

Chapter 14

Nordic Geographies of Nation and Nationhood



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Introduction

Nation, national identity and nationalism are a family of concepts that address some of the most deep-seated aspects of modern social organization globally. They all point at fundamental structures of inclusion, belonging and solidarity, chiasmatically entangled with the production of difference, exclusion and alterity. The concept of nation captures the generic belief that the world is universally organized into discrete nations to which everyone belongs, and in this sense is the precondition for national identity and nationalism. The latter two concepts express this belief in cultural and political terms respectively. While national identity responds to the question of what makes each nation culturally specific and how this is experienced as meaningful, nationalism has more to do with affective positioning vis-à-vis alterity, and how this is enacted in political praxis and rhetoric. Yet, the difference between national identity and nationalism gets ever more blurred the closer we come to the experience of nationhood in everyday life.

Michael Billig (1995) termed this intermingling ‘banal nationalism’ in his seminal study on the ways in which the nation is taken for granted in people’s mundane practices. While Billig’s insistence on focusing attention to the quiet and routinized forms of nationalism remains salient, the resurgence of ‘hot’ nationalisms (Billig’s antithesis to ‘banal’) in all Nordic countries, and the rest of Europe, has shown that the nation is far from being an outcast in the junkyard of modernity. On the contrary, the last decade has shown the stunning capability of nationalism to reinstate and

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reinvent itself in new contexts and guises, ranging from responses to climate change that serve national ends, all the way to the unashamedly nation-centered hoarding of masks and vaccinations during the covid-19 pandemic (Karlsson, 2017; Bollyky & Bown, 2020).

Influential sociological, anthropological and historical theories trace the ‘blueprint’ of nationhood as a rising transnational phenomenon since the late eighteenth century, giving due attention to how cultural contexts have shaped the processes (e.g. Gellner, 1983; Hobsbawm, 1990; Smith, 1995). Geographers’ key contribution to theories of nation and nationalism is sensitivity to their geographies, that is, the important ways in which space is implicated in them as their context, medium and substance. In this chapter we explore the development of Nordic socio-spatial theories on nation, nationalism, and national identities. As with many research themes, Nordic scholarship on nationalism and cognate phenomena is dispersed across authors and institutions. Compared to topics like regional development or urban planning, nationalism has never been a voluminous area of socio-spatial theorization. However, it is possible to identify some main lines of development that, while not building into a coherent Nordic intellectual history, nevertheless help in situating nation and nationalism as research topics within the Nordic human geography.

In the next section we provide an overview of the body of theoretical work on nation by Nordic scholars, with attention to key authors, their main theoretical positions, and methodological orientations. We intend to show how the research area emerged by the early 1990s as a minor theme in Nordic human geography, but then developed and intensified in the subsequent decades, along with the rise of the sub-field of political geography in some Nordic countries and Finland in particular. We also describe how the research field transformed in the 2000s, along with the growing interest in globalization, transnationalization and migration. After this we move into reflections on nation and nationalism arising from our own research trajectories and how they link with and build on the Nordic theoretical traditions. This discussion will situate our chapter both through our own work as Nordic scholars, and through empirical illustrations from Finland and Norway. We conclude by outlining current challenges and new horizons in Nordic theoretical work on nation and nationalism.

Theories of the Nation in Nordic Scholarship

In the Nordic countries, as elsewhere, interest in nationhood first emerged in the early twentieth century, as a part of geographical scholarship implicated in the (geo) political consolidation of the nation-state system. Before the Second World War, Rudolf Kjellén’s (1916) ideas of the inextricable bond between state and nation were influential in articulating an organicist conception of the nation-state as a form of life that has a dynamically evolving spatiality. In this vein, nation-states were seen as ‘organisms’ geopolitically competing for the finite living space of the one and only globe (Holdar, 1992; Björk & Lundén, 2021; in this book, see also Larsen

& Marklund, 2022). Paasi (1990) describes how these ideas, influenced by German idealism and the works of geographers Karl Ritter and Friedrich Ratzel, were quickly adopted by Finnish geographers Ragnar Numelin, Iivari Leiviskä and Väinö Auer. In the spirit of envisioning a ‘Greater Finland’, potentially achievable should Germany defeat the Soviet Union in the Second World War, many geographers in Finland sought to provide science-based justification for extending the Finnish territory toward the east to cover “*Finnland’s Lebensraum*” (Auer & Jutikkala, 1941). In a radically different Nordic context, questions of ‘living space’ was also pursued by Gudmund Hatt in Denmark (Larsen, 2011).

Kjellén’s geopolitics had fewer followers in the other Nordic countries, Sweden included (Haggman, 1998). While his idea of the state as a people’s home (*folkhemmet*) certainly had an impact on how the nation was seen as an integrative category in Nordic welfare societies (Stråth, 2012), explicit interest in Kjellén’s thinking waned after the Second World War. In Finland, like elsewhere in the Nordic Region, the subfield of political geography receded into the “moribund backwater” to which Brian Berry had assigned it in the late 1960s (Johnston, 2001, p. 677). With this, nation was sidelined as a research theme in Nordic scholarship, and there were few, if any, attempts before the 1990s to build theories on phenomena related to nationalism or national identity.

It is difficult to draw a precise timeline on how the nation gradually took on as a research theme in Nordic geography during the 1990s. In what cannot pretend to be an exhaustive assessment, we briefly discuss a number of key authors and their main theoretical positions in the study of nationhood. In our assessment we include human geographers who work in the Nordic countries independently of their personal trajectories, citizenship, or ethnicity.

In the Nordic intellectual landscape, the rise of the nation as a theoretical question largely coincides with two interrelated developments, neither of which had its origin in the Nordic countries per se. First, by the 1980s a self-conscious interest in social theory had emerged among human geographers who argued that geography can, and should, be a field that contributes to the development of social theory, instead of just appropriating theories built in other social science disciplines (e.g., Soja, 1980; Gregory, 1984; Massey & Allen, 1984). Second, the reverberations of this “social-theory-and-geography movement” (Cox, 1991, p. 5) were strongly felt also within the subfield of political geography with the consequence of theoretical work on nationalism gaining new ground and novel approaches (Agnew, 1984; Mac Laughlin, 1986).

In the Nordic countries the onset of interest in theorizing the nation was relatively slow and uneven. Among the early scholars to develop original theoretical contributions to this research area are Kenneth Olwig, who, through his personal trajectory of having held academic positions in Denmark, Norway and Sweden, is a veritable epitome of ‘Nordicness’. Throughout his career Olwig has employed landscape as a prism through which to address the politics and complex historical intermingling of material environment, cultural praxis, and systems of meaning (Olwig, 1984, 2005, 2018). This work has resulted in a rich oeuvre that looks historically into how the geographically embedded shaping of land (*landskap*) has carried

social, material and ideological transformations that are traceable from the modern institutional orders that link society and nature. These include cultural formations like the nation, and nationalism as its expression, but also political formations such as the nation-state and its legal tradition (Olwig, 1996, 2002). Working at the intersection of humanistic geography, literary studies, and art history, his method exposes interlinkages between conceptual etymology and development, representative practices, and material conditions to show how nature, land, nation, custom, community, law, and polity, coalesce in the ‘substantive landscape’ (Olwig, 1996, 2019). Therein meet words and worlds, language and landscape – not as a relation between unfulfilled representation and reality but as an inextricable bond where, as Olwig (2002, p. 55) points out, “the word nature [...] has the same root as nativity, native, and nation” (in this book, see also Germundsson et al., 2022).

At the intersection of cultural and political geography, Anssi Paasi’s long-standing research on the institutionalization of regions has built theory on the emergence of collective identities in parallel with the consolidation of territorial units on multiple scales (Paasi, 1991, 2001, 2016; in this book, see also Paasi, 2022). His early work dealt mainly with the historical emergence of sub-national regional divisions (Paasi, 1986), but from the early 1990s onwards he begun to address the relationship between processes of identification and nation-state territoriality through the prism of boundaries and how these are discursively construed as part of us/them distinctions (Paasi, 1996). Methodologically Paasi’s work stems largely from social constructionist approaches to social phenomena, but these are always understood as geographically embedded. Hence, for Paasi the construction of nationhood is a historically and geographically contingent process that employs boundaries as discursive realities through which fundamental distinctions between inside and outside, us and them, can be built. More than simple physical dividers on the ground, or lines on maps, which they also are, boundaries are ongoing processes of classification and negotiation of difference that are dispersed across the society in both space and time (Paasi, 1996). As discursive realities, boundaries are part and parcel of nationhood reproduced both through institutionalized practices, such as education and mass media, but also people’s everyday praxis that is intimately linked with these institutional realms (Paasi, 1999). This is how the nation becomes sedimented in everyday life in a process that Paasi (1996) terms spatial socialization: “the process through which actors become members of territorial entities and internalize narratives and memories related to collective identities and shared traditions” (Paasi, 1996, p. 8).

Paasi’s and Olwig’s work to theorize the nation has been influential in Nordic scholarship on nationhood and national identity. Olwig’s ideas of the nation embodied in representations and substantive enactments of landscape and nature has found reverberations in the works by Tom Mels (1999, 2002), who has studied the relationships between landscaping and the constitution of Swedish nationhood through “naturalization and nationalization of park spaces” (Mels, 2002, p. 136). Others have studied the roles that landscape and landscaping have had in nation building and the formation of cultural identity, cultural narratives on ethics and aesthetics of the environment, justice and tradition, and notions of wilderness (Lehtinen, 1991;

Jones, 2006; Germundsson, 2008; Kymäläinen & Lehtinen, 2010; Sæþórsdóttir et al., 2011; Lehtinen, 2012; Häyrynen, 2014). Methodologically, Olwig's insistence on the significance of etymology has inspired scholarship attuned to the local and national spatialization of rule, identification and praxis (e.g., Häkli, 1996, 1999; Setten, 2003, 2006).

Paasi's perceptive theoretical work has inspired a range of Nordic scholarship on nationhood with diverse conceptual orientations and empirical foci (e.g., Sörlin, 1999; Lundén & Zalamans, 2001; Kjæret & Stokke, 2003; Hellström, 2003; Kallio, 2016; Erdal, 2019; Andersen & Prokkola, 2021). However, Paasi's works has been particularly resonant in the context of the Finnish revival of political geography since the early 1990s – a movement that Paasi's own work certainly contributed to (e.g., Häkli, 1994, 1998a; Moisio, 1998, 2002; Kosonen, 1999). In two decades, a number of young scholars were drawn into the field of political geography in Finland, many of whom were interested in developing constructionist approaches to nationhood, identities, boundaries, and power (e.g., Virkkunen, 1999; Tervo, 2001; Jukarainen, 2002; Raento & Brunn, 2005; Moisio & Leppänen, 2007; Kuusisto-Arponen, 2009; Prokkola, 2010; Jokela & Linkola, 2013; Ahlqvist & Moisio, 2014; Kallio, 2018). When considering the volume of research channeled to this research area, it is clear that the rise of political geography had a great impact on the overall development of Nordic socio-spatial theories on the nation.

While our discussion so far might seem to offer a clear-cut timeline and narrative on key figures' impact on theoretical research on nationhood, the intellectual history of this research area is obviously more complex than this. For example, Allan Pred's (1984, 1986) work to theorize place as a historically contingent process certainly contributed to subsequent attempts to understand the spatialities of region building, nationalism and state formation (e.g. Paasi, 1986; Häkli, 1994). Moreover, his later interest in racism and nationalism (Pred, 2000) has opened up important avenues for Nordic scholarship (e.g., Molina, 2004; Haldrup et al., 2006; Koefoed & Simonsen, 2011; Malmberg et al., 2013; Jansson, 2018). At this juncture, Kirsten Simonsen has pursued an original research trajectory with focus on the everyday, the body, emotions, and encounters as key aspects of experienced nationhood, belonging and alterity (Simonsen, 2004, 2010, 2015; Koefoed & Simonsen, 2007; Simonsen & Koefoed, 2020; in this book, see also Simonsen, 2022). This phenomenologically oriented work has inspired further scholarship on banal and everyday nationalisms in Norway and beyond (Cele, 2013; Listerborn, 2015; Erdal, 2019; Erdal & Strømsø, 2021).

In a similar vein, Sami Moisio's long-standing research on transforming state spatialities has contributed to Nordic socio-spatial theorization of the nation and nationalism. His geopolitically attuned critical work has, for example, sought to understand the discursive positioning of Finland in the context of EU membership debates, showing how competing interpretations of national history, geographical affiliation, and national interests became rhetorical resources for political elites (Moisio, 2008a, b). More recently, in an attempt to overcome the analytical divide between geopolitical and geoeconomic approaches, he has advocated a link between critical geopolitics and cultural political economy approaches to unravel the

constitution of knowledge-intensive capitalism (Moisio, 2019). To this end, he has also analyzed processes of geopolitical subject formation to serve national strategic ends, thus showing how the geopolitics of global competition operates through practices of higher education (Moisio, 2018).

Interest in the nation and nationalism took a new turn during the 2010s, partly in response to growing globalization, mobility and transnational migration. The approaches that previously emphasized the *longue durée* construction of the nation and the discursive practices of national identification were complemented by interest in theorizing how the nation is implicated in the everyday and particularly in encounters across otherness and alterity (e.g., Haldrup et al., 2006; Johansson, 2013; Koefoed, 2015; Prokkola, 2020; Hansson & Jansson, 2021; Häkli & Kallio, 2021; Erdal & Strømsø, 2021). Focus on migration and transnational connectivities has foregrounded practices of bordering and securitization, and sustained sensitivity to methodological nationalism – the assumption that society can unproblematically be equated with the nation-state (Häkli, 2001a; Martin & Paasi, 2016; Erdal et al., 2018). Increasing attention has also been given to the colonial histories and subordination of Sami in the negotiation of nationhood in Nordic countries (Lehtinen, 2012; Wråkberg & Granqvist, 2014; Jansson, 2018; Saarinen, 2019). To gain access to everyday narratives and negotiations of (non)belonging, these culturally attuned bodies of research have employed multiple methods of ethnographic research and qualitative analysis, thus expanding the methodological approaches of Nordic scholarship on the nation. In this regard a key driver has been the need to gain an in-depth understanding of mundane and everyday aspects of experienced nationhood (Johansson, 2013; Raento, 2014; Strømsø, 2019a, b, c).

Socio-Spatial Constructions of Nation in Finland

This section presents Nordic theorization of the nationhood as seen through the prism of Jouni Häkli's personal research trajectory on nation and nationalism. The discussion will focus on the concepts of territory, knowledge, landscape and borders, and explicate how these build upon a specific socio-spatial constructionism as a theoretical and methodological position. Similar reflections by Mette Strømsø, with focus on migration and everyday encounters, are presented in the next section. These two autobiographically attuned sections will also demonstrate how the geographies of nationhood outlined above are reflected in the actual work by two Nordic scholars differently situated in the timeline of this broader theoretical development.

For me (Häkli), the question of nationhood first emerged as a theoretical problem in the context of an ambitious attempt to unravel the *longue durée* genesis of territoriality as a process in which certain understandings of space emerge historically from specific governmental practices. To be able to discuss territoriality at the intersection of spaces as meaning, knowledge and practice, I developed a methodological stance that I named spatial constructionism with which to study “the material practices that in historical contexts stand behind the cultural realities of region and

especially region as territory” (Häkli, 1994, p. 25). My work was inspired by Paasi’s (1986) insightful research on the institutionalization of regions, to which I wanted to add more emphasis on the consolidation and operations of state power as a driver of territoriality. Approaching the state in socio-spatial constructionist vein meant focusing on the historical development of practices and technologies for organizing and controlling space, rather than linking the state with territory as a given notion. I asked, what makes it possible to conceive of and control space as territory and ended up with an understanding that it is any practices that have historically increased the reach of states’ governmental power, including technologies of mapping, statistical data collection, and the codification of law. In theorizing territoriality, I distinguished between the consolidation of states’ capacity to administer space (system integration) and the deepening of experienced unity among the population (national integration), which together account for the rise of modern nation-state as a tightly knit territorial formation (Häkli, 1994).

In some further works I went on to detail my theoretical account of the production of territoriality both as a new kind of reality (understanding of space), and a material outcome of capacity to govern (Häkli, 1998a). This work gained new directions from studies of science, technology, and society (STS), particularly Bruno Latour’s (1986) thought on the material ramifications of cognition, as well as from the emerging ‘school’ of critical geopolitics with its insistence on the representational and discursive constitution of the geopolitical world (O’ Tuathail, 1996; Häkli, 1998b). At this juncture, I developed ‘the political geography of knowledge’ approach to study the epistemic question of how social sciences in general understand the society as a socio-spatial entity (Häkli, 2000, 2001a). In agreement with Simonsen’s (1996) call for more precision on how the space is understood in social theory, I argued that in mainstream social science “the common assumption is still that the state territory adequately describes the spatiality of ‘society’” (Häkli, 2001a, p. 417). Examples range from explicitly nationalistic historiography to fully implicit ways in which the national application of non-territorial GIS-based knowledge leads to its reterritorialization. These hidden geographies of society not only tend towards methodological nationalism, but also link much social scientific knowledge discursively to the state through a shared perspective from which the social world is seen – an academic equivalent to everyday or banal nationalism (Calhoun, 2017).

In attempt to theorize how the nation-state formation unfolded in Finland, I coined the notion of ‘discursive landscape’ to capture the various ways in which geography is involved in the evolution of national identities. In response to Olwig’s (1996) call for attention to the substantive nature of landscape, I approached territory “both as a political reality and an image or symbol in the shaping of the Finnish identity” (Häkli, 1999, p. 123). For me ‘landscape’ provided a conceptual avenue for studying the ways in which things and events are systematically drawn to signify nationality, and nationhood, with the key idea that “[n]ational landscape is not only read off from nature and culture, it is also written therein” (Häkli, 1999, p. 124). This interest paralleled Paasi’s (1996) approach to nation-building as the construction of socio-spatial consciousness that gradually ‘fills’ the nationalizing state

space, but placed more emphasis on how national identity is differently appropriated and reproduced and sometimes contested by different groups, especially the recognized national minorities of Swedish-speaking Finns and Sámi (Häkli, 1999).

My attempt to understand and theorize Finnishness continued in a study of how the idea of Finnish nationhood has survived under pressures coming from globalization and increasing transnational connectivity. To describe such resilience in the ever-changing forms of national identification, I employed the idea of nation as a 'root metaphor' – an interpretative framework within which nationhood is unreflexively lived through in the everyday: "as a root metaphor nation has seized to be an idea and become reality in itself" (Häkli, 2004, p. 18). This work culminated in attempt to link my earlier interest in the territorialization of the state space with later ideas on the cultural processes of nation-building. To this end, I revisited the STS-oriented thought by Annemarie Mol and John Law (1994) on regions, networks and fluids as different spatial types, and argued that nation-building and state-formation could be usefully theorized as constituted by, and constitutive of, these different spatialities (Häkli, 2009). This topological analysis scrutinizes territoriality as a performed (Euclidean) state spatiality, accomplished by means of time-space compressing networked spatiality, and cemented through the ever-changing processes of national identification in fluid space. In theoretical terms, working with these unconformable but related spatial types allows the "meaningful juxtaposition of seemingly unrelated, dispersed and episodic events and processes" taking place both 'within' and 'outside' the Finnish territory (Häkli, 2009, p. 18). This also helps in assessing how different geographical scales (or micro- and macro-level processes) are involved in nation-state building.

Border studies is another major context for my theoretical considerations of nationhood. From early on, I was interested in how borders link with the experience of national identities in much the same way as in Paasi's (1996) work on the Finnish-Russian border. However, my focus was on the roles that national identification play in cross-border regionalization and reterritorialization that I studied empirically in Catalonia and Tornio River Valley. In the former context I studied the tensions between different groups of actors with differing ideas on how Catalonia should be conceived of nationally and territorially (Häkli, 1998c, 2002, 2004). I assessed these tensions in terms of 'politics of belonging', based on what Castells (1997) had termed 'legitimizing', 'project' and 'resistance identities' as alternative and partly contradictory bases for national identification (Häkli, 2001b).

The manifestations of cultural and institutional divisions at international borderlands, despite cultural and linguistic affinities, reveal the power of the nation as a socio-spatial reality that is deeply rooted in state-based processes of national socialization as well as in people's experience of their lived spaces and landscapes (Olwig, 2005). In a study that explored a project to build a transnational center for the Haparanda-Tornio twin city, I approached these national divisions as a challenge of social trust that the project would need to overcome to achieve its ambitious ends (Häkli, 2009). To understand what facilitated complex and demanding transnational cooperation in the project, I looked into how the Tornio River took on a dual role of being both a natural boundary that divides, and a 'boundary object' that unites the

project's actors who work under distinct nationally embedded systems of meaning and ways of doing things. Developed by Star and Griesemer (1989) in their STS-oriented study of cooperation under circumstances of heterogeneity and diversity, the notion of 'boundary objects' provided interesting new avenues for understanding how the nation is implicated in cross-border interactions (see also Häkli, 2012, 2015).

In the 2010s my theoretical work increasingly became concerned with subjectivity as the basis for political agency in connection with various sources of vulnerability, and in this context the question of nationhood appeared less central (Häkli & Kallio, 2014, 2018). However, as part of a broader Nordic scholarly response to increasing transnational migration (Haldrup et al., 2006; Simonsen, 2010; Koefoed & Simonsen, 2011), I was drawn to questions of citizenship (Häkli, 2018; Kallio et al., 2020), as well as the study of asylum seeking and experienced refugeeness, and at this juncture also encounters between asylum seekers and Finns as members of the host society (Häkli et al., 2017; Häkli & Kallio, 2021). In these encounters, and particularly in anti-immigrant responses to asylum seeking, nationalist sentiments have started to figure ever more strongly. In times of rising populist nationalism across Europe, and beyond, it is clear that nationhood is far from being the defunct relic of the twentieth century that some analysts were willing to believe at the heyday of discourses on globalization. Nationhood may go largely unnoticed as imbricated into myriad everyday practices, but as the rise of explicit nationalist sentiments and actions indisputably shows, it is alive and well, and ready to be awakened in the right circumstances.

Everyday Nation and Encounters with Otherness in Norway

My (Strømsø) personal research trajectory on nation and nationalism is substantially shorter than Häkli's, and links closely with the more recent changes occurring in the field. Since the mid-2010s, I have investigated negotiations over the nation in everyday life in light of increased ethnic and religious diversity in Norway (Strømsø, 2019a). The point of departure for this endeavor was inspired by scholarship on transnationalism that started to pay attention to the territorial settings of transnational migrant living (Gielis, 2009). I was interested in questions of living together in diversity that engaged with power-relations associated with formal and informal structures of national belonging in the receiving societies, but without treating belonging as a zero-sum game (Erdal et al., 2017).

These discussions coincided in time with the upsurge of populist nationalism reproducing an understanding of the nation as an exclusive socio-spatial entity in Europe and beyond. For instance, data for my study was collected only four years after the 22 July 2011 terror attacks (at Utøya island and the central government buildings in Oslo) which were ideologically motivated and reasoned to defend a Norwegian nation against heterogenization. Another significant backdrop to this study, the sitting government was a conservative-led coalition that included the

populist Progress Party and the Liberal Party. It was a government that reflected the international policy trend of foregrounding border control and reducing immigration flows. It is within this historical and spatial context that my research on everyday nationhood is situated, and it is from this academic conversation that I engage with this volume's emphasis on socio-spatial theorization in Nordic geography. I start with a discussion on theories of nation and how it relates to migration-related diversity, before I continue with a discussion of theories of nation through the conceptual foci of everyday life, scale and boundaries, and encounters with otherness.

My entry point into these discussions has been methodological and guided by the following question: who are 'the masses' of the mass-phenomenon of nationalism? With the implicit assumption that nationalism is a mass-phenomenon, the masses have for the most part unwittingly been left out of the analysis (Whitmeyer, 2002). The cultural and discursive turn in research on nations and nationalism brought the idea of masses in through the work of Benedict Anderson (1983) and Michael Billig (1995), albeit treating them as an 'undifferentiated' group of ordinary people (Smith, 2008). The significance of this omission is reflected in the established narrative that nation and migration-related diversity (i.e., ethnic and religious diversity) cannot coexist (Antonsich & Matejskova, 2015). This narrative reproduces conceptualizations of the nation as built on socio-spatial homogeneity, which echoes prevailing conceptions of nationalism. By contrast, immigration, and thus immigrants as the assumed carriers of diversity, is thought to weaken a sense of national solidarity (Kymlicka, 2015). Consider, for instance, how this narrative in many ways is reproduced in established sampling strategies in the study of nation and nationalism as well as migrant integration. Boundaries of national belonging are treated as taken-for-granted with the implication that nationals are assumed to belong unconditionally, whereas ethnic and national minorities, as well as immigrants, are considered as more or less belonging as the element of diversity in the supposedly homogenous national culture (Triandafyllidou, 1998, 2013). In consequence, certain boundaries of nationhood may be reproduced and upheld if the premises of who are the masses are not reflected upon.

To move beyond these potential pitfalls of methodological nationalism, also addressed by Häkli above, I have looked to current work on superdiversity for inspiration (Meissner & Vertovec, 2015). The concept of superdiversity was first introduced to encompass the changing demographic compositions and unprecedented complexity in urban areas characterized by migration (Vertovec, 2007). Since then, it has been interpreted in three main directions: theoretical, methodological, and policy-oriented (Meissner & Vertovec, 2015). My work is inspired by the methodological direction as it calls for an acknowledgment of how contemporary societies are diverse in multiple and intersecting ways, and underscores that questions of belonging cannot a priori be confined to one particular national space (Erdal, 2017; Meissner & Vertovec, 2015). To not reproduce taken-for-granted conceptualizations of national belonging, such as citizenship, birth, ancestry, or race, I have sought research participants who reflected a diversification of diversity among individuals living within a shared national space, here Norway (Bauböck, 2002; Strømsø, 2019a). Their self-identifications with various intersecting and unique combinations

of identity markers, such as age, gender, socio-economic, ethnic, religious, and political affiliation, and their oral representations of perceptions and experiences of belonging, have been a central element in my study.

To not place emphasis on certain identities in favor of others, I started by looking at ordinary individual's everyday lives (Fox & Jones, 2013). However, individuals are not necessarily aware of how they help produce and reproduce nationhood and its boundaries in their mundane lives. Therefore, starting with everyday life as the 'domain of enquiry' allows for an exploration of when, where, and how the nation emerges as meaningful, and in which social contexts it is actively lived and (re) produced by ordinary people (Antonsich, 2016; Fox & Miller-Idriss, 2008; Thompson, 2001). Where the nation traditionally had been considered an omnipresent and overriding identity-marker (Millard, 2014; Skey, 2009), within the everyday nationhood tradition the nation is understood as contingent in time and space, as an identity marker that sometimes 'crystallizes as an event' – referred to as nationness (Brubaker, 1994, p. 8).

Engaging with nationness in everyday life contrasts with the more established research on nationalism where the nation is commonly approached as a phenomenon on the national scale (Moore, 2008). A similar approach is found in much of the research on, for instance, cosmopolitanism and everyday multiculturalism, where the nation is commonly conceptualized building on Benedict Anderson's (1983) idea of the nation as an imagined community. Hence, the nation is relegated as an abstract phenomenon without taking into consideration Anderson's contribution that complements macro-structural approaches to the nation by placing emphasis on how nationhood is reproduced in individuals' everyday lives. These research traditions are important to mention because they have dominated much of the debates on social interaction in everyday life and encounters with difference since the 2000s (e.g., Wise & Velayutham, 2009). As a result, the nation is often reduced to a static backdrop and overlooked in analysis of diversity, while other geographical scales, such as the local and the urban, are understood as lived and experienced. More critical, still, is how the nation is conceptualized as a homogenous and exclusive socio-spatial entity and for these reasons rejected on normative grounds (Antonsich, 2018; Antonsich & Matejskova, 2015). Again, the local and the urban are, by contrast, understood as inclusive (Koefoed & Simonsen, 2011; Wise & Velayutham, 2009).

The scholarship on everyday nationhood is mainly traced to Anglophone geography but related discussions are found in Nordic geography, such as in the work of Haldrup et al. (2006) and Koefoed and Simonsen (2011). Their contributions on the everyday experiences of nationhood have been an inspiration in my work related to embodied encounters with difference, as already indicated by Häkli. However, I have sought to develop further an understanding of the nation as a multi-scalar and contextually lived phenomenon, thus contending that everyday life does not have a fixed spatiality (e.g., Strømsø, 2019b, 2019c).

By shifting the focus from a conceptualization of the nation as a container of singular belonging to one that allows scope for diversity as an integral part of the nation, does not entail that living together is without friction (Erdal & Strømsø, 2021; Strømsø, 2019b). Through my endeavor to investigate negotiations over the

nation in everyday life, I identify – to no surprise – boundaries. Boundaries are here approached as socio-spatial processes. Having sampled participants without a pre-defined notion of nationhood, insights from my study unveil how individuals living in Norway – regardless of background and whether they identify as Norwegian or not – draw upon different symbolic resources at different times and spaces to help (re)produce boundaries of nationhood. When (re)produced, boundaries are themselves clear, or rather, free from ambiguity. Yet, there is a lack of consistency between individuals' national imaginaries and their everyday experiences, which I argue help demonstrate how boundaries of nationhood in everyday life are blurred (Strømsø, 2019a). These insights challenge the preconceived notions of a fixed and stable boundary demarcating Norwegian nationhood.

From a different vantage point, in a study among pupils in upper-secondary schools across Norway, we find that first impressions, as situated and unpredictable encounters with otherness, can also be conceptualized as boundaries of the everyday nation (Erdal & Strømsø, 2021). Boundary-making through first impressions (often) involves interpersonal encounters, which are both embodied and involve emotional dimensions. Our analysis revolves around visibility and race, as we expose how first impressions trigger automatic reactions or conscious reflections based on taken-for-granted imaginaries of who 'naturally' belongs within a national context and preconceived ideas of otherness. Still, these boundaries are not fixed but characterized by heteronomy and multiplicity (Andersen et al., 2012; Sohn, 2016). In other words, first impressions mean different things to different people, and we contend that the production or non-production of boundaries in this encounter depends on both the onlooker and the observed. Insisting on their agency in these encounters, the youth in our study elaborated on how they managed first impressions – or not – in everyday life. Furthermore, they reflected on normative aspects of the nation, where the 'what is' might be at odds with what they think it 'ought to be', in particular as the 'what is' might exclude their friends. Thus, the everyday nation can be understood as both a site of boundary-making and as being constituted by this very boundary-making.

Conducting a study on nation and migration-related diversity in the midst of a populist upsurge in Norway, where questions such as 'who is (not) a Norwegian' and 'who is (not) entitled to welfare services' are often raised in media, makes for a particular historical and spatial context. Starting with the everyday lives of ordinary people, and by taking seriously the ways in which nationhood are reproduced in taken-for-granted manners, the study not only helps challenge fixed and biased conceptualizations of the nation by offering a more nuanced picture than the one created in public debate. More importantly, it also unveils how focus on everyday life helps make space for different conceptualizations of the nation, where also diversity beyond the salient markers of migration-related diversity, is envisioned as an integral, but not frictionless, part (Erdal & Strømsø, 2016).

Conclusion

In this chapter we have charted the development of Nordic geographical theories of nationhood and nationalism from the early twentieth century up to the present day. We have deliberately limited our assessment to works that explicitly discuss the nation in theoretical terms. This means that we have not highlighted some important but latent forms of academic enactments of nationhood such as the racializing science of ‘lappology’ that from the sixteenth century onwards sought to build an ethnically homogeneous image of the Swedish nation through categorical distinctions from the Sami called ‘Lapps’. These forms of colonizing knowledge production were deeply entangled with the rise of the Nordic nation-states as the dominant geopolitical order in the European north. However, instead of providing theoretical understanding of nationhood as a socio-cultural and socio-spatial phenomenon, they served as a direct academic contribution to nation-building in Nordic countries (Mattson, 2014).

By instead following the trajectories of Nordic theorization of the nation and nationalism we have sought to trace a body of work that reflects the socio-historical and intellectual contexts, in which it has evolved. We have done this in full realization that social sciences have always been a transnational endeavor and that it is, therefore, difficult to distil a specifically Nordic approach to the study of nationhood. However, we offer our interpretation of some aspects of an intellectual tradition that could be seen as characteristic of Nordic socio-spatial theorization. One such common thread is keen awareness of the nation as a socially, culturally, and geographically constructed reality (e.g., Stokke, 1999; Engelstoft & Larsen, 2013). Whether emphasizing more its material entanglements with the physical environment, seen through the prism of landscape, or its semiotic structurings in identity narratives, texts and images, nationalism is understood and analyzed as an historical-geographical construction beyond any idea of primordial nationhood.

Another common aspect is the relative similarity of political development in the Nordic countries. As democratic welfare societies they form an intellectual context with particular architectures of inclusiveness across class differences and potential exclusiveness in terms of cultural identity and belonging. Arguably, Nordic scholarship is particularly cognizant of the Janus-faced character of nationhood as, at once, a basis of solidarity among ‘us’ who belong ‘here’, and division towards ‘them’ who now live ‘here’ while they actually belong ‘there’ (Paasi, 1996).

Conversely, the different geopolitical positionings across the Nordic countries before and after the Second World War might account at least for some of the variation between scholarly traditions, with political geography attracting interest early on in Finland much more than elsewhere in the Nordic countries. Perhaps the blunt proximity of the Soviet Union and Russia as a great power, combined with the tradition of troublesome Russo-Finnish relations, actually boosted Finnish geographers’ engagement with border studies and nationalism in the way authors such as Paasi (1990) and Moisio and Harle (2010) have hinted at. Be that as it may, it is evident that within Nordic geographies of nationhood there are considerable differences in

terms of volume and emphasis that are difficult to account for with an exclusive focus on individual scholars and their academic networks.

In view of all this, it is hardly an overstatement to say that Nordic scholarship has been building, rather than just following, the theoretical state of the art in this research area. We hope to have shown this through our assessment of Nordic socio-spatial theorization, which we complemented with our partly autobiographical reflections on how the research field has changed during the past decades. Instead of attempting to reiterate it, we use the remaining part of this concluding section to discuss the continued relevance of this work in understanding the social and political changes that over the past decade or so have brought populist and right-wing nationalism on the public agenda throughout Europe, the Nordic countries included.

In a way hardly conceivable in the late 1990s when discourses on the ‘borderless world’ were popular, after the turn of the millennium nationalism re-entered forcefully the political scene in the form of openly nationalist rhetoric and the popular support gained by parties with a nationalistic political agenda. While to some extent this has been a response to social polarization and precarization caused by neoliberal globalization, especially in the aftermath of the European ‘refugee crisis’ of 2015, nationalist sentiments have revolved around debates on immigration. More recently still, the idea of ‘us’ being different from ‘them’ has shifted into a rhetoric highlighting ‘our’ interests before ‘others’, like in the national brokering over access to vaccines and other medical supplies in the context of the covid-19 pandemic. At the time of writing, in 2021, the political landscape in the Nordic countries is still dominated by this trend, where the Finns Party in Finland, Center Party in Norway, and Sweden Democrats in Sweden are competing for the position of largest political party in polls. While somewhat smaller, in Denmark the Danish People’s Party has for at least two decades been setting the agenda on immigration and refugee policy by making other parties to toughen their policies.

The situation calls for continued attempts to understand nationalism as a persistent political phenomenon. To quote Matejskova and Antonsich (2015, p. 206), the nation is often understood as “in the hands of [the] xenophobic” in public and academic debate. Hence, much scholarly attention is paid to these political sentiments and responses. However, as emphasized in Strømsø’s section above, the everyday nationhood literature has highlighted how the nation matters to individuals regardless of its political articulations on the public agenda. While less conflict-oriented and more open for diversity as an integral part of the nation, everyday realities of nationhood are nevertheless entangled with the hotter forms of nationalism (Jones & Merriman, 2009; Erdal, 2019). To analyze the contemporary nationalist populism as a political force it is, therefore, important to build theoretical understanding of the ways in which the nation exists in the everyday.

One avenue for future research on nation and nationalism in Nordic geography might be to take up the role of technology, and in particular the impact of algorithmic dissemination of social media contents, which tend to reinforce the sentiments and affects of similarly-minded media users. Such ‘echo chamber’ effects are likely to play a role in the everyday reproduction of nationalism as at once banal and hot. At this juncture the question of emotions and affects in the nationhood certainly

merit further attention, along with the non-intentional and pre-reflexive aspects of identification that may give rise to mundane political agencies with the potential of “maintaining, challenging, and transforming the conditions from which they spring” (Häkli & Kallio, 2018, p. 71; also Bille & Simonsen, 2021; Erdal & Strømsø, 2021).

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