

## Object centric study of everyday nationalism in an Australian preschool

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**Abstract:** Materialities of everyday nationalism is more frequently explored today in nationalism studies. Similar attention, however, is missing if we consider young children's institutional lives. This chapter uses an object centric approach to everyday nationalism to explore how objects gain national significance and weave nationalism into young children's everyday institutional lives and contribute to their identity formation as national subjects. By analysing two scenarios as cases to learn from, I identify three processes: production, occupation and performance through which objects tie the nation into everyday practices. While everyday nationalism often operates beneath the surface, paying attention to objects and mundane practices in preschools help us understand where and when everyday nationalism is present in children's preschool lives, when it matters, and how it works. To conclude, I call attention to the need to take objects more seriously in the study of banal nationalism and childhood.

**Keywords:** Banal nationalism, everyday nationalism, objects, socio-material practices, childhood, preschool

In his work on 'banal nationalism', Michael Billig (1995) discusses the daily reproduction of beliefs and habits, which structure everyday life in modern nations. Following his framing, nationalism studies have generally conceived objects in terms of their semiotic and symbolic qualities, their sign value. Focusing instead on objects' physical entanglements in performances of nationalisms, Kowalski (2017, p. 129) calls for going beyond conceptualising objects as simply '*stamping on*' our everyday experience with their symbolism. Rather, she orients research to the materiality of objects in banal nationalism, that creates "*material ties*, both social and physical, into which everydayness and banality, in and of themselves, *weave practices*" (Kowalski, 2017, p. 129). In this chapter, I discuss some ways in which everyday nationalism is materially weaved into practices of young children's everyday institutional lives. As part of this exploration, I aim to make visible how nationalist imagination takes ordinary or taken for granted objects in the environment and reclassifies those symbolically as remarkable ones creating indexical connections to the nation, more specifically its heritage and stereotypical lifestyle. In other words, I aim to highlight some ways in which national imaginary folds into the familiar life of the preschool through objects

tied into practices.

There are still relatively few studies in nationalism studies that account for the materiality of 'things' in the performance of nationalism and national identities, or that take the nation as performed socio-material constructions (Merriman and Jones, 2017 and see exemptions such as Löfgren, 1993; Edensor, 2002; Noble, 2002 or Zubrzycki, 2017). A subsection of these studies focuses on objects and seeks to trace out how different objects compose a part of broader material cultures of the nation, such as old stones weaving national tradition into restoration of old ruins (Kowalski, 2017), teacups along with the period houses enable people to "connect with a national past and to collectively produce relatedness and a sense of belonging" (Balthasar, 2017, p. 220) or skis and skates produce a nation-ed environment with which people feel at home (Millei, Korkiamäki and Kaukko, Forhcoming). These studies understand objects as acquiring and conveying meanings and significance when they move through the times and spaces of the people they live with, carrying with them complex and changing social lives of their own (Appadurai, 1986; Kopytoff, 1986). The 'abilities' of things, their texture, form, colour etc., makes them 'social objects' that people engage with. 'Social objects' have their own biographies which are in flux. For example, and as I will discuss in more details below, a wooden tongue depressor can be a medical tool in a doctor's office but becomes a craft supply in a preschool from which other objects are constructed. Objects, in this way, have their own and changing 'voices', they invite interaction, mobilize people, take part in their actions, invoke feelings and a sense of community, as they cross people's everyday lives.

People know about objects and objects also 'know' by storing knowledge. As objects travel through times and spaces, they come across people and (other) objects with their unique biographies and, hence, connect people and things from different times, places, cultures and positions (Silverman 2015). These connections may take place in concrete ways as people share objects and the knowledge they carry, or handle objects once created and treated by other people. Objects create connections also by their biographical existence as they tell stories and inevitably conjure imaginations in people that they can recall. They also animate people with "affects and emotions, feelings of remembrance, affection, appreciation and loss", for example as souvenirs brought home from a holiday do (Haldrup, 2016, p. 52) or feelings that the visiting or restoring heritage objects evoke (Kowalski, 2017). The role of objects in this understanding and in relation to nationalism goes beyond symbolizing or lending meaning to everyday experience. Objects' physicality – their banality, texture, colour, shine, raw material, biographical traces etc. –

affords them abilities for different uses and force onto experience by participating in and texturing practices at the same time creating indexical connections to the nation (Kowalski, 2017).

Institutional practices are paramount in reproducing the nation (Skey, 2011). They contribute to the continuous signalling of and performing the nation, such as raising the flag as part of ceremonies, singing the national anthem with particular bodily comportments, participating in national sport or use nationally sanctioned languages (e.g. Benei, 2008; Woronov, 2007; Scourfield, Dick, Drakeford and Davies, 2006; Millei and Imre, 2015). There are also more internalized, naturalized or routinized habits of the nation that are hard to notice (Fox, 2017) and in which objects play different roles. These appear as part of embodied practices of eating, dressing, celebrations (Lappalainen, 2006) or play (MacNaughton, 2001). Through these practices, the nation is reproduced as the taken for granted order of things and ways of life, which scholars term as everyday nationalism. Everyday nationalism is a perspective that views nationalism as part of social interactions in which people engage in the local places of everyday encounters. The nation, according to this view, is an ongoing accomplishment, in which children also participate but in less acknowledged or researched ways (see Millei, 2018). Everyday nationalism continuously reinvents itself adjusting to changing circumstances of the social, political and economic world (Skey, 2011 Antonsich, 2015; Fox, 2017) and within the frame of preschools, as it entwines with curriculum, pedagogy, everyday routines and activities (Millei, 2018).

To explore the ways in which everyday nationalism is materially weaved into the practices of children's everyday life in a preschool, I use data I produced as part of an 18 months long ethnography with 4 and 5 years old children in an Australian regional preschool between 2013-14. In this project, I have researched nationalism in young children's lives with an aim to move beyond the children's 'sense-making', expressed beliefs, values, and feeling. In my ethnographic observations I sought to foreground children doing things as part of the flow of life. As I read the data with the frame of 'everyday nationalism' and objects in mind, I selected two scenarios. The first exemplifies how nationalist imagination can take ordinary objects in the preschool and reclassify them as symbolizing national heritage weaving the nation into children's play and environment. The second scenario highlights how children can add to preschool objects' biographies by enrolling those into practices that are part of broader national habits and lifestyle. These examples offer context dependent and nuanced understandings about how objects play their part in everyday nationalism in a preschool. Thus, instead of offering universals (Flyvbjerg, 2006), these scenarios offer examples from which we can learn about banal nationalism in

children's institutional lives. By selecting and presenting these data as part of these scenarios, I have already performed a form of analysis which I continue in the next part of this chapter by making visible how these objects and practices are linked to national imaginaries and reference national lifestyles.

In these examples, I represent data by giving human and non-human bodies a symmetry and zoom in on objects and children's practices as they are configured socio-materially in these unfolding scenarios (Sørensen, 2013). When scenarios are considered through a socio-material perspective, children's bodies and objects are viewed as "intimately situationally entangled" (Sørensen, 2013, p. 118), thus my focus shifts to coinciding events where the material and social co-exist and interplay. As Sørensen (2013, p. 118) explains, focusing on socio-material processes "highlights 'doings' in contrast to 'sense'", shifting the attention towards the situation and its processes. By applying this principle, it becomes possible to observe how children and objects, spaces, and affective relations construct these scenarios and give shape to performances of everyday nationalism in the preschool.

### **Scenario 1: Garden for the fairies**

In some conversations between the children and teachers, it came up that the children were interested in creating a garden for the fairies. As the conversations developed, children have expressed that they wanted to create a playground so the fairies can play. Besides a see-saw, they imagined a swing and the teacher suggested a merry-go-round. In response, a child imagined a merry-go-around "with animals for seats and flowers". This interest met with the teachers who is also passionate about recycling.

Using the recycled materials provided by families, a group of children and the teacher set out to create some miniature playground equipment. Colourful recycled plastic plates, beads and pipe cleaners from the craft boxes and plastic kangaroo and zebra toy animals kept as play props in the preschool are turned into a carousel, swings and a see-saw for the fairies. "The fairies also need a toilet", a child lamented, so they glued together wooden tongue depressors creating the toilet building and they painted it pink inside and rainbow colours outside "cause fairies like rainbows, you know". The fairy garden was assembled from these structures on a low height table enabling the children to interact with the objects easily. The children animated fairy figures made from small pipe cleaners and dressed in skirts. As the fairies were using the playground equipment, rode on the merry-go-round, used the swings

or proceeded to use the toilet, children gave excited expressions to the fairies' emotions of delight: 'I am finished!' and the child lead the fairy out from the toilet.

*Figure 1. Merry go round with kangaroos*

*Figure 2. The dunny*

Through a recycling craft project, objects that were play props, and recycled or craft items in the everyday running of the preschool, became part of an ornamental set up exhibited on a table that children could also play with (Figure 3). Participating in these socio-material practices, each mundane object's biography gained a new turn. By giving particular shapes and aesthetic to the objects in development, the teacher's nationalist imaginary helped to shape these new structures in a particular way. With proposing and assembling the merry-go-round with the kangaroos and the toilet that looked as a dunny, the teacher's imagination re-signified these objects by making an indexical connection to the nation's past and heritage. The merry go-round referenced carousels set-up during yearly Royal shows. On the carousel, horses were exchanged to kangaroos (Figure 1), an animal symbolising the Australian nation, for example, on the national coat of arms. The fairy toilet created from tongue depressors resembled a dunny linking Australian heritage to this structure and the fairy garden (Figure 2.).

*Figure 3. Children playing inside with the fairy garden*

Royal shows and fairs in Australia "are one of colonialism's quintessential representational spaces" (Anderson, 2003, p. 3). The showgrounds, which are part of the everyday Australian culture, are "made to stand as testimony to the successful march of 'civilization' to the colony ... – with civilization conceived, in European and humanist terms, as a spatialized progression out of an animal-baseline in nature, through an agrarian garden, to the evolved space of the City" (Anderson, 2003, p.1). Essential parts of these shows inherited from the British Empire are the carousels and other entertainments for young and old, in what is called the Sideshow Alley.

Nationalist imaginary uses the pre-existing, historically inherited cultures and turns them into nations, as Gellner (1983) explains. With regard to settler societies, such as the USA and Australia, national culture is not composed on the heritage of local groups (Stratton & Ang, 1994). Rather, colonial settler societies adopt a particular national culture, generally that of the coloniser, the one that has been transplanted by British imperialism and more recently by Western emigrant

societies (Pettman, 1995). In the case of pre-Federation Australia, as White describes (cited in Stratton & Ang 1994, no page no):

The question of Australian identity has usually been seen as a tug-of-war between Australianness and Britishness, between the impulse to be distinctively Australian and the lingering sense of a British heritage. However this attitude to the development of an Australian identity only became common towards the end of the nineteenth century, when self-conscious nationalists began to exaggerate what was distinctive about Australia (p. 47).

Helping to make these differentiations in the early days of Australian federation between British and Australian national cultures, the Australian-born child and native animals became symbols of the new and strengthening Australian national imaginary. They became “a key strategy in building identification with the new Australian nation” (Taylor, 2014, p. 170). For example, native animals hosted settler children to become Australians in stories of children’s books, such as *Dot the Kangaroo* written by Ethel Pedley. As Franklin (2006, p. 138) puts it in his book titled *Animal Nation*, the figures of distinctively Australian animals remain an essential symbol of the constitution of Australia itself, for example in portraying the nation on the Australian coat of arms.

The fairy toilet resembles a dunny, an outhouse used during the first part of the 20th century in most Australian houses. The dunny was placed against the back fence, so that the pen could be collected from the dunny lane, the exact lane that is located behind the preschool. As Newton (2007, p. 91) explains, the dunny invokes a nostalgia for the bush and for egalitarianism, and the tradition of democratic humour “related to lower bodily and ‘ocker’ humour”. She contends that Australians have a particular, nationally infused and nostalgic relationship with the dunny.

This consideration of the objects in the fairy garden, the carousel and the dunny, and the fairy garden as an object itself representing Royal shows and fairs, brings up a dimension of Australian heritage. Heritage here appears as representative or typical things and tropes and places or realms. Heritage is composed of “experiential totalities involving multiple things, places, people, and actions; ... [reflecting] memory and community (Nora 1984; McCrone, Morris, and Kiely 1995 cited in Kowalski, 2017, p. 130). Heritage thus has little to do with ideology, representation, and beliefs and more to do with materiality as it interweaves practices. Kangaroos replace the usual animal, the horse, due to their properties that enable for the toy fairies to sit on. The idea of the toilet, as it is intended for the fairies, became a dunny. Mundane objects assemble to compose the fairy garden and reflect a nostalgic heritage of the Australian nation through the nationalist imaginary of the teacher. The children play with this heritage, the fairy garden, as part of their

everyday preschool lives and it is also added to their environment as it is later relocated to the garden area. The peculiar simplicity and efficacy of ordinary nationalism in this scenario thus lies in the very ordinariness of a craft making activity that reintroduced these objects as national heritage in the preschool practices and the environment. No nationalist indoctrination is at work here. Children engage the nation and heritage through an ethics of recycling, craft making, a child-centred pedagogy and mundane play.

By creating and placing these ornamental objects first on a table inside the preschool (Figure 4) and later in the preschool's garden, the teacher with the children's collaboration made herself 'at home' in the larger social space of the nation. In this home of the nation, as Noble (2002, p. 54-55) explains, the "construction of personal and collective identities occurs within a 'nation-ed' environment, where nation forms a material backdrop to the functioning of everyday life and is thus 'naturalized'". As they create the fairy garden with objects of personal and national significance, they weave national experience and heritage in the fabric of everyday life, constructing "the nation not so much as a project of active affiliation and identification but as the furniture of everyday life, or what we might see as a "very banal nationalism". (Noble, 2002, p. 55.).

In the fairy garden building project and play, mundane objects lying around the preschool were transformed into heritage and a 'nation-ed environment', where their enrolment hinged upon the materiality of these objects, their capacity to allow the building to unfold. Toys and recycled materials became national heritage and home environment through a reflexive process that singled out mundane objects and reclassified them as national ones. Through children's play, these objects facilitated the circulation and reproduction of the nation as part of everyday preschool practices. Creating and playing with the fairy garden here were not 'ideological habits', as Billig (1995) describes, for example in the case of flag raising in the classical theory of banal nationalism, but remained mundane practices with heritage items and in a now 'nation-ed environment' that children habituate as a taken-for-granted backdrop to their everyday lives. In the next scenario, objects gain significance and participate in a different way in children's play in the preschool garden.

### **Barbecue (BBQ)**

This event takes place during free outside play in the preschool. Children are allowed to bring out toys or equipment from the shed and use those freely. On the grass and next to a life size fishing boat, camping chairs are organised in a circle (Figure 4.).

Four boys and a girl are sitting on the chairs holding their water bottles and gazing at the large plastic building blocks in front of them (see Figure 4). On the ground plastic fishes and crabs are placed on a wire rack. The children strike a relaxed sitting pose, legs spread out wide and they slightly slouch down in their chairs. I ask while approaching: “What is happening here?” A couple of them answer in chorus: “We are drinking here!” The boy in the middle straightens up and crosses his legs, lifts them from the ground and moves his crossed legs up and down. I ask: “Whose place is this?” John answers: “Only for boys!” The other boys look at the girl who smiles with a bit of surprise on her face. John lifts both shoulders and relaxes his face almost as much as his jaws drop down completely. He slightly tilts his head down and fixes his stare on the ground while casually pointing to James with a relaxed arm gesture and pronounces: “You can come in.” I ask in response in an emphasized teenage girl style: “Can I come in?” the firm answer arrives in a matter of fact tone and deep voice: “Girls cannot come in”. A boy leaves the scene and goes to the trampoline. I respond: “I am not a girl”. John wrinkles his forehead and looks straight at me seriously and in a forceful tone states: “You are not a boy. Only dads can come in”. I respond in a begging tone of voice that “I can pretend to be a wife of your dad”. He looks down to the ground for a few seconds, while James says in firm but quiet voice: “No you can’t”. John then looks up at me and explains apologetically: “Dads have beer”. I ask: “What do girls have?” James responds that “Girls have drinks”. In a surprised tone I ask: “What?” “Girls have beer” – Jonathan adds. “No, girls have wine” – John corrects him. John sits back on his chair and spreads his leg and holds the arm of the chair with both hands with a straight face instructing me: “Take a picture!” James stands up and goes to the wire rack laying on the ground with the coloured plastic fishes and crabs placed in a row. “Is that a BBQ?” – I ask. James proceeds to remove the fishes and crabs off the rack. “The fish is ready” he adds.

*Figure 4: Fishing boat and camping chairs*

The interesting objects in this scenario are the boat, camping chairs, drink bottles, plastic stands, wire rack, and toy fish. They are carefully assembled by children to reproduce gatherings around the barbecue, perhaps on the beach, composing a regular event of socialising in families. These objects invoke a lifestyle and special feeling of togetherness. The objects and children’s body



language - relaxed pose and drinking -, and oppositional stance for girls to join, creates belonging and exclusion. The space that objects mark out and children's imaginative play reproduce forms of sociality experienced by children outside of the preschool. Children's enactment of the BBQ lends a new biography to these objects as they create a homely environment linking spaces of the preschool to the home and the larger social space of the nation.

At the BBQ, "so the myths go, Australians manifest the informality, classlessness, and love of the natural that typifies 'Australia.'" (Bradford, 1995, p. 112). Barbecue symbolizes a stereotypical relaxed Australian lifestyle. It is related to outdoor spaces that generate an interpersonal quality of shared social life with an inherently egalitarian quality. Drinks and food cement the bonds between males, termed in Australia as 'mateship', a long standing but transforming Anglo-Australian nationalist gravity (Kapferer, 1988). Mateship is a bush-derived 'Australian Legend' originating in the settler colonialist period of British imperialism and glorified in sports and war (Pease, 2001). During the insecure times of colonialism, and due to the harshness of the bush and the often violent relations with Indigenous people, the behavior code of mateship was born in which man would do anything to protect and support a mate in the absence of females who were kept safe at a distance (Pease, 2001). Mateship was constructed against Indigenous man's resistance to take their land. By late nineteenth-century, radical and labor intellectuals transformed this bush ideal to a politicized mateship essential to the making of a 'positive' working-class Australian identity (Pease, 2001; Dyrenfurth, 2007).

In a more general trope, mateship represents visions of solidarity, collectivism and mutuality. Being accepted as an 'Anglo-Celtic mate' means that one belong to a category of 'extra-class whiteness' (Hage 1998, 199) referring to the ideal of companionship or comradeship between fellow working men. John Howard, Australian Prime Minister serving between 1996-2007, operationalized and popularized 'mateship' to capture public consciousness with his conservative politics. It earned him four consecutive election wins (Dyrenfurth, 2007). At the end of the twentieth century, these ideals still formed an important part of Australian national identity, despite a strong second feminist wave during the 1970s (Pease, 2001), and the actual diversity of the nation and the Australian governmental agencies advancing more progressive and inclusive imaginary of nation by the 1990s in which cultural diversity formed a part of the national ideal (Turner, 1994).

One of the paradigmatic features of the 'Australian' BBQ trope is the marked gender separation (Redmond, 2007). At the BBQ, men share cooking and drinking together usually with the

exclusion of females. Men gather around the BBQ, while women are often found looking after children and/or preparing salads or mixing drinks in a separate space. Expressed in the colloquialism: 'men, meat and metal', the shared social life of males around the BBQ invokes a "sacrificial male homosociality" (Redmond 2007, p. 338).

The boat, camping chairs, drink bottles, plastic stands, wire rack and toy fishes and crabs delimit and configure an area for the BBQ. It is also interesting to observe the boys' T-shirts, all explicitly marketed for boys and portray giant monster trucks, bikes and cars. The social and material aspects are performative here. Acting the BBQ is tightly dependent on the configuration of these objects, affective practices, such as slouching down, relaxing, enjoying company, defending and supporting each other that create togetherness and a relaxed atmosphere of mateship solidarity.

In the boys' play, masculinity does not appear as an essence to be revealed, but as sets of practices that are actively performed and negotiated in relation to other forms of identity. The children actively engage in what Foucault (1982) identifies as the dual process of subjectification – both as the subjects acting upon the existing conditions and being subjected to various discursive practices, in this case both the preschool and the shared social life of BBQ. The children make themselves subjects to these discourses, producing themselves by referring back to these knowledges, such as drinking or excluding women. These discourses also regulate what occurs within this area, and what can be said and done. The boys, all three except one who leaves, seem to be willing to take up these discourses, experiencing the world, acting, shaping and recognizing themselves according to the rules of a stereotypical Australian BBQ and its discourses informed by 'mateship', 'white masculinity' and exclusion. The boy who leaves the scene might not subscribe to these (or just wants to leave the play). The only girl present in the situation reacts with a smile when the exclusive statement is made based on gender, but she stays in the play and remains silent. It is possible that the exclusionary discourse silences her<sup>1</sup>. When my exclusion from the space based on my gender did not seem to work, John turns to a different strategy of exclusion and positions me as a teacher by instructing me to take a photo. This practice is quite universal in the preschool as teachers usually walk around with a camera to record children's activities for documentation of their learning. Being positioned as a teacher, a non-participant in their game, he can disregard my question and perhaps act as a child all consumed by playing. My exclusion perhaps was also

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<sup>1</sup> It is also possible that she does not understand the BBQ as an exclusively male domain. She might also like to enact the masculine discourse.

motivated by my accent, being a non-Australian and woman, I just could not fit within their performance.

An individual's experiences, the sense of who one is, depends on the weaving-together of multiple subject positions within discourses through various practices. As Wetherell and Edley (2014, p. 355) explain, for boys enacting masculinities, "[s]uch practices take many different forms and involve a wide range of activities, such as the disciplining of bodies to match currently ideal physiques, choices of clothes and fashion, leisure pursuits, gendered hierarchies in workplaces, and so on." The boys positioned themselves with drink bottles, chairs, fashion, relaxed positions, facial expressions, tones of voice as mates. John skilfully mixed this discourse with others that are present in this situation, such as those operating in his everyday preschool environment. Within the preschool rules, I was positioned as an adult who has a more powerful position in the preschool and deserves respect. He, however, skilfully positioned me within both discourses. First, drawing on the masculine 'Australian' discourse he explained that without drinking beer I cannot participate, and as a woman I cannot drink beer. Second, he demanded me to take a picture, as a teacher in the preschool would. Besides these ambiguous positionings, I was positioned as someone who has a marginal role in their BBQ. I could be excluded based on my gender, as an adult having no space in children's symbolic play or as a non-Australian.

With their situated affective practices, such as relaxed performance (children's relaxed mood and body positions), support for each other, and excluding (forceful tone of voice and expressionless face), the boys build identities, connect cultural tropes, (re)create social orders and perform institutional practices in relation to an old-fashioned and highly stereotypical national trope. In this way, objects, affect, discourse and social life are all tied together and linked to socio-material practice referencing Australian lifestyle.

### **Objects, children and everyday nationalism**

I presented the above examples to gain context dependent and nuanced insights about the ways in which everyday nationalism operates in children's institutional lives and in which objects have a distinguished role. In both of the scenarios, objects either gained a new life by becoming part of children's craft production and play infused with the teacher's national imaginary, and as objects delimiting a space and aiding in the reproduction of a fair and barbecue similar to those familiar

events that happen in the larger social space of the nation. Indexical connections between objects and the national imaginary, heritage and lifestyle weaved the banality of the nation into children's socio-material and embodied practices. In weaving the nation into mundane practices, three processes played crucial roles: first, processes of *production*; second, the *occupation* of space; and third, the *performance*.

Through *production* in each scenario, objects started a new chapter in their biography. As they contributed to the creation of the fairy garden's equipment and the BBQ space, they gained national significance as 'social objects'. Preschool objects, such as pipe cleaners, toy kangaroos, chairs, water bottles etc. became part of "nationalist imagination through a reflexive process that singles out cultural objects and practices and reclassifies them symbolically as remarkable ones" (Kowalski, 2017, p. 144). Their socialities were shaped in connection to nationalist imaginaries, heritage and lifestyle through the *production* of garden equipment and BBQ space.

The second commonality between these scenarios is that both of these creations *occupied* an area that has previously been used for other preschool activities. The fairy garden and BBQ re-signified these spaces in connection to the larger social space of the nation. This process of *occupation* overlaid or made more complex the available discourses and positionalities within that space by adding to those ones referencing wider national tropes and norms, such as Australian heritage or mateship, masculinity, solidarity, and belonging and exclusion.

The third process is *performance*, which points to the actual practices that children were engaged in and that reproduce the nation as everyday practices. Children *performed* these spaces and events as they were playing with the heritage carousel and dunny, and acting the lifestyle of the BBQ. Through their mundane acts – playing with the fairies or enacting a social gathering, they were *performing* the nation, either as indexing its mythical past or embodying in socio-material practices its present. In these socio-material practices, the nation was not flagged vigorously, rather it was enfolded in the scene of the fair or the performances of the boys perpetuating the nation indirectly. The fairy garden and barbecue also indexed a national "identity while talking about other things" (Kowalski, 2017, p. 145) be that of children's imaginative play with fairies or children engaging in free play in the space of the garden.

It is important to state that these scenarios and many others unfold and then disappear from preschool practices and at the same time always new practices emerge. These scenarios might be similar to other places but everyday nationalism always takes different forms, continuously reinventing itself adjusting to changing circumstances of people, objects and discourses being

present. If the fairy garden was built with another teacher, the equipment might have been quite different, perhaps objects would have lacked any connection to the national imaginary. Also, not all children liked the particular aesthetic of the fairy garden and definitely not all played with it. The same way, children engaged differently with the BBQ performance. Some wanted to join, while others did not like it or noticed it, or did not have any desire to join.

During the project, the teachers came to me quite often when children referenced a country or when children explicitly stated that they are Australians or when they excluded someone claiming they are not from here. They also alerted me when children drew maps with countries or referenced Australia as their home. These events were quite easily identifiable for teachers since these were ideological in nature. More mundane events, such as the fairy garden and BBQ, however, went under the radar. Even when a teacher cheered for the nation as part of an Easter song, the teacher did not take notice that it might be national (Millei, 2018). This is perhaps not so surprising, since everyday nationalism operates in similar ways in larger society. It ebbs and emerges in different shapes and adjusts to circumstances. It happens beneath the surface. Adults the same way as children also have different relations to it, some identify, while others reject or criticize it, yet others take no notice as it flickers silently reproducing the nation, our identity and belonging to it.

### **Concluding thoughts**

Nationhood thus might happen every day in the institutional lives of children, even if many of its performance remain invisible or uninteresting. Objects entangled in children's craft production or the BBQ scene express not political claims or nationalist rhetoric, but as they become part of "everyday encounters, commonsense knowledge, cultural idioms, interactional cues, discursive frames or organisational routines reproducing the nation" (Brubaker et al, 2006, p. 6-7). Paying attention to them helps us understand where and when everyday nationalism is present in children's preschool lives, when it matters, and how it works (Brubaker et al, 2006).

I aimed to show with these examples, in a similar manner to Kowalski (2017, p. 145), that "the object-centric approach to banal nationalism opens up an entirely new agenda" for exploring children's nation-ed everyday life and their identity formation as part of institutions framing their activities. Banal nationalism presupposes practical attachments and entanglements in a world of things. However, objects' entanglement in practices are rarely considered in Billig's (1995) theory unless they can be reduced to discourses, messages, and symbols. However, as I have demonstrated and Kowalski (2017, pp. 129-130) so concisely summarize, "[m]aterial entanglements are

particularly important to keep in mind when accounting for the strength of the bonds that banal nationalism creates— not in spite of its everydayness and ordinariness, but because of it”. Objects matter profoundly, and they are interesting and worthy of much more consideration and study (Horton and Karftl, 2006). Objects are rarely impotent. While they appear just as toys, ornaments or equipment, and form a part of the regular preschool environment, with their abilities they can easily gain a new turn in their biographies and afford national types of performances. They can become potent in any moment for carrying the nation, to matter in a different way to children and consequently to matter to them in ways that play a part in their identity formation as national subjects.

What I showed in this paper is that the attention to objects together with discourses and practices provide a more complete cultural sociology of national identity formation and transformation in children’s preschool lives. It also offers a more accurate interpretation of specific political configurations, than interpretations attentive only to discourse or to explicit ways of teaching the nation in preschools, already marked as ‘political’ (Millei and Imre, 2015). While ethnographic accounts shed interesting light on how meanings are created and re-created at the intersection between nationalism and everyday life, to answer the question of how the nation is performed in children’s everyday lives in institutions, this approach has to be furthered into the realm of materials.

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