

Nationalism, popular culture, and the media

Abstract

The media and popular culture play an integral role in how the idea of the nation has been developed, contested, and contextualized over space and time. After acknowledging the media's part in creating a sense of national community, this chapter reflects on the everyday geographies in which the nation is (re)produced via a range of media. While geographers have focused on the discursive construction of the nation in popular culture and the media, here I explore the chapter explore how nationalism is experienced, embodied, and performed through everyday mediated encounters. I then consider the paradoxical relationship between globalization and nationalism and the impact of a society that is more and more digital. More specifically, I explore how the Internet is increasingly involved in the everyday reproduction of nations at a range of scales. By drawing attention to the role of social media, I highlight the mobility of the "national image," the weaponization of affect, and the transnational ties that have been forged and are reworking understandings of national identity and nationalism in the twenty-first century. To conclude, I offer future theoretical and methodological approaches in which geographers can contribute to understanding the mediated encounters of the nation and nationalism.

Keywords: Nationalism, the Media, Popular Culture, Popular Geopolitics, Globalization, the Internet, Social Media

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Introduction

The media and popular culture play an integral role in how the idea of the nation has been developed, contested, and contextualized over space and time. For media geographers there

has long been an interest in how the media shapes both spatial imaginaries and identities (Burgess and Gold 1985; Adams 2009), and yet despite research on nationalism featuring in the subfield of political geography, the relationship between nationalism and the media has not warranted so much scholarly intrigue. While initial work on nationalism, defined here as “the territorial expression of identity: a sense of belonging to a group or community associated with a particular territory” (Mountz 2009, 287), has sought to pinpoint the emergence of the “nation”, more recent theorizations have set out to “explore the geographies of nationhood manifest in everyday life” (Edensor and Sumartojo 2018, 553) and expressed through the media. On the other hand, communicative technologies and the media are transcending borders and expanding territorially bounded identities. Yet nationalism remains a potent force, evident in its resurgence and the rise of populism in a variety of geographic contexts (Ince 2019). Rather than dissipating, national identity and nationalism remain important and an enduring social identity for many people in the twenty-first century.

Competing theories on nationalism have emerged, including primordialism, perennialism, and modernity, attempting to offer explanations as to how, why, and when a nation is formed (see Ozkirimli 2017). Within modernist accounts, the media and communication—alongside and entangled with the emergence of the centralized bureaucratic state (Tilly 1992), standardized education, and intensifying industrial relations (Gellner 1983)—are noted as modern institutions and processes that have facilitated the continuing (re)production of the “nation” (Smith 1998). One of the most prominent scholars to consider the role of the media, Benedict Anderson (2016 [1983]), famously notes the role of “print capitalism” and the subsequent emergence of a standardized common language that created a sense of a political community, congruent with a territorial unit. In this sense, it was the arrival of the new technology of the printing press that enabled the circulation of national culture and language

and nurtured a national consciousness. Anderson's work has been hugely influential within media studies, as it highlights the creation and distribution of a national imaginary via the popular press, which meant millions of people within a nation were able to read the same message at the same time. As such, Anderson (2006 [1983]) argues that nations are "imagined communities." This conceptualization of the nation and its manifestation in the cultural practices of everyday life have proven foundational to much work tracing the relationship between nationalism and the media.

Advancing and complementing the cultural underpinnings of nationalism, Michael Billig's (1995) *Banal Nationalism* acknowledges the central importance of the "everyday" and the discursive and performative ways in which the nation is understood within prosaic contexts. Commenting on the media's role, Billig notes how the nation is "flagged" through the production, circulation, and consumption of symbols, representations, and routinized language—or deixis—located in print media, such as "we," "us," and "them," which provide a spatial reference point and promote the "self-other" dichotomy that establishes national identification. Despite a growing interest within geography in attending to the everyday manner in which nationalism is contested and negotiated in a variety of geographic contexts and across scales (Benwell and Dodds 2011; Jones and Merriman 2009; Koch and Passi 2016), there remains a limited systematic exploration of the relationship between media geographies and nationalism (but see Skey forthcoming for a media studies perspective). This chapter aims to remedy this deficit and begins by reflecting on the everyday geographies in which the nation is (re)produced via the media and popular culture.

(Re)presenting the nation in the media and popular culture

The role of the media and popular culture in the study of nationalism took on new impetus in the 1990s with the emergence of the “cultural turn” in the social sciences. Central to this shift was an interest in the social construction of the nation—the everyday iterative processes and practices by which the commonsensical notion of a world divided into nations is propagated (Billig 1995; Edensor 2002)—and reproducing the “territorial trap” and the purported fixity and assumptions of nations as containers of societal relations (Agnew 1994).

As a result, questions of “when” and “what” is the nation have been superseded by nuanced critical reflections that seek to acknowledge *how* the “nation” comes to be (see Antonsich 2015). While nationalism studies had identified the processes of modernity, the role of media, cultural institutions, and modes of communication in creating and shaping a collective sense of national belonging, these studies often “privileged structure or form over content” (Skey forthcoming). An emerging interest in the content of the media and popular culture identified how language, representation, and performance (re)produce and communicate a sense of a distinct, bounded national territory. This new emphasis coincided with a burgeoning interest in taking popular culture and the media seriously within the broader discipline of geography.

While Tim Edensor’s (2002) seminal work draws specific attention to the relationship between national identity and popular culture, a more sustained interest in the cultural practices and visual representations in which nationalism occurs has emerged more prominently through the interdisciplinary field of popular geopolitics. Here, scholars have noted the historical and contemporary influence of the media and popular culture as productive of popular understandings of nationalism, in which a world order of nation-states

and the interactions between them are constituted with “everyday” representations, settings, and practices (Dittmer and Bos 2019; Saunders and Strukov 2018; Sharp 2000).

It has been argued that the role of visual culture is central to this: existing in a variety of forms, operating in various geographic contexts, and evoking affective relations that inform political orientations and identities. Saunders (2016, 13) argues the importance of the “national image,” a “fluid, socially constructed view of the nation,”[...] “which exists on both the domestic and foreign levels.” Indeed, the field of popular geopolitics has stimulated a healthy analytic focus on a wide range of popular culture and media texts, representations, and performances, including, but not limited to, print media (Falah et al. 2006), comic books (Dittmer 2007), videogames (Bos 2018a), photography (Foxall 2013), heritage (Waterton and Dittmer 2016), and film (Carter and Dodds 2011).

The analysis of filmic representations of the nation has featured heavily in contributing to a sense of national identity and diverse social constructions of the nation. Such work has drawn attention to the visualization of place, people, and quotidian landscapes that reaffirms concepts of “self” and “other” (Edensor 2002); mobilizes gendered narratives of nationalism (An et al. 2016); and produces generic conventions evoking nationalistic tendencies (Carter and Dodds 2011). However, media geographers have critiqued the work of popular geopolitics through its tendency to treat “texts as coherent, self-contained systems” and therefore “lack[ing] in attention to the theoretical complexities therein” (Sharp and Lukinbeal 2016, 25). Recent work, on the other hand, has attempted to go beyond representational accounts by attending to the affective qualities and multimodal nature of film through which “[national] identity can be received and negotiated” (Kirby 2019, 3). Attention has focused

on the role of sounds and music, emphasizing the multisensorial means by which national identities and geopolitical sensibilities are evoked and communicated.

Whereas the predominant focus has enlisted textual deconstruction and the critical interrogations of culturally mediated representations of the nation, less scholarly emphasis has been placed on “going beyond the screen/text.” This tendency to concentrate efforts on a “finished” mediated text, or object, overlooks the wider array of political-economic structures such as funding, distribution, and marketing practices in which nationalism is embedded and which draw upon “territorial appeals” (Coulter 2013; and see Bos 2020; Ridanpää 2017).

Building on earlier work emphasizing modern structures and institutes, such as the media, as integral to the (re)production of nations (Gellner 1993; Anderson 1991), there has been growing interest in and recognition of the power of cultural media institutions (Müller 2012; Kuus 2020) such as television networks, videogame developers, and film producers (Webber 2020), or more recently geospatial and mobile technologies (Lukinbeal et al. 2019), via which cultures of nationalism emerge and are reconfigured.

Previous works have considered such institutions as homogenous entities and simply as conduits for the dissemination of national and geopolitical narratives, but there has been growing interest in exploring the internal orderings by which organizations are constituted and “socio-material networks”; in other words, the arrangements of human and material elements that work together toward a shared mission (Müller 2012). An illustrative example is the consolidation and intensification of cooperation between the entertainment industries and the military, termed the military-entertainment complex (Lenoir and Caldwell 2018).

Nationalistic media practices have a long history and are powerful weapons used explicitly and implicitly during war for propaganda purposes. The “war on terror,” for instance, has seen the US Department of Defense providing military vehicles, equipment, and personnel to film producers in exchange for the ability to edit scripts and narratives (see Mirrlees 2017 for examples). This demonstrates states’ concerted propaganda efforts to promote national foreign policy directives that glorify nationalistic perceptions and cultures of militarism to wider publics. Such studies are vital in revealing the broader entanglements between the state and entertainment industries, in which, at times, competing visions of national narratives and images are sculpted, (re)written, but also silenced.

Next, I turn to what the media and mediated representations of the nation *do* and *where* by acknowledging the everyday interactions, practices, and experiences of mediated encounters.

Everyday nationalism and the media

Despite initial theoretical contributions exposing the “everyday” as a legitimate site for an understanding of how nationalism operates, such studies have been critiqued for prioritizing analysis of text and discourses over how people respond to them. This noticeable absence has troubled nationalism scholars, as there is a tendency to overlook *how* nationalism circulates and how the public receive these national narratives (Skey 2009; Benwell and Dodds 2011). Attending to matters of reception disrupts the notion that the nation is purely the result of macro-structural forces: it is “the practical accomplishment of ordinary people engaging in routine activities” (Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008, 537).

The processes of nationalism require detailed empirical investigation into how “ordinary” individuals are empowered as active producers and negotiators of national meanings (Antonsich 2016). In critiquing *Banal Nationalism* (Billig 1995), Skey (2009, 336) suggests the focus on the media overlooks “the complexity of the national audience,” the socio-political contexts in which nationalism operates, and ultimately how it is received and negotiated by diverse internal and external national populations. A corrective to this has been encouragement of empirical studies, drawing upon audience and reception studies, to explore processes of meaning-making as individuals and groups engage with popular (geo)political texts, objects, and representations (Dodds 2006; Bos 2018b), and offering insights into the process of national identification vis-à-vis the media (Madianou 2005).

In the first instance, such an approach recognizes the heterogeneity of a “national audience” and how audience encounters are inflected through various subject markers, including class, ethnicity, gender, and age, in which varying interpretations and understandings of the nation materialize, including among populations not classed as citizens of national territories (Koch 2016). A focus on the diversity of audiences acknowledges the agency of individuals and is essential to overcome theorizations extolling the power of the media without considering its actual efficacy, or the myriad ways by which national narratives become meaningful within the everyday socio-spatial contexts of people’s lives. Moreover, as Dittmer and Larsen (2007) suggest, the lines between production and audience are blurred as processes of audience “feedback”—in this case, letters to editors of comic books—demonstrate a more reciprocal relationship in which popular nationalist imagery narratives get made.

This has led to an emphasis on the spaces and places in which mediated encounters with “the nation” operate and occur. These spatial contexts include national mass events (Rech 2015), but also spontaneously emergent, ceremonial, and spectacular landscapes (Johnson 1995; Edensor and Sumartojo 2018). However, individuals also engage with popular culture and mediated texts and imagery in the mundane contexts of the home, and the scales and spatial contexts in which “nationalism is reproduced” exist at a localized level too (Jones 2008; and see Morley 2000). The burgeoning interest in domestic geopolitics aims to expose the socio-spatial context of the home in which a wide range of “agents, practices, objects, performativities and discourses [...] contribute to how geopolitics is rendered familiar, sanitised, embodied and enacted” (Woodyer and Carter 2020, 2). Focusing on the situated and domestic context of playing military-themed videogames, Bos (2018b) considers the socio-material contexts and geopolitical encounters of play in which national identity is performed, and their sociality. Playing war online presents opportunities for individuals to express national allegiances verbally, as well as through the customization of avatars and the display of national flags. The home becomes an important site that shapes and informs mediated encounters, collapsing the public/private binary and revealing the multiscalar reproduction of the nation.

As a means of advancing interests in the everyday form in which the nation takes place, more recent work has begun to cover new terrain drawing attention to the affective qualities of nationalism (Militz and Schurr 2016; Antonsich et al. 2020). To this end, such work has presented opportunities to go beyond a focus on discursive and symbolic representations of the nation, to understand the affective intensity and forces of things, objects, and the media. This draws particular attention to the *relational* and “the *processes* of emergence and intermittence, foregrounding and backgrounding, individualizing and collectivizing, presence

and absence, through which national feelings, emotions and affects take hold (or not) in *and between* bodies of different kinds” (Merriman and Jones 2017, 600, emphasis in original).

The media arguably has become a key conduit in promoting affective resonances by which political sensibilities become mobilized and diffuse in and through wide segments of a “national audience” (Carter and McCormack 2006; Shaw and Wharf 2009). Closs Stephens (2016) outlines how the London 2012 Olympics became generative of “affective atmospheres” in which “national feelings” diffused and orientated individuals toward a national consciousness. National media institutes, such as the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), operated as “semiconductors,” espousing the liveliness of the sporting event, and in doing so evoking a national togetherness through coalescing and circulating relations between national symbols, objects, narratives, emotions, and bodies.

Such studies pose nuanced considerations, extending concerns with how mediated encounters of the nation unfold and are lived within everyday geographies. It is crucial to consider that, while such an emphasis seeks to challenge a skewed focus on critically attending to the cultural representations of the nation, it does not supplant the representational. Instead, “more than representational” accounts are essential for attending to the intermingling of practices, affects, and things; the spatial and temporal contexts of these unfolding relations; their varying intensities; and how they work to form collective political identities and subjectivities (Müller 2015). Such thinking is allied to relational and posthuman ontologies that acknowledge the wider human and nonhuman assemblages in which meanings are communicated and constituted (Dittmer 2014; Weir 2018).

This calls forth a new paradigm for the study of the geographies of media and communication, by recognizing “the metaphysics of encounter” (Adams 2017), acknowledging the emergent relations between micro–macro, human–nonhuman and local–global in which mediated communication operates. As Adams (2017, 371) elaborates: “In the new metaphysics of encounter people engage with a wide range of different media and simultaneously encounter other people and things, near or far, still or mobile, perpetually redefining ‘here’ and ‘there.’”

Such a turn raises pertinent questions around power: the capacities for different bodies to affect and be affected and how; the role of human agency and capacity within these relations; and the methodological challenges in empirically accounting for affective relations going beyond talk and text (Antonsich and Skey 2017). A focus on spatially mediated encounters presents an important avenue for considering how the “everydayness” of the nation comes into being.

Nationalism, globalization, and the Internet

Transnational mobility, mass transportation, supranational systems of governance, and information and communication technologies (ICT) have heralded global interconnectivity in which the power and authority of nations and nationalism have been argued to be waning. However, the relationship between globalization and nationalism has also been claimed to be complementary rather than contradictory. The question, therefore, is not about the demise of the nation-state, but “how it is being reworked to remain salient among new socio-spatial formations; and how national identities are renegotiated and reconfigured in the age of globalisation (Biswas 2002)” (Antonsich 2015, 304). There has been growing interest in the

role of the Internet in questioning longstanding assumptions concerning a coherent and stable “nation” and national sense of identity (Eriksen 2007; Lu and Yu 2018). Indeed, the Internet has allowed diasporic groups to engage in practices of long-distance nationalism, expanding social and cultural connections and sharing a sense of belonging across various geographic territories. Such studies show how the Internet helps maintain relations and affiliations that are bolstering, rather than weakening, national identities.

Early work demonstrated how the structures and features of the Internet, including language, domain names, hyperlinks, and algorithms, reproduce and naturalize the division of the world into different nations (Eriksen 2007; Szulc 2017). Indeed, access to and regulation and governance of the Internet are anchored in national territories. Internet-enabled streaming services such as Netflix still operate by and are aligned to national media policies, the viewing behavior of national audiences, and matters of translation determining how they are shaped and perceived in different countries (Lobato 2019). In this sense, the Internet is not abstract nor an aspatial domain, but interacts with territorialized national markets, audiences, and regulations.

The emergence and popularity of (western) social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube contribute to newer politicized types of communication—nationalism 2.0—encouraging newer forms and distribution of user-generated content; the convergence and blurring of categories of production and consumption; and the governance and regulation by which nationalism is continually reworked (Fuchs 2019). Social media provides several affordances of interest for scholars concerned with media and nationalism. First is the ability to share user-generated content in which the nation can be symbolized in

textual and visual forms and appear on numerous platforms. Second is the ability to facilitate transnational connections and networks with and between individuals across space and time, extending the notion of an “imagined community.” The final affordance is enabling discussion and debate in which the nation is continually (re)made in both banal and remarkable ways (see Adams 2015, 396–7). In the following sections I will outline how the Internet and social media are challenging and reconfiguring theorizations and practices of nationalism.ⁱ

The “national image” going viral

In an increasingly globalized and digitally mediated world, the national image has become more and more mobile, malleable, and diffuse. This poses theoretical and methodological challenges. Within media and cultural geography, toolkits for the critical interpretation of visual communication and meaning are arguably ill-equipped to attend to the mass, mutable, and multimedia nature of (national) digital imagery (Rose 2016a). The lower cultural barriers afforded by social media offer “bottom-up,” creative, and participatory opportunities for citizens in the visual and textual (re)articulation of nationalistic sensibilities (Pinkerton and Benwell 2014). Such digitally produced, displayed, and performed images of nations can take myriad forms and include production and sharing of images of national landscapes, architecture, and events; use of customizable overlays for Facebook profile pictures, including national celebrations and symbols such as flags; and creation of new forms of digital imagery and expression, as in memes conveying nationalism (Ismangil 2019; Hodge and Hallgrimsdottir 2019). This opens an important area of research in acknowledging the visual cultural practices and forms in which the nation is communicated.

Memes, for example, have become a staple aspect of Internet media culture and “represent a truly banal, hidden form of nationalism” (Ismangil 2019, 243). Often taking visual form, memes usually involve humorous content transmitted via online interpersonal connections and can subsequently become a shared social phenomenon laden with particular nationalistic meaning and expression. Originally created as a character in an Internet comic strip by Matt Furie in 2005, Pepe the Frog was strategically appropriated by the Alt-Right movement and heavily featured on sub-boards of the 4chan forum website. The cartoon’s relatively simplistic esthetics meant it was easily edited, shared, and circulated. Offering a means of recruitment to the Alt-Right, Pepe the Frog served to propagate ethnic/white nationalism through the sharing of varying versions of the image via social media. Individuals who circulate Pepe the Frog do not necessarily share the Alt-Right’s political-ideological values and meanings, but the character’s affective properties have been weaponized in order to stoke agitation and tension within online and offline communities (Ash 2019).ⁱⁱ Digital means of production and distribution and their speed have allowed the national image to go “viral,” enabling competing visions of the nation and nationalism that have been utilized for a variety of political purposes.

Weaponizing affective nationalism

Central to understanding the relationship between social media and nationalism is acknowledging the manner in which it is being used, by whom, and to what effect. The use of social media enables a variety of bottom-up processes by which the nation is discursively constructed and performed. Indeed, social media and its affordances have been exploited via a range of strategic techniques, including sock puppets, trolls, and bots, which have implications for the trustworthiness of the media, the increasing spread of misinformation,

and further radicalization emerging from Internet subcultures, all of which have profound implications for the mediated communication of nationalism. This has led to a growing interest in the power of social media, extending beyond its content to consider what social media *does* to feelings, experiences, and performances of nationalism within and beyond digital cultures and spaces.

The affective modulation of social media has become part of a broader social-technical assemblage generating varying intensities and tonalities of nationalism, ranging from “lukewarm” (Mōri 2019) sentiments to the production of positively charged “happy affective atmospheres” (Closs Stephens 2015), which do much ideological work in foreclosing critical scrutiny and debates around nationalism. More attention is being paid to the weaponization of social media (Ganesh 2020; Singer and Brooking 2018), and how both state and nonstate actors are engaging with social media to manipulate and draw upon resurgent nationalist narratives for a range of political purposes.

Such practices have been instigated by nonstate actors outside of the national context. These include individuals in Macedonia producing clickbait for personal financial gain, but also more organized agencies such as “troll farms” or the Internet Research Agency in Russia, and their interference in and impact on the 2016 US presidential election (Bos and Dittmer 2019). The motives for such actions range from spreading ideologies to financial incentives, acquiring status, and achieving a measure of control over powerful institutions. Such efforts have been seen as necessarily aligned with supporting a particular political candidate, but the spread of disinformation has also been used to foster political divides in the US.

Such strategic manipulation has rested on affective appeals made possible by the affordances of social media, and the practices of individuals and groups who are using it to (re)imagine the nation. The Alt-Right, which has built a community through emotional and affective appeals, has become central to the promotion of ethnic and nativist narratives and ideologies. Alt-Right digital culture has involved the collective production and circulation of “white thymos,”ⁱⁱⁱ which describes “a complex of pride, rage, resentment, and anger that is created through informational and affective circuits that create the perception of a *loss* of white entitlement” (Ganesh 2020, 3, emphasis in original). Individual self-presentation via social media outlets has mobilized a collective imagined community premised on fear, and the purported subsequent need to protect white nativist identity politics. The Alt-Right has exploited the affordances of social media sites through the community production of visual memes and images propagating white victimization, and the practices of circulation and sharing that enable the flows of “white thymos” within a broader transnational network, connecting to the emotional dispositions and interpretative frameworks of a range of audiences. The affective and emotive appeal of social media is integral to the development of such online communities, but also to communicating and amplifying the inclusion and exclusion that are essential to the ideology of nationalism.

Transnationally mediated nationalism

The influence of migration, and more recent modes of maintaining communication across space and time via social media, has facilitated transnational connections that are redefining the sense of belonging to national territories. People see themselves as part of a group that shares common ideas, opinions, views, and ideologies, with its reach extending beyond their national borders. More recently, studies have taken into the consideration the role of the

Internet and social media in communicating, organizing, and mobilizing, allowing the Alt-Right to become an international phenomenon, and positing an outlook that is transnational in focus (Hermansson et al. 2020). Indeed, the processes of transnationalism have been identified as being critical to the success of right-wing populism in Europe and beyond (Langenbacher and Schellenberg 2011). Paradoxically, such far right movements and groups oppose globalization and supranational systems of governance in favor of nativist concerns, and yet have increasingly engaged with politics at the transnational level—“globalized anti-globalists” (Grumke 2013).

Yet, the efficacy of such efforts to mobilize transnational connections has been contested. As Froio and Ganesh (2019, 531) argue, transnational exchanges between far right groups remain “moderate at best,” with Twitter activity still predominantly aligned to, and within, national borders. The transnational scope and mobility of the far right movement are also still wedded to political parties and particular individuals—such as the president of the French far right populist party the National Rally, Marine Le Pen—in the mobilization of global far right discourse. How social media is being used to organize social groups and movements around nationalist ideologies, and the extent to which these appeals have transnational reception and mobilization, are important questions for media geography to take forward.

Conclusion

This chapter illuminates the continuing relevance of nationalism and the role of the media and popular culture in understanding the “nation.” Research within media and political geography has explored the cultural politics of representing the nation and the manner and form in which a national image operates, and for what purpose. The interdisciplinary field of

popular geopolitics has been noted to be key to the exploration of nationalism, although as others have argued, such work would benefit from a closer alignment and dialogue with media geography (Sharp and Lukinbeal 2015). Moreover, this chapter has argued that closer empirical attention needs to be paid to exploring how media encounters unfold within everyday geographies, and how the nation is understood, experienced, and internalized by an “ordinary”—yet heterogenous and differentiated—public. Attending to media encounters enables opportunities to acknowledge the complex “more than human” networks and the variegated media ecology that are “perpetually redefining ‘here’ and ‘there’” (Adams 2017, 371). The recent turn to acknowledging the affective, relational, and material networks of media communication offers important contributions to recognizing, and critically attending to, questions of power, agency, and national identity.

The role of globalization, and in particular new forms of mediated exchanges and the sociality presented by ICT, have been argued to present real challenges to national identification. Yet, as this chapter has shown, the transnational affordances of the Internet and social media are not diminishing the role of nationalism, but actively complementing it. Indeed, social media has become a key arena in which nationalism is played out via the sharing and production of nationalistic content and debate, laden with affective and emotive power, and reinforcing shared community nationalistic interests and values extending beyond national borders.

In exploring this area further, important methodological and ethical questions remain. They include the speed and volume of data generation, and how both people and researchers react and respond to national events and discussions as they unfold and are discussed via social

media. On Twitter around 500 million tweets are sent each day. The ability to engage effectively with the potential size of such datasets may require computational forms of recording and analysis (Sloan and Quan-Haase 2017). Issues of data accuracy, reliability, and quality are important in social media research in the face of demographic characteristics and the presentation of “self” online. As Crosset et al. (2019) note when attempting to research and trace far right groups, these are often reliant upon amorphous networks and practices of anonymity. Current ethical guidelines when applied to social media data are still in their infancy and raise ethical issues, since participant anonymity cannot be secured when Twitter, for example, “will not allow tweets to be presented without usernames” (Sloan and Quan-Haase 2017, 8). Nevertheless, social media research represents a fertile area of concern in which both political and media geographers are well placed to explore the pervasive and resurgent nature of mediated nationalism.

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ⁱ I limit examples to the far right, “referring [here] to extreme and radical right populist organizations as sharing three ideological cores: nativism, authoritarianism and populism” and noting how “within the far right organizational variants exist ranging from more to less established organizations” (Caterina and Ganesh 2019: 514).

ⁱⁱ Pepe the Frog has been reappropriated by activist groups as a symbol of resistance against state control, for instance in pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong (see Eliss 2019).

ⁱⁱⁱ Thymos is defined “as the part of the soul that seeks recognition and redress of the injustices done to it” and “is the centre of rage, anger, indignation, and pride” (Ganesh 2020, 4).