

2022, 9(2): 309-324
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17572/mj2022.2.309-324>

Interviews

INTERVIEW WITH JON FOX ON BEING AN “EVERYDAY NATIONHOOD SCHOLAR”

Emel UZUN AVCI¹, Kadir DEDE²

Although nationalism studies in Turkey are quite advanced, it is not easy to say the same for research on everyday aspects of nationalism. However, there can be no better time than this period in Turkey to talk about the daily looks and representations of nationalism due to immigrant mobility in recent years and many other internal political dynamics. This is exactly why we published a special issue that focuses on the “here and now” of nationalism through the ‘every day.’ As the first step of this journey, we preferred to turn back to one of the first users of the term “here and now of nationalism” and invited Jon Fox, Professor of Sociology at University of Bristol, for an interview.

Neither Miller-Idriss' and his article “Everyday nationhood” (2008a) nor their emphasis on the present and today as a response to Anthony Smith's critics of being ahistorical (2008b) were the earliest and most known examples of works on everyday nationalism. Such that Billig's *Banal Nationalism* (1995), Brubaker's long-term research (in which Fox took part) *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town* (2006), and of course Tim Edensor's *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life* (2002) were some instances that refer or focus on everyday in different ways. However, Fox's contribution(s) in 2008 can be seen as the necessity ring of the chain through which “everyday nationalism” became a popular, fruitful, and attractive research field and a specific circle within nationalism studies through ensuing contributions such as Hearn

¹ Emel UZUN AVCI, Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, Hacettepe Üniversitesi İletişim Fakültesi, Radyo, Televizyon ve Sinema Bölümü, emeluzun5@gmail.com

² Kadir DEDE, Doç. Dr., İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi, Siyaset Bilimi ve Kamu Yönetimi Bölümü, kadirdede@gmail.com

(2007), Skey (2009, 2011), Antonsich (2015), Skey & Antonsich (2017), Ichijo & Ranta (2016), Hearn & Antonsich (2018), Duchesne (2018), etc.

Fox's kind and detailed answers not only provided a fascinating source for the issue his experiences also reflects the academic and intellectual background of a scholarly interest in detail.

Let's start from the beginning. We wonder about the academic, intellectual, and perhaps personal roots of this interest that have made you a well-known figure in the field of everyday nationalism. What brought you from the USA to Hungary and Romania? And could you describe the relationship between the case and the theory? Did you choose Hungary and Romania as a well-designed sample to discuss everyday nationhood or did these cases trigger to seek for a new methodological framework?

Like many people at the time (the early 1990s), I was drawn to East Central Europe by the excitement of the changes sweeping across the region. And like others, my interest centred on questions of nationalism. A semester-long study abroad stint in Hungary in 1987 had given me the before snapshot; in the early 1990s I returned for the after snapshot and stayed on for what would be two years. Whilst working at the Sociology Institute in Budapest I met Rogers Brubaker who later employed me to do research on Hungarian minority politics in Romania (Transylvania). My first research fieldtrip to Romania to interview Hungarian politicians in Romania, however, didn't quite live up to my expectations. I spent weeks talking to of politicians but at the end felt none the wiser. There were internal differences and the occasional intrigue but mostly they all stuck to the same message, one I already knew quite well before embarking on the trip. I returned to Hungary exhausted and underwhelmed. Hungarian minority politics in Romania was an open book – one I might have stayed home to read.

But I hadn't yet been converted to everyday nationhood. Rather, I carried on with my interest in nationalist politics and started a PhD at UCLA under the supervision of Rogers Brubaker and Gail Kligman. Gail was adamant that if was to do research in Romania on questions of nationalism I had to learn Romanian too; Rogers was in full agreement. So off I went to Romania for a couple of summers – aided by Romanian language instruction at UCLA during the academic year – to learn Romanian.

I didn't realise it at the time, but I was doing participant observation during my summers in Cluj – a city of historic and cultural significance in Transylvania for both Romanians and Hungarians. I lived with a Romanian family to learn the language, met friends and extended family through them, and gradually began to find my feet both linguistically and in terms of what life was like in Romania. It took some time to gain competence (and confidence) in my Romanian, but I enjoyed my time there, meeting people, talking to them, and coming to term with people's everyday experiences through the lens of my own everyday experiences.

This was a time of nationalist political tensions in Romania, Transylvania, and Cluj around growing Hungarian demands for autonomy. Cluj was also home to Gheorghe Funar at the time, the city's flamboyantly nationalist Romanian mayor who was bent on making Romania (and Cluj) great again. All this provided plenty of fodder for the local press, and so there was plenty of dinner conversation where I feebly attempted to probe these

matters with my patient hosts – or anyone else willing to talk to me. Whether it was my rudimentary Romanian or their plain indifference (I suspect it was more the latter) these conversations never went very far. What seemed extraordinary to me – Funar's antics, the ramped up Hungarian demands for this and that – had, over time, become ordinary to my hosts. They had more important things to attend to than following the ins and outs of local/nationalist politics. I had more interest in nationalism than they did.

And so my interest in nationalism gradually evolved into an interest in why the people in whose name nationalism spoke seemed not to care so much about nationalism. I didn't choose everyday nationhood, it chose me. I went to Hungary and Romania chasing nationalist fireworks, drawn by the excitement – and horror – of the Yugoslav wars next door and expecting that any moment a spark would light similar pyrotechnics in Hungary and Romania. But what I found was much more mundane: a cynicism about politics in general and nationalist politics in particular that was overshadowed by more pressing concerns with getting by and making do. What looked like hot nationalism to me when I focused on politics seemed more like banal nationalism when I turned my attention to people in their everyday lives.

Where, for example, did the problem begin with mainstream theories of nationalism for you? Was the emphasis on "ordinary people doing ordinary things in their ordinary lives" an epistemological break from modernist theories and constructivism, or a way to reinterpretation and update?

I cut my teeth on all those theories of nationalism and those theories still inform my thinking, research, and teaching today. I of course do have my own views on various debates, and there are some scholars who've had a bigger influence on me than others, but I wouldn't be where I am today without those theories of nationalism.

For me, the problem with these theories was not what they were doing but what they were not doing: explaining why people seemed indifferent to nationalism. If anything, their top-down logics (with their focus on the macro-structural forces that have contributed to the production and reproduction of nations) seemed to suggest that people should *not* be indifferent to nationalism. If nationalism was about making people national, then these theories were showing how people were made national. Yet their analyses usually focussed on the things that made them national – the processes, institutions, and structural forces – rather than people themselves who were supposedly being made national. Their perspective was top-down.

Initially, this led me to think of this as a question of resonance: we knew that nations were being made, but we didn't really see how the people targeted by nationalism reacted or responded to all this. Were they listening? Did they care? This is the 'does it work?' question for everyday nationalism: we have nations being made 'up there', but does it trickle down into people's everyday lives in ways that have meaning and salience for them?

This isn't actually a bottom-up question, though. It starts at the top, with macro-analytical perspectives on nationalism, and then follows the logic of those structural forces, elite discourses, and/or institutional effects 'down' to the people who supposedly embody the nation. This is a worthy area of investigation, but it also

brings with it its own biases by following those top-down trajectories and thus risks missing other manifestations of everyday nationalism that don't follow those well-trod top-down pathways.

Against this 'does it work?' question, I gradually became more interested in what people were doing with the nation in their everyday lives. This is how I see the everyday nationhood approach. It doesn't begin with what's 'up there' and ask whether it's working 'down here'; it simply begins with what's 'down here' – people in their everyday lives – and then looks to see how the nation is implicated in those everyday lives. Of course some of that stuff inevitably will come from or at least be connected to what's 'up there'. But by beginning from below, from a domain of everyday life unencumbered by any intrinsically national biases, we can take a less path-dependent approach to considering the uses and relevance of nationhood to people. This is what Cynthia Miller-Idriss and I called the 'wait-and-listen' approach to everyday nationhood: we need to listen to the profound silences of nationalism if we're to appreciate its scattered manifestations in context.

Your early works such as your MA & Ph.D. dissertations, related publishings, and your collaboration with Roger Brubaker, Cynthia Miller-Idriss, and others still present us a very valuable and fruitful toolbox to understand nationalism. When we check the early 2000s and studies of "everyday nationhood scholars", is it possible to claim a "paradigm shift" just like Gellner, Anderson and Hobsbawm achieved in the 1980s?

A 'paradigm shift' sounds a bit dramatic; a gradual evolution might be a more apt way of putting it. I think a number of trends were coming together that led to increased attention to things that eventually were referred to as everyday nationhood and its many cognates.

First, the scholarship on nationalism, relatively young itself, was initially preoccupied with nationalism's history. Some of those early contributors to these historical questions were however sociologists and anthropologists: Anthony Smith's PhD was in sociology, Ernest Gellner was a social anthropologist, and later Benedict Anderson brought his anthropological background to the mix. So nationalism studies was focused on historical questions but it was bringing sociological and anthropological insights and ways of thinking to these questions. In so doing it attracted the attention of sociologists and anthropologists, including those more interested in the 'here and now' of nationalism.

Second, anthropologists, whilst relative latecomers – like sociologists – to nationalism studies *per se*, nevertheless brought decades of anthropological interest in (and methodological sensibilities for the study of) questions related to nationalism. It's hard to look back at the work done in recent years on everyday nationhood and not think that this has all been done before. It has: not usually as the study of nations, but as the study of ethnic groups, kinship groups, religious groups, and other formations of groupness. The scholarship on nationalism has also inherited anthropology's interest in questions of rituals, symbols, and practices along with their methodological predilection for ethnography and participant observation. Subsequent generations of anthropologists – Katherine Verdery working in Romania, John Borneman in Berlin, Robert Foster in Papua New Guinea, and Daphne Berdahl also in Germany, just to name a few – updated anthropology's interest in these matters by focusing it more explicitly on questions of nationalism.

These and other anthropological contributions remain largely hidden in the background of contemporary work of everyday nationhood, but without them there wouldn't be an everyday nationhood.

Finally, these developments spawned an interest in nationalism amongst the next generation of sociologists and political scientists. People like Michael Billig, a social psychologist, and Rogers Brubaker, a sociologist and my PhD supervisor, and many others began joining up questions of the here and now of nationalism with sociological perspectives and methods. This in turn paved the way for a new generation of PhD researchers who were keen to understand the (sociological and political) workings of nationalism. Many of these people traded anthropology's ethnographic sensibilities for a more direct qualitative approach to data collection (usually involving interviewing and focus groups, reflecting newfound interests in discourse). Others stuck to their anthropological guns and immersed themselves in different national communities to understand the 'natives' view on nationalism.

All that was left was to give it a name – everyday nationhood, everyday nationalism, banal nationalism, etc. And it became a thing. Not exactly a paradigm shift, but a thing.

And this time, a classical question: The relationship between "banal nationalism" and "everyday nationalism". You've already compared them in several works (Fox, 2018; Fox & Van Ginderachter, 2018) but our readers will be happy to hear once more. In addition, we wonder about your personal and intellectual relationship with Billig's work. When did you read Banal Nationalism, and in what ways it affected you? Is it possible to quote Dostoyevsky's "We all come out from Gogol's 'Overcoat'" to describe the effect of Billig on you and other "everyday nationhood scholars"?

Michael Billig's *Banal Nationalism* is the gift that keeps on giving. I don't think Billig ever intended to be the progenitor of everyday nationalism but many of us working in the field see him like this. And by rights: *Banal Nationalism* was published in 1995, a decade or so *before* most stuff on everyday nationhood appeared. But the timing of such things is less relevant than the substantive focus and contribution of Billig's book, that nationalism is banal: it is taken for granted as part of the ordinary landscape of things – unseen, unheard, unnoticed. Here for the first time was a possible answer to the question I was posing in my PhD: why do people appear indifferent to nationalism? For Billig, it was because nationalism had become routine, normalised: it didn't require much conscious ratification because it was just the way things were.

Michael Billig had the answer long before many of us had the question. Some of us came up with different questions and different answers and at some point some of that coalesced into an everyday nationhood/nationalism perspective. I'm not really sure when or why but at some point, some people began to view banal nationalism in opposition to everyday nationalism. It didn't start that way: banal nationalism was front and centre in my PhD and also took pride of place in the Everyday Nationhood article with Cynthia Miller-Idriss. Roughly the same time Michael Skey took aim at some of Billig's finer points but as a critical friend, not as a detractor. But as the years passed and everyday nationalism began developing an identity of its own, more contrasts were drawn between it and banal nationalism. I too began to see everyday nationhood

as being concerned with ‘doing’ of nationalism whilst banal nationalism told us about the ‘being’ of nationalism: from an everyday nationhood perspective, people are agents of nationalism; from a banal nationalism perspective, they are its dupes.

My professional career is built on dubious binaries like this: elites versus non-elites, the everyday versus the political, top-down versus bottom-up, self-conscious v unselfconscious, and many more. None of them stand up to much scrutiny and so you won’t find me defending them with much vigour, but I do find them useful at times for imagining different sides of similar questions before arriving, almost inevitably at some middle ground.

And that’s where this opposition between banal nationalism and everyday nationhood has taken me: the more I think about the differences, the more I become aware of the similarities. ‘Talking with the nation’ (as opposed to ‘talking about the nation’; both taken from the Everyday Nationhood article with Cynthia) is not dissimilar to Billig’s insights about the deictic uses of pronouns; the indifference of Romanians and Hungarians to national holiday celebrations is captured nicely by Billig’s metaphor of the flag hanging limply; and the institutional choices and consumption practices that Cynthia and I explored in Everyday Nationhood are not self-conscious national choices but banal nationalism in practice – automatic, unreflexive, routine. Being an everyday agent of nationalism does not mean waving the flag or spouting nationalist rhetoric (at least not for most people); rather it’s the mostly unselfconscious ratification of the nation through routine everyday practices that nonetheless contribute to the validation and reproduction of nationalism. It’s banal nationalism in everyday life.

Ultimately the most significant difference between banal nationalism and everyday nationhood is one of perspective. The everyday nationhood approach lauds Billig as their inspiration for their bottom-up approaches to nationalism. But Billig’s *Banal Nationalism* is actually top-down – a point Sophie Duchesne reminded me of not long ago. It is concerned with the ideology of nationalism and how that ideology pervades people’s lives. Billig’s examination of this phenomenon doesn’t index everyday life as much as it considers media discourse, political ideology, and national symbols: the production of banal nationalism, not its consumption. And that’s why it fits so nicely with everyday nationhood; it complements – not contradicts – everyday nationhood’s bottom-up perspective.

Let us share a long quote from you: “My baptism in nationalism came not via the ‘established democracies’ of the UK and US, but through Eastern Europe in the 1990s (and Hungary and Romania in particular). The research I did for my Ph.D. (2004b) and later in collaboration with Brubaker et al. (2006) queried what a resurgent nationalism meant for ordinary people (Fox, 2018: 864).” Could you explain us the difference between these cases or the thing that differs you from the ones whose baptism came via different cases such as Skey, Antonsich, etc..

I think the key contextual factor that distinguished everyday nationhood in Romania from the versions Skey considered in England (and also, earlier, Billig) and Antonsich in Italy was a difference between hot nationalism and banal nationalism. Or perhaps a more useful distinction to use in this context might be Bart

Bonikowski's distinction between nationalism in settled times and *unsettled* times (I don't recall him talking about the latter; that's me inferring it in opposition to settled times). There was a nationalist resurgence in Romania and across East Europe in the 1990s, and it reached fever pitch in Yugoslavia as well as, more sporadically, other countries. But that nationalism was not cause, but effect, of unsettled times – the regime changes of the late 1980s and early 1990s and the rocky transitions that followed. I can't speak for Yugoslavia, but if you look at the way people talked about things in Romania – their relative indifference to nationalism and their preoccupation with the challenges of finding their feet when many of the rules (formal and informal) of everyday life had changed – I'd be inclined to say this was more about feeling unsettled than about nationalism.

In contrast, things in England and Italy were comparatively 'settled', yet Skey still found indifference and even disaffiliation – what Fenton (and Fenton and Mann) found as well. That's not to say that there aren't differences or that context – hot or banal, settled or unsettled, alongside any other relevant contextual factors – doesn't matter. It's to say that context always matters, from the macro-historical to the micro-interactional and everything in between. But disentangling these contextual factors is no easy task. I explained earlier that my initial interest in nationalism began as a 'Does it work?' question: do structural and politicised forms of nationalism influence or resonate with people in their everyday lives? These 'structural and politicised forms of nationalism' can also be understood as 'contextual factors' when we're considering questions of everyday nationhood. And surely, as contextual factors, they help shape at least some everyday invocations of nationhood. But they don't in themselves explain everyday nationhood. This describes why I am sceptical about does-it-work questions: there are far too many contextual variables at play to establish definitively that nationalist politics resonates with people in their everyday lives.

This in turn translates into a similar sort of scepticism that we'll be able to show that settled times or unsettled times – or hot or banal nationalism or established democracies or whatever the opposite of established democracies is – produce distinct forms of everyday nationhood. (I'll leave it Bonikowski and other quantitative social scientists to work out the relative influence of different contextual factors.) My approach instead has been to simply begin with people in their everyday lives to observe and (hopefully) understand their everyday practices and routines of nationalism with attention to context but without a theory for which combination of contexts matters when.

And related to the previous question, how do you position Turkey within these established / non-established or West / East dualities: A similar instance to your experiences in Hungary and Romania or a case which is adaptable to the Loughborough circle? Specifically, our "baptism in nationalism" takes its roots from the Turkish case, a traumatic experience for the researcher. Not only due to academic and legal limitations but also due to the power of Turkish nationalism in all aspects of everyday life, questioning the belonging of ordinary people brings trouble to the researcher. How were your experiences?

I'm really not qualified to comment on Turkish nationalism. My knowledge of Turkey is almost entirely second-hand, coming from books, the Turkish postgrads I've supervised, and a handful of visits to Turkey.

Even if – especially if – I were an expert in Turkish nationalism I would eschew reductionist east-west and democratic-undemocratic dualities to describe it. I'm sure that these and other dualities do infuse and inform contemporary political and cultural debate in Turkey and I would therefore have an empirical interest in that. But I would not employ those same dualities to analyse or explain Turkish nationalism sociologically. I may be guilty of using these dualities by positioning Romania against the 'established democracies' of the west. But in doing so, it wasn't my intention to suggest that countries can be sociologically classified according to east/west, democratic/undemocratic, or other binaries. Rather, I simply meant that context matters: by saying Romania is not an established democracy does not mean it's an *un-established* democracy, it means it's just not an established democracy – it's something else, it belongs to a residual category. Romania *is* different from Britain and the US and to understand banal nationalism (or everyday nationhood) requires an appreciation of these contextual factors. Reducing those contextual factors to tired oppositions ultimately conceals much more than it reveals. I would make the same point about Turkey: it's not useful to describe the Turkish context by aligning it along one side of various binaries. Rather, a richer, more nuanced appreciation of the multiplicity of contextual factors is needed to appreciate and understand Turkish nationalism. This is something I'm not equipped to do in the Turkish case.

I'm sure that current circumstances in Turkey raise many interesting questions – and challenges – for the study of nationalism and everyday nationalism. I positioned my own thinking on everyday nationhood against Billig's banal nationalism borne out of the 'established democracies' of Britain and the US. In so doing I'm acknowledging my own regional bias in formulating the approach to everyday nationhood that Cynthia and I came up with in Germany and Romania respectively. An investigation into Turkish nationalism might reveal further biases in the everyday nationhood approach, or in approaches to nationalism more generally. That's a good thing. Everyday nationhood was designed not as a grand theory for how nationalism works amongst people across time and space but as a provocation to think about and investigate how nationalism works amongst people across different times and spaces. I hope that the peculiarities of the Turkish context will help generate new insights into the field nationalism – and new questions as well.

On the other hand, we're living in an era in which the "established" aspect of the "established democracies" is really questionable, and hot versions of nationalism become more and more common. In this respect, what kind of place do you imagine that everyday nationalism studies will evolve in this period of the world? Do the theories of nationalism and even everyday nationalism approaches offer tools to answer the questions to be asked in today's populist, authoritarian governments and migrant crisis?

This is a really interesting question. Cynthia Miller-Idriss and I had a chance meeting a few years back and asked ourselves the same question. Reflecting back on the years that had passed since we published *Everyday Nationhood* in 2008, we both felt that in one sense, our approach had stood the test of time: people were still talking, choosing, performing, and consuming the nation. This was the mundane, routine side of everyday nationhood: the lived experience of the nation as a category of membership that gives meaning and order to the social world. But as we thought about how the world had changed since *Everyday Nationhood* –

the rise of the radical right and populist politics, the concomitant racialisation of politics in general and nationalist politics in particular, and the wars being fought in the name of nations – adjectives like ‘mundane’ and ‘routine’ seemed out of place. Whilst these routine practices of everyday nationhood were still a part of people’s, we were also witnessing a new repertoire of practices of everyday nationalism becoming a part of people’s everyday lives. It seemed as though everyday nationhood was making way for everyday nationalism.

That is, people are not only bumbling about through their everyday lives, invoking the nation here and there, casually, unreflexively, where the nation was obliquely reproduced as an artefact of the other mundane things people are up to. Alongside this, there also seems to be a new focus and purposefulness taking shaping in at least some people’s engagement with the nation – more of a frontal engagement, rather than an oblique one. These people are becoming their own DIY architects of the nation. I wouldn’t go so far – at least not yet – to say that the tail is wagging the dog. But the divide between top-down nationalist politics and bottom-up everyday nationhood – a divide which at least implicitly informed our 2008 article – appears to be losing its clarity, its sharpness. Nationalism is becoming more of a co-production.

If the everyday nationhood of the past emphasised the routine and banal reproduction of nations in everyday life, often detached from the realm of nationalist politics, the everyday nationalism of the present (and future?) brings with it a new intellectual, emotional, and political resolve and investment in ideas about the nation. Ordinary people, or at least some of them, are becoming everyday nationalists.

Or so we thought. Our meeting led to a first draft of a manuscript tentatively titled ‘From everyday nationhood to everyday nationalism’. Then COVID happened, life was interrupted, and we never got back to it. Maybe one day.

The progress of new media technologies directly transformed the formal duality between “top” and “below” as well as the source of the nationalist discourses. So, how does social media affect these daily nationalist, racist practices especially when we compare with your discussions on “performing the nation” and “talking the nation”?

This was one of the specific questions Cynthia and I were asking a few years back when we revisited everyday nationhood: how is social media relevant for everyday nationhood/nationalism? When we were talking about interaction in 2008, we were talking about face-to-face interaction. Facebook and Twitter were in their infancy at that time, and things like WhatsApp, Instagram, Snapchat all came much later. Social media sites intended for or appropriated by more extremist views such as Gab, Voat, 4chan, and 8chan appeared later still.

When Cynthia and I did fieldwork on everyday nationhood in the 1990s and early 2000s, neither of us encountered many committed nationalists, the sorts of people I referred to above as everyday nationalists. But we did find some: these were the people who, when they got together, shifted the conversation to nationalism. They were avid followers of nationalist politics, and had their own considered, informed views, which they shared and debated with their like-minded friends. But those views they expressed, debated, and

espoused back then were confined for the most part to the physical echo chambers of the nook in the pub, the dinner table or coffee table, the earshot of the audience.

Social media has clearly changed all this, transforming the way not just nationalists communicate, but everyone communicates. Now of course plenty of tweets still fall on deaf ears, but in virtual space, they fall on a potentially limitless number of deaf ears. And at least some of them enjoy a warmer reception – a like, a share, a comment, a retweet, a new thread, and emoji. This doesn't mean that people's actual audiences for their nationalist views have expanded from the days of face-to-face interaction. But it does mean their imagined – or *imaginable* – audiences have expanded. And it's that imagination, fuelled by the presumed limitlessness of virtual space, which can create the impression (though not the reality) of the discursive empowerment of the masses of the nation. People are invited to see themselves as part of a national conversation in ways that until relatively recently wouldn't have been imaginable. The masses can become, or at least invited to see themselves as becoming, agents of everyday nationalism.

Whereas in the past, elites spoke, and ordinary people listened (or, as we argued, didn't listen), social media can transform ordinary listeners into ordinary tweeters. Everyday nationalists aren't just in response mode; they can also be the new co-owners of the means of national production, creatively manipulating content and adding their own ideas in the creation of their own bespoke versions of the nation. This virtualisation of national space can contribute to the dilution of the divide between elites and non-elites because virtual space becomes a shared space. It's not only the voices of the privileged few, whose wealth and power buy them their audiences – though they of course are still present and influential. It's at the same time a platform where the masses can meet and tweet, and, if they're lucky, maybe even be retweeted as well. It's where ordinary people can become, or at least come to see themselves, as national influencers.

And now that everyone can be a virtual agent of nationalism, the nations they're constructing can become more individualised. A diffuse virtual space is able to accommodate multiple, bespoke versions of the nation. It's a kind of craft nationalism, a home-brew version of the nation crafted from the safety of home. It's not bent on making the nation congruent with the state, nor is it a proselytising nationalism trying to turn peasants into Frenchmen or perform the alchemy required to create unity out of diversity. Rather, these new craft nationalisms can proffer idealised versions of their nations where they can be fully realised in virtual space. In these virtual nations, the hard-fast territorial boundaries of the state can be supplanted by the shapeshifting, deterritorialised properties of virtual space. These idealised nations are realised not firstly through expulsions or assimilations, genocides or ethnic cleansings, but instead, and more perfectly, through memes and algorithms, tweets and retweets – through the construction and constriction of idealised virtual spaces where their borderless and stateless nations can thrive.

Some of these people can be the self-styled architects of craft nations – the tweeters of craft nations, the purposeful agents of nationalism promoting and disseminating their own versions of the nation through social media. Others are the fellow travellers of craft nations – the retweeters of craft nations, the echoes in the chamber, sharing others' versions of the nation through social media. And most are of course both

simultaneously, tweeting and retweeting, producing and sharing, and blurring the boundaries between consumption and production in the process.

The history of nationalism studies gives us a chance to observe a pendulum between history and sociology, between anthropology and cultural studies. Underlying "here and now" in your (with Miller-Idriss) response to Anthony Smith was a revolutionary motto in this respect. So, in short, how can you describe your relationship with history? And when we check your recent works such as the edited book - National Indifference and the History of Nationalism in Modern Europe, how can we discuss your collaboration with Marteen Van Ginderachter? Is turning back to historical data an inevitable necessity to discuss the mundane and ordinary or is it a consequence of the impossibility of finding a reflection of "national indifference" in today's world?

My work in everyday nationhood has almost always been focused on the 'here and now', but the 'here and now' always has a past to it. The history of nationalism informs everything I've ever said or written about nationalism – not always explicitly, but it's there, in the background, in the past. There is no everyday nationhood without the personal and political histories of nationalism behind it. My own focus on the present does not dismiss history but complements it. My window for history, however, is the everyday: how history informs and underlines routine invocations of nationhood; how the past, both political and personal, is carried through to the present and into the future by ordinary people doing ordinary things; and how we perform invented traditions (*a la* Hobsbawm and Ranger) to remember our national pasts.

Not that long ago, I had the opportunity to collaborate with Maarten Van Ginderachter on the history of national indifference (*National Indifference and the History of Nationalism in Modern Europe*). Maarten is a historian at the University of Antwerp but one with sociological tendencies. He invited me to a workshop he organised some years back to discuss national indifference – an idea popularised by Tara Zahra and picked up on by a number of historians working mostly in East Central Europe: Jeremy King, Pieter Judson, James Bjork, and many others. In the spirit of everyday nationhood (though not directly influenced by it), the national indifference approach questions the resonance of nationalism in different historical and geographical contexts. That is, it shifts the focus to the targets of 19th and 20th century nationalisms and asks whether people are tuned into the national/ist messages of their self-appointed national elites. This is an important corrective to some of the earlier historical accounts of nationalism which focused more on the role of elites and/or the state in making nations.

It's also one that presents methodological challenges for uncovering evidence of national indifference. What counts as evidence of indifference – of the absence of something? I'm not an historian, but as someone who grapples with questions like this in the 'here and now' I was more than happy to be involved in discussions about similar challenges when the evidence we're looking for is in the past. I've always thought it was the historical evidence that was harder to uncover, and so thinking through such things with historians has been an exciting challenge which in turn has got me to think about expanding our sociological toolkit as well. Maarten tackled this question in a paper he wrote for a themed section he and I co-edited for *Nations and Nationalism* called 'Everyday nationalism's evidence problem'. In his contribution, '*How to gauge banal*

nationalism and national indifference in the past: Proletarian tweets in Belgium's belle époque', Maarten (and his team of researchers) analysed 25,000 'proletarian tweets': short messages written by rank-and-file Belgian Workers Party members and published in the party paper in exchange for small donations they made to the party. Maarten analysed thousands of these 'tweets' to see how – and how often – the messages made mention of or were framed in national categories. I think this is an excellent example of how historians can better understand not just the everyday meanings and uses of nationhood but also how they can appreciate those meanings and uses in context: the nation appeared in only 1.75% of the 25,000 tweets.

Maarten collaborated with me because he was interested in exploring how sociological insights into everyday nationhood might be used to think about historical evidence of national indifference. But it works both ways: insights and methodologies from national indifference scholars challenge sociologists to think about new data collection and analysis strategies when studying the 'here and now' of everyday nationhood. Maarten's metaphorical use of 'tweets' is an open invitation to sociologists to develop a similar (though technologically different) approach to analysing real tweets for their invocation of national categories. I really enjoyed these various collaborations with Maarten – the book and the themed section. I think we showed that ideas about everyday nationhood were just as relevant in the past as they are today, though of course in different ways. The same goes for national indifference. This is the category invented by historians to capture the everyday perspective on nationalism's past, but it is equally valid in today's world as scholars like Steve Fenton have shown.

And at the end, we want to learn more about your recent and future projects and last comments for the "everyday nationhood scholars".

I recently completed a 2.5 year project called 'Everyday Integration' that – as the name suggests – maintained my interests in the everyday but focused it on questions of integration. In the project we researched the everyday contexts, practices, and mobilities of integration and then developed, with our partners, an inclusive, local, and bottom-up approach to integration for Bristol (where I live). The research showed that whilst people do the work of integration in their everyday lives, there are certain institutional and structural barriers and processes that get in the way of that work. Our Bristol Integration Framework – the approach we developed for Bristol – elaborated a set of methodologies, principles, and pathways to facilitate integration from below.

Whilst the project had nothing to do with nationalism *per se*, I recently returned to the data when invited to a workshop organised by Siniša Malešević on covid and nationalism in March 2022. Not long after that I reworked those same ideas into a paper focused on national solidarities that Danny Kaplan and Hizky Shoham organised (and Siniša also contributed to). The Everyday Integration data I had was focused on neighbourhoods and the everyday experiences of Bristolians. Since most of our data was collected during the pandemic, it was not uncommon for our respondents to talk about the clapping rituals that were happening at the time. Every Thursday, people would emerge from their homes to collectively applaud the work of the National Health Service. Like with all rituals, these clapping rituals made transparent and reaffirmed the bonds of community. For most of us that community was firstly the actual community of our neighbours

clapping up and down the street. But the focus of our clapping – the *National* Health Service – plus some of the symbols on display and the fact that this ritual was being simultaneously replicated the next street over, the next town over, and across the entire country meant that we simultaneously could also imagine a national community. It's this tension between the local and the national, the real and the imagined, that I'm focusing on in my paper. Siniša, Danny, Hizky, some others, and I hope to publish a special issue on the practices of national solidarities sometime soon.

I also have longer term plans to look at the relationship between integration and nationalism in Sweden and the UK with Gabriella Elgenius, a colleague at Gothenburg University. Aside from that my role on the editorial board of *Nations & Nationalism* helps keep me abreast of developments in the field and I've also been fortunate to contribute to the ASEN Summer School on Nations and Nationalism in the Contemporary World (<https://asen.ac.uk/summerschool/>) where I learn just as much from the students there as they do from me.

It's this younger generation of scholars who will inevitably lead the way in the future directions of nationalism, everyday nationalism, and everyday nationhood. As the contexts for nationalism change so too does the scholarly interest in nationalism, and in the process new insights are generated to explain this evolving world of nationalism. I'm always an observer of nationalism, but I haven't done serious empirical work on the nationalism for many years. It's up to the next generation to decide where the field should go. There's still plenty of nationalism out there that we need to understand.

References

- Anderson, Benedict. 2006. *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*: Verso books.
- Antonsich, Marco. 2016. "The 'everyday' of banal nationalism—Ordinary people's views on Italy and Italian." *Political Geography*, 54: 32-42.
- Berdahl, Daphne. 1999. *Where the World Ended: Re-Unification and Identity in the German Borderland*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Billig, Michael. 1995. *Banal Nationalism*. London: SAGE Publications.
- . 2009. "Reflecting on a critical engagement with banal nationalism – reply to Skey." *The Sociological Review* 57(2):347-52.
- Bjork, James. 2009. *Neither German nor Pole: Catholicism and national indifference in a central European borderland*: University of Michigan Press.
- Bonikowski, Bart. 2016. "Nationalism in settled times." *Annual Review of Sociology*.

- Borneman, John. 1992. *Belonging in the Two Berlins: Kin, State, Nation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Brubaker, Rogers. 1996. *Nationalism reframed: Nationhood and the national question in the new Europe*: Cambridge University Press.
- . 2009. *Citizenship and nationhood in France and Germany*: Harvard University Press.
- Brubaker, Rogers, Margit Feischmidt, Jon Fox, and Liana Grancea. 2006. *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Duchesne, Sophie. 2018. "Who's afraid of banal nationalism?" *Nations and Nationalism* 24(4):841-56.
- Edensor, Tim. (2002). *National identity, popular culture and everyday life*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Elgenius, Gabriella. 2018. *Symbols of nations and nationalism: Celebrating nationhood*: Springer.
- Elgenius, Gabriella, and Steve Garner. 2021. "Gate-keeping the nation: discursive claims, counter-claims and racialized logics of whiteness." *Ethnic and racial studies* 44(16):215-35.
- Fenton, Steve. 2007. "Indifference towards national identity: What young adults think about being English and British." *Nations and Nationalism* 13(2):321-39.
- Foster, Robert J. 2002. *Materializing the Nation: Commodities, Consumption, and Media in Papua New Guinea*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Fox, Jon E. 2004. "Nationhood without nationalism: being national in everyday life." in *Department of Sociology*: University of California, Los Angeles.
- . 2017. "The edges of the nation: A research agenda for uncovering the taken for granted foundations of everyday nationhood." *Nations and Nationalism* 23(1):26-47.
- . 2018. "Banal nationalism in everyday life." *Nations and Nationalism* 24(4):862-66.
- Fox, Jon E, and Cynthia Miller-Idriss. 2008a. "Everyday nationhood." *Ethnicities* 8(4):536-63.
- . 2008b. "The here and now'of everyday nationhood." *Ethnicities* 8(4):573-76.
- Fox, Jon E, and Maarten Van Ginderachter. 2018. "Introduction: Everyday nationalism's evidence problem." *Nations and Nationalism* (3):546-52.
- Gellner, Ernest. 2008. *Nations and nationalism*: Cornell University Press.
- Hearn, Jonathan. 2007. "National identity: banal, personal and embedded." *Nations and Nationalism*, 13(4): 657-674.

- Hearn, Jonathan and Antonsich, Marco, 2018. "Theoretical and methodological considerations for the study of banal and everyday nationalism." *Nations and Nationalism*, 24: 594– 605.
- Hobsbawm, Eric J. 2012. *Nations and nationalism since 1780: Programme, myth, reality*: Cambridge university press.
- Hobsbawm, Eric, and Terence Ranger. 2012. *The invention of tradition*: Cambridge University Press.
- Ichijo, Atsuko and Ronald Ranta. 2016. *Food, National Identity and Nationalism*. Palgrave.
- Judson, Pieter M. 2006. *Guardians of the nation: Activists on the language frontiers of imperial Austria*: Harvard University Press.
- Kaplan, Danny. 2018. *The nation and the promise of friendship: Building solidarity through sociability*: Springer.
- King, Jeremy. 2005. *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans: a local history of Bohemian politics, 1848-1948*: Princeton University Press.
- Kligman, Gail. 1988. *The wedding of the dead: Ritual, Poetics, and Popular Culture in Transylvania*: Univ of California Press.
- Malešević, Siniša. 2013. *Nation-States and Nationalisms: Organization, Ideology and Solidarity*. Cambridge: Polity.
- . 2019. *Grounded nationalisms: A sociological analysis*: Cambridge University Press.
- Mann, Robin, and Steve Fenton. 2017. *Nation, class and resentment: The politics of national identity in England, Scotland and Wales*: Springer.
- Miller-Idriss, Cynthia. 2009. "Blood and Culture: Youth, Right-Wing Extremism, and National Belonging in Contemporary Germany." Raleigh, NC: Duke University Press.
- Shoham, Hizky. 2021. "The Israel BBQ as national ritual: performing unofficial nationalism, or finding meaning in triviality." *American Journal of Cultural Sociology* 9(1):13-42.
- Skey, Michael. 2009. "The national in everyday life: A critical engagement with Michael Billig's thesis of *Banal Nationalism*." *The Sociological Review* 57(2):331-46.
- . 2011. *National Belonging and Everyday Life: The Significance of Nationhood in an Uncertain World*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Skey, Michael and Antonsich, Marco. (eds.). 2017. *Everyday Nationhood – Theorising culture, identity and belonging after Banal Nationalism*. Palgrave.

- Smith, Anthony. 2008. "The limits of everyday nationhood." *Ethnicities* 8(4):563-73.
- Smith, Anthony D. 1986. "The ethnic origins of nations."
- Van Ginderachter, Maarten. 2018. "How to gauge banal nationalism and national indifference in the past: proletarian tweets in Belgium's belle époque." *Nations and Nationalism* 24(3):579-93.
- Van Ginderachter, Maarten, and Marnix Beyen (Eds.). 2012. *Nationhood from Below: Europe in the Long Nineteenth Century*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Van Ginderachter, Maarten, and Jon E Fox. 2019. *National indifference and the history of nationalism in modern Europe*: Routledge London.
- Verdery, Katherine. 1983. *Transylvanian villagers: three centuries of political, economic, and ethnic change*: University of California Press.
- Zahra, Tara. 2010. "Imagined noncommunities: National indifference as a category of analysis." *Slavic Review* 69(1):93-119.