

# NEGOTIATING THE NATION

Implications of Ethnic and Religious  
Diversity for National Identity



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**NATION (Negotiating the Nation: Implications of Ethnic and Religious Diversity for National Identity)** is a research project funded by the Research Council of Norway under the FRIPRO program for basic research. The project has collected and analyzed new data on top-down, mediated, and bottom-up iterations of the nation, and notably on the interactions of these in ongoing reproductions of nations today. Its main empirical focus has been on Norway, drawing on comparative perspectives from France, the UK, and beyond. The research has been conducted by researchers from PRIO, the University of Oslo (Department of Sociology and Human Geography), the University of Sussex (Department of Geography/Sussex Centre for Migration Research), and Université de Poitiers (Migrinter).

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Insights from the research project Negotiating the Nation:  
Implications of Ethnic and Religious Diversity for National Identity (NATION),  
led by the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO).

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# What's in a Nation?

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## Nations and national identities

■ The nation exists in the everyday lives, and the minds, hearts and imaginations of people, who live within a national space. As such, the nation is an empirical phenomenon which merits further analytical attention. Nationalism studies used to be preoccupied with the historical origins of nations, including a heated debate on primordialism, the deep cultural, historical roots of nations, on the roles of tradition, including its invention and re-invention, and the differing paths of nations struggling for independence and those with imperial histories. In the European context, focus turned to the ideal-type notions of ethnic and civic nationalism. Currently, the attention of nationalism studies is increasingly on how nations are being produced, reproduced and negotiated by ordinary people in everyday life, as well as by states, in the contexts of globalization, international migration, and migration-related diversity.

Nations and national identities are of course closely intertwined with the

politics and power of the nation-state. Indeed, states' roles in nation-building, for instance through the education system, are crucial to the production and reproduction of nations. Meanwhile, nations and national identities are not merely a top-down governing tool of states. The production and reproduction of nations is contingent also on the agency of the individual, of families, and of communities, all inhabiting a particular national space. National identities are not, *per se*, more salient than other individual or collective identities. National identity neither overrides nor rules out other identities for the individual, if nationness is understood as processual, contingent and dynamic.

The concept of 'nation' here is approached with attentiveness to the political and the temporal, the economic and social, the cultural and religious, and explored at the intersections of everyday experiences, the mediated public realm, and states' nation-building ventures. National identity is explored from the perspective that the national – whether as birth country, country of citizenship, as linguistic or cultural community,





Brick Lane street sign in English and Bengali. Photo: CC / James Cridland / Flickr





or an ethnic or religious one – in different ways matters to most people. National identity may matter alongside or be subordinate to other identities, and sometimes with high levels of patriotism, other times with ambivalence, contestation, even rejection. Taken together, ideas of what the nation is – *nationhood*; the nation as it is experienced by ordinary people, *nationness*; various iterations of national identity – are what constitutes a *nation*.

## Migration-related diversity

■ The claim that migration-related diversity is somehow troublesome for the nation is founded on a conviction that nations are static and unchangeable, and normatively that this is how nations should be. Yet empirically, and historically, nations are neither static, nor unchangeable. Looking back a couple of decades, a century perhaps, it is clear that nations are dynamic: they are affirmed, shaped and changed through ongoing negotiations. The fault lines of such negotiations might center on the roles of religion, or of economic inequality, in the guise of class-based identities, of race, ethnicity and language, or indeed of gender equality. Whichever is relevant, how *difference is constructed* is central.

The existence of difference should not be underplayed, for a key trait of

nations is their heterogeneity. Which difference is seen as part of heterogeneity within the nation, and which difference is seen as external to the nation, is among the things that change over the *longue durée*. Such change is rarely friction-free, and is often intertwined with the fear that difference may produce within nations, and among individuals. However, difference is not new, nor is the instrumental politicization of differences, perceived or real, in relation to the national.

The NATION project has considered various differences which a nation encompasses. A key question has been whether *the difference that makes a difference* in relation to how a nation in Europe today is experienced necessarily is that of migration-related diversity. What then of class, of regional differences, of religion, of past immigration and emigration and in the Norwegian context, of the Sami indigenous population and long-standing minorities such as the Roma or Jews?

Meanwhile, the fact remains that the population composition of societies such as the Norwegian, French or British have changed as a result of immigration, especially in the last half-century. Immigrants in Norway originate from 221 countries globally. The three largest immigrant groups are from Poland, Lithuania and Sweden. As of 2017, immigrants made up 13.8% of the population of Norway, whereas children born in

Norway to two immigrant (foreign-born) parents made up 3% of the population of Norway. If counting both immigrants and Norwegian-born children, the largest groups have origins in Poland, Lithuania, Somalia, Sweden, Pakistan, Iraq, Germany, Eritrea, the Philippines and Vietnam. Children born in Norway with one Norwegian-born and one foreign-born parent are not counted as part of 'the immigrant population' of Norway, and make up about 5% of the country's population, underscoring the rapidly evolving complexity and superdiversity of the population composition of Norway, especially in terms of ancestry and race.

Yet, the populations inhabiting the national space – within the territorial boundaries of the nation-state – were never homogenous. In the French and British cases, a colonial history stretches further back into history, with migration flows in multiple directions. In the Norwegian case, the 1814 Constitution and independence from Sweden in 1905 form a crucial historical backdrop.

There are internal cleavages which cannot be overlooked. In the Norwegian case, the indigenous Sami population, and the history of brutal assimilationist politics targeting Samis in Norway, is an often-unspoken backdrop to approaching diversity. Religion is a further case in point, where the dominance of the Lutheran Church of Norway –



until recently formally the State Church – has shaped both state and nation. In the 1814 Constitution, Jews, as well as Jesuits, were banned from entry into the national territory – revealing the ways in which questions about religious diversity and nation are historically both intertwined and conflictual.

How the British case can be understood as one of nations and nation-states raises multiple questions. Does a British national identity exist? Or are there only English, Scottish, and Welsh national identities? What then of Northern Ireland? Whether or not a British identity is compatible with the others is both a political and an empirical question. In France, a strong tradition of civic national identity has been fostered, underscored by the principle of *laïcité*. Meanwhile, increasing diversity in the

ethnic origins and religious convictions of populations inhabiting or even born in France are challenging often racialized conceptions of civic Frenchness.

In Norway, France and the UK, migration-related diversity – in everyday life, as well as in the mediated public sphere – is often reduced to questions of race and ancestry, and of religion, and more specifically of Islam. How nation and diversity interact, and are relationally interdependent, receives less attention. Instead, attention is often focused on difference, on boundaries between certain visions of 'us', contingent on particular articulations of 'the Other'.

Pall Mall, lined with Union Jacks, on the first day of the Jubilee weekend. CC / Photo: Garry Knight / Flickr






## Boundaries

Feeling reasonably at home in your neighborhood, on the football pitch, in your local shop, at work or at school reflects a sense of belonging. Feeling at home is something that is experienced – or not – in everyday life. Membership of a ‘nation’ is about one’s own sense of belonging, but also about whom one is willing to think of as being a member of that same national community. Relatedly, it is also about the experience of not being seen as a legitimate and equal member of a national community. This boils down to inclusion and exclusion in the nation, or *the boundaries of the nation*. Where inclusion and exclusion are practiced and experienced, boundaries of the nation are shaped, affirmed and changed. Through these processes of shaping, affirming and changing the boundaries of the nation, our understanding of the nation itself, and its key traits, also changes.

Meanwhile, boundaries in relation to nations are often assumed to be static. This is, arguably, associated with their salience. For the distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’ is contingent on a boundary, which clearly demarcates who is within, and who is not. Boundaries come into being through the social differences that are ascribed to an ‘us’ against ‘the Other’ – producing an ‘us-hood’ within.

A bottom-up approach to the production and reproduction of the boundaries of social groups – such as nations – does not question the salience of boundaries. It does, however, posit that boundaries can empirically appear as solid, but also as permeable, even fluid: that boundaries shift over time, or are crossable, sometimes openly, other times covertly. Thus, the salience of boundaries is less that they demarcate an ‘us’ inside against ‘the Other’ outside, and more about the roles they perform, as crossable, and shifting over time. These roles are constitutive of producing a ‘we-hood’ within, a collective sense of ‘we’ that draws less on an external ‘Other’ and more on a solidarity within, as suggested more than 20 years ago by Thomas Hylland Eriksen drawing on the case of Mauritius.

## Negotiating the nation?

 Negotiations are usually associated with the process of salary negotiations, or peace talks, of conflict resolution through some form of mediation, where there is an acknowledgment that everyone is better off finding common ground together. Arguably, the nation is negotiated at all levels in a society; in everyday life, in the kindergarten, at the doctor’s, in the mediated public sphere, as well as by the state. Belonging and sense of community are experienced and negotiated locally in everyday life, in all arenas where people interact.

However, belonging may also be spatially multiple to people and places within the same nation-state, or across international borders. The formal recognition of such spatially multiple belonging is reflected in the increased acceptance of dual citizenship – dual nationality – in Europe and beyond in recent years. Meanwhile, it remains an empirical question to what extent individuals and collectives experience or see dual citizens as fully nationals in one, both, or neither of their countries of citizenship. These are processes closely associated with perceptions of what the nation is, or should be, as much as experiences of who nationals actually are, and the juxtaposition of perceptions does not always match on-the-ground realities of ‘who’ nationals are.

Current policy developments are an important frame for the negotiations of nations that are taking place, not least in contemporary Europe, whether or not state actors are actively a part of or facilitate negotiations about who ‘we are’ as a nation. Simultaneously, public debate in traditional as well as new social media is a driving force in such negotiations. A premise for negotiations is a shared acknowledgement that everyone is better off finding common ground. Consequently, the relational outcomes – in terms of ‘we-hood’, of ‘who’ is the nation – are of the essence. But also substantive outcomes, in terms of ‘what’ the nation is, matter in negotia-

tions of contemporary European nations. These negotiations are individual and collective, and go on over time, in everyday life, the mediated public sphere, as well as in politics, and are what the NATION project refers to as ‘negotiating the nation’.

The nation may be approached as an empirical phenomenon, as a political project which enables mobilization, and as a dynamic and changeable social group, for which time and space are crucially important. The insights from the NATION research project presented here seek to address these central questions:

**Who is a nation?**  
**Where is a nation?**  
**When is a nation?**  
**Why is a nation?**  
**How is a nation ‘a nation’?**



# Project Design

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## Research questions

■ The NATION project has investigated the role of ethnic and religious diversity in contemporary European nation-building. National identity is not a fixed entity, and through the parallel processes of globalization, immigration and secularization, traditional notions of national identity are under pressure. NATION seeks to understand these issues by exploring how nationhood is negotiated in three European countries: Norway, France and the United Kingdom.

The NATION project has addressed nation-building not only as a top-down strategy of state authorities, but also as a discursive bottom-up process. The latter includes voices from civil society, the media, political contenders and the general public, through both document analysis, focus groups and interviews.

Three questions have guided the research:

- Along which boundaries do conflicts around the meaning of national identity arise?
- What are the implications of increased ethnic diversity on national identity?
- How do religious and ethnic identities interact in current negotiations of nationhood?

## Approaches

■ Too often, the basis for nationhood – for inclusion or exclusion in the nation, and the ways in which boundaries of the nation are interpreted and operationalized in studies – is left implicit or taken for granted. For instance, in a survey on the implications of migration-related diversity for the nation, who is entitled to have an opinion? When researchers ask questions about the national, who do they include as informants? Only those who are citizens? Those who

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were born in the country in question? Those who have parents who were born there? Or, those – in the context of Norway and much of Europe – who are white, or otherwise racially or religiously defined? Any approach, with its ensuing choices and their implications, should be justified in relation to its scientific merits. Whom you choose to ask about the nation will affect the answers you receive.

The approach taken in the NATION project has been one of analytical openness. This has translated into particular methodological choices in relation to studying top-down negotiations of the nation, mediated negotiations of the nation, and bottom-up negotiations of the nation, as described in Table 1. These methodological choices share the premise that who is or is not a national is more an empirical question, which is spatially and temporally contingent, than something which can a priori be established by drawing on selected pre-defined criteria, such as for instance race or ancestry. For what then of the adopted child, or the child of a bi-racial couple?

Thus, the methodological approach taken in the NATION project has been one that is sensitive to the inherent risks of reproducing the very boundaries, which encircle the object of study, that we seek to better understand: the nation. Therefore, throughout the project, care has been taken when drawing on categories and labels such as minority and majority, ethnic and national, citizen and non-citizen, or religious (e.g. Christian or Muslim) and secular. The theoretical proposition has been that these categories and labels serve their analytical and communicative purposes, but must always be approached with the dynamism and contingency, friction as well as overlap, that may be empirically observed. Someone who is approached as ‘minority’ might also be ‘majority’ – e.g. a person whose parents immigrated (‘minority’), but who is a citizen (‘majority’); and someone for whom religious conviction may be important, whether Christian or Muslim, might also be a strong defender of secular principles which uphold the freedom of religion and belief.



# Methods and data

Focus	Types of sources	Data analysed	Researchers
Policy	Law and policy documents, speeches, minutes from Parliamentary question time, interviews with bureaucrats	Database with all relevant policy and law texts; 10 interviews	Katrine Fangen, Mari Vaage, Nina Høy-Petersen, Sandra Feride Demiri, Bjørnar Buxrud
Media	Opinion pieces, letters to the editor, editorials and commentaries in 5 newspapers ( <i>Aftenposten</i> , <i>Bergens Tidende</i> , <i>Klassekampen</i> , <i>Nordlys</i> , <i>Verdens Gang</i> )	Database with 13,070 texts, manually coded, covering 2011–2014	Åshild Kolås, Mari Vaage
Everyday perspectives	Interviews with “ordinary people” in four localities, two in Oslo, Troms, Sogn & Fjordane.	60 semi-structured interviews, field notes	Mette Strømsø
Youth perspectives	Study with upper-secondary school pupils (17–18 year olds), in six schools (Oslo, Bergen, Tromsø, Sogn & Fjordane)	289 student texts, 33 focus group discussions, background information	Marta Bivand Erdal, Mette Strømsø
Religious diversity	Study of motivations for interreligious dialogue, Oslo (actors); Study of the construction of two religious buildings, Oslo (actors and documents); Study of young Christian’s engagement with diversity and Norwegianness (actors); Study of constructing mosques in the UK (actors and documents)	Fieldwork, participant observation and semi-structured interviews in four sub-projects	Emma Barkström, Brita Brekke, Sonja-Beate Egge, Marta Bivand Erdal, Michael Collyer, Andrea McKinlay
Comparative perspectives	Media analysis of opinion pieces in two French and two British newspapers; Analysis of French and British citizenship policy; Analysis of French post-terror media coverage; Analysis of processes of constructing mosques in the UK	Media texts and policy documents from France and the UK	Marta Bivand Erdal, Rojan Tordhol Ezzati, Michael Collyer, Andrea McKinlay, Thomas Lacroix, Cathrine Talleraas

Table 1

## Experiences and perceptions

Ordinary people produce and reproduce boundaries of Norwegian nationhood in their everyday lives, through entangled relationships between perceptions of nationhood and everyday experiences. Individuals are inconsistent when producing and reproducing boundaries of nationhood in their everyday lives, drawing on various symbolic resources at different times and places. Exposing the inconsistency – both within and between individuals – challenges the structures and preconceived notions of a fixed and stable boundary demarcating Norwegian nationhood. When they are produced or reproduced, boundaries are clear; however, by approaching boundary-making as a contingent event, the uncertainty of where, why and if a boundary will be produced and/or reproduced blurs people's perceptions and experiences of these boundaries.

First impressions might be conceptualized as boundaries of the everyday nation, characterized by their situational production. First impressions point to the perspectives of the observed and the onlooker, and to questions of race and belonging. First impressions unmask how perceptions of what the nation ought to be are often out of sync with everyday experiences of what the nation is. First impressions trigger automatic reactions, or more conscious reflections, and may be managed deliberately. Shared experiences of belonging to the plural nation, acknowledging heterogeneity within it, can result – or not. This is not frictionless, but allows for ambivalence and negotiation of difference.



Photo: John O' Nolan / Flickr



## (Re)producing the everyday nation



When choosing *where* their children will grow up, parents draw simultaneously on multiple temporalities of an imagined community – in the past, present, and future. Here, nation and diversity are portrayed as contradictory and intertwined. Parents draw on different conceptualizations of the nation simultaneously; a nation based on imagined homogeneity in the past, a future nation encompassing the imagined past and present diversity, and friction between these conceptualizations in the present. These frictions result in contrasting reflections about the choice of residence, which in most cases are based on evolving understandings of diversity within the nation, not diversity as a threat to the nation.

There was a notable difference in perspectives on diversity between interviewees in the 60+ age-bracket and those aged 20–39 and 40–59 in Oslo. All but one of the research participants in the 60+ age-bracket spoke about migration-related diversity as something they had to live with, i.e. coming to ‘us’, that we must tolerate. Considering that these research participants were often adults early on, when international labour migration to Norway grew, this is not so remarkable. By contrast, all but two of the 19 interviewees in the two younger age-brackets spoke from a perspective where they themselves were part of – living in – the diverse population composition in Oslo, and Norway.

# Asserting and contesting nationness

■ National day speeches play an explicit part in defining national identities. In Norway, these speeches are supposed to focus on unity, not conflict. What happens in the context of diversity? The use of plural pronouns in the speeches makes Norwegian national identity more or less accessible for people with minority backgrounds. By including ethnic minorities in national day rhetoric, the speakers negotiate who belongs in the Norwegian community in a less directly political way than in everyday life. Yet, whilst the genre is celebratory, the national day speeches also echo differences in political attitudes towards diversity and integration among the mayors.

■ Because of his unifying role as a national symbol, the King has a unique position in negotiations of 'Norwegianness', balancing potentially conflicting notions to create consensus through, for example, his New Year's speeches. In the first period of this research, from 1960 to 1985, Norway was constructed as a humanitarian, peace-loving nation. In the second period, from 1986 to 2001, the King explicitly defined Norway as a Christian-cultural nation. In the final period,

from 2002 to 2014, Norway was constructed as a multicultural and diverse nation. The King addressed features that can be unifying and shared across ethnic, religious and cultural differences, such as respect, care and understanding. The Constitution, democracy and human rights are important prerequisites for the King's non-threatening notion of diversity for the national.

■ The paradox of static conceptions of national identity and dynamic experiences of the plural everyday nation can be juxtaposed with the constitutional nation, as articulated in policy. Interviewed civil servants were hesitant about the usefulness of national identity as a category, seen as void of meaning, politically correct, or inherently problematic, with static, excluding, cultural roots. The civil servants are aware of their signaling role in negotiating a plural conception of the nation, through language and policy, yet they are cautious. At a personal level, they often lack analytical and political tools to combine the 'thick' cultural national identity they acknowledge, with a more inclusive, dynamic conception of the plural nation, the production of which they would like to facilitate.

Paris / CC0 Public Domain / King Harald V giving a speech to Sametinget. Photo: Wikimedia Commons Pxlhere







# Religious diversity and secularism

■ New places of worship for minority religions have always provided an important indication of shifting national identities. Mosque construction in the UK reveals a continual negotiation between religious authorities and formal and informal public institutions. This concerns physical structures but also a growing range of outreach activities. Collectively these activities highlight the continual efforts of Islamic institutions to influence the public imagination of the place of mosques, and of Islam more broadly, in the UK.

■ Religious buildings play an important part in the lives of Hindus and Muslims as enablers of social life, religious practice and as cultural centers. Materiality and architecture are important. The buildings and lived spaces of the users are relational spaces, formed by laws and regulations, but also dominating discourses on Islam and Hinduism, and Norwegian public space. Within these meaning systems, minority religious bodies and buildings are constructed as foreign disturbances, making their existence acts of resistance to the dominating discourse of what Norway 'is'. Reli-

gious spaces are created within, and formed by, the tension between these discourses and the everyday lives of religious minorities. This tension also challenges the dominating discourses of Norway as a social space, contributing to the creation of a new social space.

■ Categories, such as nation or religion, are at once taken-for-granted tools that people use to order and make sense of the everyday and the roles of society, and also abstract, conceptual constructs. As such, these categories both describe the empirical realities of human practices and groupness, which are differently justified, and contribute to producing such empirical realities through the power of categorizing. This becomes evident when those described by others as young, perhaps conservative, Christians for an array of reasons are ambivalent about this particular category.

■ Even in societies characterized by religious pluralism and secularity, religious diversity runs the risk of becoming mainly associated with essentializing identity politics. In Europe today, religious minorities,



Photo: Dilwar H. / CC / Wikimedia Commons





and more specifically Muslims, are increasingly described by their religious identity only. Meanwhile, interfaith dialogue and activities may be seen as a force that can counter polarizing identity politics, by bringing to the fore intra-religious commonalities, across faith as well as life-stance communities. The negotiation of national identities is thus contingent on a dynamic interplay, with faith communities and life-stance actors, who all contribute to reproductions of the nation in their different ways.





# Terrorism and the national

Assuming that the terrorist attacks in Oslo and Utøya on 22 July 2011 were a 'critical event' in Norwegian history, one might expect them to bring about new sorts of action through the reworking of traditional categories, codes or meanings. This is especially pertinent given the 'Eurabia-inspired' political convictions driving the perpetrator, especially those pertaining to Norwegianness and diversity. However, a media-based study of the discursive framing of 22 July reveals that the key message conveyed to the public was that 'nothing would change', leaving public security as the key frame through which the Norwegian public sought to understand and resolve this instance of terrorism.

Concerns over radicalization include how to react to those young people returning from fighting with ISIS: 'Syria travelers'. Debates in Norway follow two narratives: 'the Syria traveler' as different, as Muslim youth at odds with mainstream society, or as 'the boy next door'. The first highlights security threats and draws on generalizations about the illiberal nature of Islam and perceived cultural clashes. The second fore-

grounds exclusion due to socio-economic marginalization and/or anti-Muslim prejudice ('Islamophobia'). Consequently, reactions to Syria travelers are polarized: either criminal prosecution and loss of citizenship, or re-habilitation and re-integration efforts in order to fully return to society.

Both consensus and contestations are important for building national unity. There are points in history where the need for consensus crystallizes. The immediate aftermath of terror attacks are such moments. Societal responses to terror attacks in Norway and in France provide insights on manifestations of national unity across ethnic, religious, and political differences through speeches, marches, and gatherings organized by authority figures and by grassroots. Meanwhile, moments of national unity are succeeded by a return to normalcy, where the accommodation of friction and disagreement is necessary, in ways which do not nourish enemy-images, but instead foster a national culture that encompasses disagreements.



## A plural conception of the nation

Employing negotiation as a tool in the study of nations reveals the salience actors place on substantive concerns – ‘what’ is the nation – and on relational concerns – ‘who’ is the nation – and how these operate in interdependent ways. The relative balance of relational and substantive concerns mutually affect each other, contributing to inclusion or exclusion of people in the nation, but also contributing to changes in the substance of what the nation is understood to be. The concept of negotiation holds potential beyond being a metaphor, negotiation holds potential as an analytical tool for better understanding – and managing – the dynamics of nationalism in contemporary diverse nations.

Modern-day European societies are plural; indeed, they have to some extent been plural historically. Europe’s history is the history of all today’s Europeans, although seen differently. Understanding of who ‘we’ are needs to be open, because reality does not reflect singular readings of history, nor of the present day, in terms of a culturally pure ‘us’. Any democratic country requires a shared sense of community, trust in a

legitimate government, and space for political disagreement. However, democratic plural societies cannot question the legitimate belonging of their members, where some are automatically entitled to belong, while others’ belonging remains precarious, questioned and conditional.

Approaching the nation in inclusive and plural ways is one approach to unpicking the notion that migration-related diversity is a threat to the nation. Instead, a new national ‘we’ builds on an inclusive nation, open to plurality, based on the diversity of those who actually inhabit the national space.



Photo: UNICEF

## Ethnicity, race and ancestry



Although identities are relational and dynamic, whether you can *become* Norwegian – or British or French – is often viewed in relation to specific identity-dimensions. *Becoming* a national is possible if national identity depends on citizenship or language skills. If national identity is dependent on country of birth or physical appearance, becoming a national might not be possible, even for people who permanently inhabit the national space. This has an excluding effect, especially on young people who experience that becoming *fully national* is out of reach. This experience is also shared by many who are born in, and the citizens of, a given nation-state, with implications for their sense of inclusion in society.

Reflections on boundary-making often result from first impressions shaped by automated reactions, in particular, to skin color and race. These are revealing of perceptions of what the nation *ought to be* and how it is *experienced*. Race as a boundary of the everyday nation was a recurring experience for our school study participants. Race upheld a boundary and compelled reflections on why it did and whether it ought to.

In normative terms, race was not seen as a legitimate boundary of nationhood for a vast majority of participating youth. Yet, there is need for space and tools to process experiences of nationness and their interactions with perceptions of nationhood.

Labeling the national ‘we’ was investigated through analysis of the use of the term ‘ethnic Norwegian’ in op-eds, commentaries and letters to the editor in a selection of newspapers (2014). The term surfaced twenty years ago and quickly became a linguistic marker of difference. We found that in a few cases ‘ethnic Norwegian’ is used to argue for, or against, the need to include people into the national Norwegian ‘we’, suggesting measures to address ‘exclusion’. In the vast majority of cases, however, the term is used in passing. Only rarely have media contributors reflected critically on their use of the term ‘ethnic Norwegian’.

# Nation in the study of migration and diversity

■ The nation is often either reified, vilified or ignored in the study of migration and migration-related diversity. Reified, in the sense of providing the basic unit of analysis, the nation-state, within which all social processes fit and must be analyzed. Vilified, in the sense of being a priori rejected as a statist and exclusionary, usually racist, tool of domination. Ignored, in the sense of being an unquestioned backdrop, a neutral container, for whichever social process at hand, but worthy of little further analytical interest on its own terms.

Whilst rejecting static, homogenous and ahistorical conceptions of any nation at face value, there is a need for further engagement with plural conceptions of the nation. Plural conceptions of the nation that are also cognizant of the need for categories, not least to produce statistics. Engaging with the ways in which such categories are produced, operationalizing categories differently, for instance with dynamic approaches to ethnicity, race and ancestry, is an important contribution to unveiling the plurality of nations as they are to be seen on the streets of modern-day European cities.

Arguably, the national, with its transcending scales, up and down, as process, as something which following Rogers Brubaker *happens*, should in its plural iterations be of crucial interest to scholars of migration and migration-related diversity. For the nation matters, because it is there. And we ought to understand more about how, when, why and for whom the nation happens (or not), and its intersections with other dynamic identity-markers in everyday life and in society overall, bounded by as well as transcending the boundaries of nation-states.

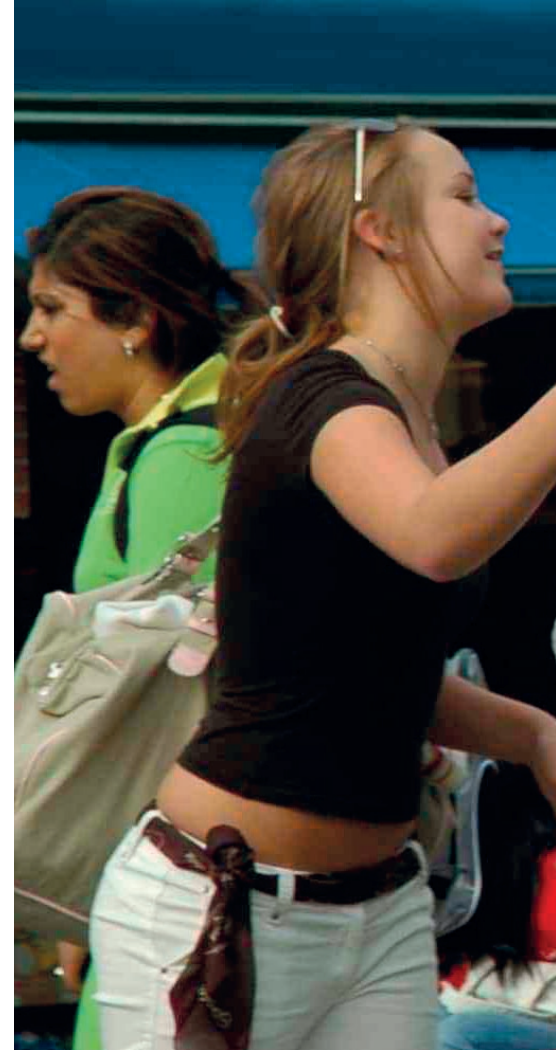


Photo: CC / Wikimedia Commons





# Communication

■ The NATION project has approached research communication as an ongoing task and responsibility throughout the project period. Such communication has involved participating in media debates with op-eds and blog posts, direct meetings and invited talks, open seminars, and workshops and conference sessions facilitating interaction with other academics.

An unexpected outcome of the NATION project has been the application of a methodological tool developed for research purposes, as a tool for dialogue and discussion on identity, nation and diversity in Norwegian schools.

Heated media debates about Norwegianness have been a more or less constant backdrop for the research as well as communication thereof, leading to a need for continuous reflection on both the research process itself, and the ways in which to communicate project findings in responsible and trustworthy ways.

The broader rise in neo-nationalist populist political movements across Europe during the research project's lifespan has provided food for thought, and a changing societal and political context into which to communicate our research on 'the nation'.



Adolph Tidemand & Hans Gude - Brudeferden i Hardanger. Public domain

# ‘Democratic preparedness against racism and anti-Semitism’



Through the NATION project’s innovative approach to the fundamental question of what constitutes a nation, we have developed methodological tools which educators subsequently have integrated into citizenship education programs in schools. Our basic research on nationhood, in the face of increasing migration-related diversity, has critically scrutinized taken-for-granted approaches, often based on ancestry and race. Instead we interacted with pupils in schools, gaining insights about their perceptions of nationhood, its boundaries, and the permeability of those boundaries.

Our research contributes to shaping perceptions of national identity among the next generation of Norwegians, working to foster reflection about nationhood and diversity. Methodological innovation has, in turn, informed pedagogical interventions, facilitating the development of skills necessary for negotiating identities and life in a diverse society. Such skills include dialogue, with space for difference and friction, enabled by awareness that identities are dynamic, as are the boundaries of nationhood over time.

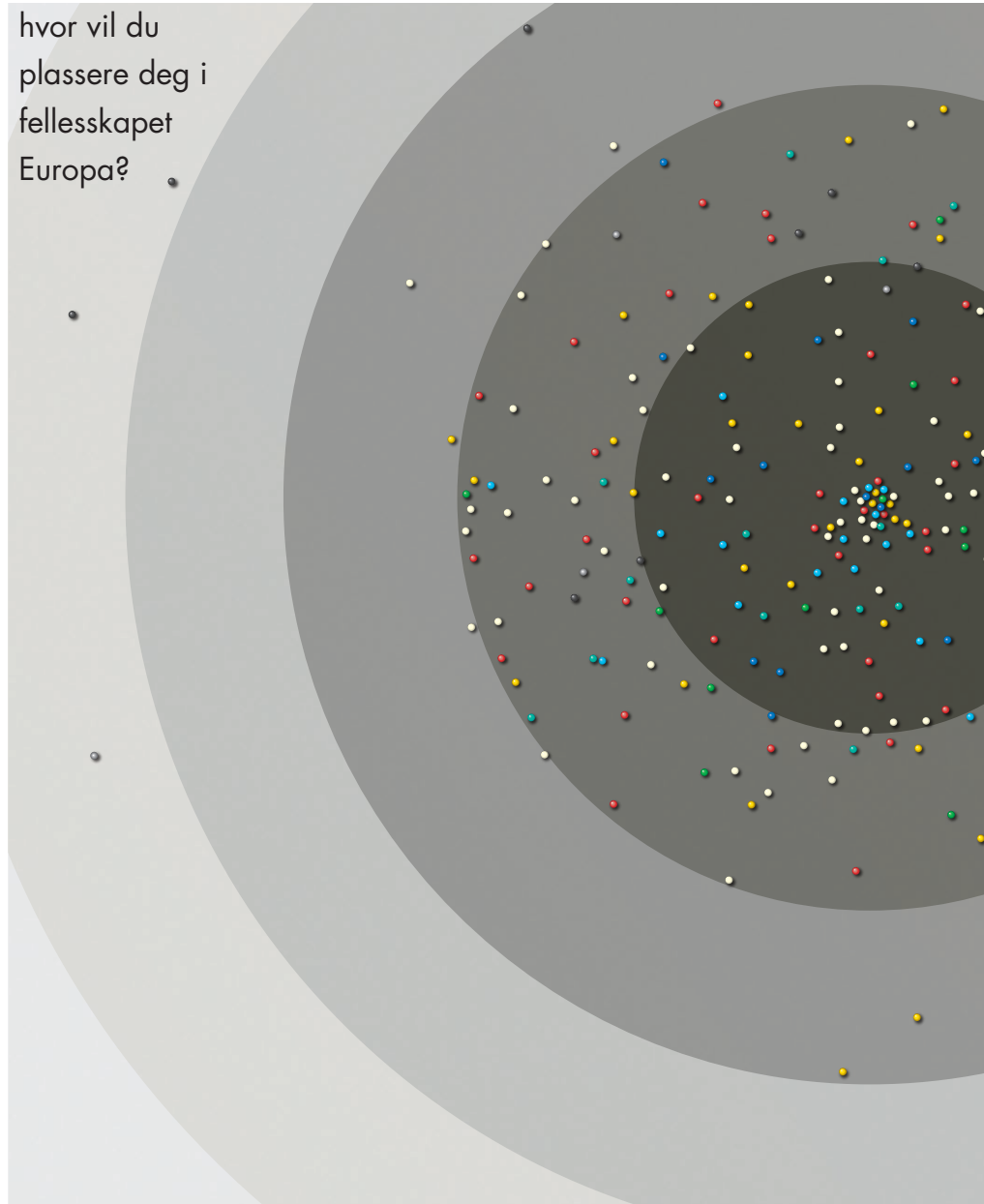
The focus group methodology developed as part of our research is available at the Dembra website for educators, and pilot-tested for use by Dembra in lower-secondary schools (13–15 year olds). ‘Dembra’ – ‘Democratic preparedness against racism and anti-Semitism’ – is a capacity-building program within Norwegian schools, aiming to counter racism, anti-Semitism, and undemocratic attitudes. Dembra is funded by the Ministry of Education, under the auspices of the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training. Dembra works with schools in different regions of Norway, reaching out to thousands of pupils, through teacher activities and on-site programs. Dembra also offers an online support portal for citizenship education, where the focus group methodology is among the tools available for use.



# Communicating boundaries and belonging

‘Borders’ were the theme of the 2016 national science week in Norway and at the ‘science fair’ in Oslo. A popular scientific geography experiment was conducted by drawing on the NATION project, among others, focusing on boundaries and belonging within different collectives. Visitors and passers-by were invited to place – using a pin – their own position: at the core of, more in the periphery of, or outside of the boundaries of four collectives: the workplace or at school, the city of Oslo, Norway, and Europe. The experiment sensitized participants to the salience of boundaries of belonging, but also to degrees of belonging within various collectives simultaneously. This was a collaborative effort between the University of Oslo’s Department for Sociology and Human Geography and PRIO.

hvor vil du  
plassere deg i  
fellesskapet  
Europa?



# #JegErNorsk – #IamNorwegian

Public debate in Norway in the spring of 2015 has involved a lively discussion about Norwegianness, spurred by a web-documentary produced by a leading Norwegian newspaper, *Aftenposten*. NATION-researchers contributed an op-ed to the debate ‘On Becoming Norwegian’. This piece discusses national identity by looking at various factors that may suggest inclusion – or exclusion – set within the context of Norwegian debates, but with significant parallels to debates throughout Europe. National identity is now central to public debates on immigration and integration, and managing societal diversity has become highly politicized, with concerns about security and migration often conflated. The *Aftenposten* web-documentary featured young minority background Norwegians who reflected on the ambivalence of multi-dimensional identities, in particular those including family migration histories, and their sense of a lack of recognition for their lived experiences within the framework of current articulations of Norwegianness.

## Seminars and talks

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*Further information on all events, publications, and staff pages related to the NATION project can be found at: [bit.ly/prionationproject](http://bit.ly/prionationproject)*

### Do we negotiate about Norwegianness?

Half-way through the project an open seminar was organized at PRIO, asking the question: ‘Do we negotiate about Norwegianness?’ During the seminar, preliminary findings on negotiating the nation from top-down, mediated and bottom-up perspectives were discussed and brought into dialogue with research on experiences of intersections of Sami and Norwegian identities and of belonging among adoptees growing up in Norway. Perspectives from practice and lived experience foregrounding challenges were presented, including a sense of ‘global homelessness’ among children of migrants growing up in Norway, and the increasing sense of alienation among many Muslim youth due to what is experienced as Islamophobia in parts of the public sphere. Considering negotiation of Norwegianness, who the actors are – and how they act – was pointed to, inter alia with the

example of a project working to enhance collaboration among youth with minority backgrounds as part of contributing to more dialogue in Norwegian society, and in a similar vein, foregrounding religious diversity as a part of the national fabric.

### Nation-building in Norwegian schools

What kinds of Norwegianness are being created and re-created, challenged and asserted in the Norwegian schools of today? Can this be understood as nation-building?

What is the role today of the school as a nation-building institution? Traditionally, nation-building in schools is often understood based on what is written in history textbooks, and which literary works are on the curriculum, and through the music and art that is being communicated in esthetic subjects. As an important addition to these ways of attending to nation-building, the NATION project has focused on what happens in the class room: on the relationships between pupils, and between teacher and pupils, in the class room and school community over time.

### Interaction with policy makers and practitioners

Every second year, practitioners in the field of integration and diversity gather for a conference at Maihaugen in Lillehammer, Norway. At this 2016 Maihaugen conference, with about 600 participants present, perspectives on Norwegianness and diversity drawn from NATION-research were presented. For more information, visit the website here: [bit.ly/2j7WoRa](http://bit.ly/2j7WoRa).

### Interaction with teachers

Building on the anticipation of societal impact via teachers in Norwegian schools, we were invited to present at the Norwegian Association of Graduate Teachers (Lektorlaget) conference in 2016. The conference was streamed, and a video can be seen here: [bit.ly/2ApKfKj](http://bit.ly/2ApKfKj).

The presentation was subsequently turned into a text solicited by ‘Lektorbladet’, which reaches 5700 Norwegian graduate teachers: [bit.ly/2hQ7XHI](http://bit.ly/2hQ7XHI).



# Academic workshop and conference sessions

## Lived Experiences of the Everyday Nation

The workshop 'Lived Experiences of the Everyday Nation' was held in Oslo, 9–10 June 2016, as part of the NATION project. Keynote talks were given by Marco Antonsich (University of Loughborough) on the topic 'The "what", "who", "when" and "where" of the everyday/banal nation' and by Kirsten Simonsen (University of Roskilde) on the topic '(Re)scaling identities: on the possibilities of belonging'.

The workshop gathered international researchers from various disciplines following a call for papers and a competitive process. The common denominator of the participants was the conceptualizations and experiences of the nation in everyday life, although with a myriad of entry points, such as, through migration, first impressions, poetry and popular music, love, affect, a majority/minority axis and beyond. The workshop also included a session on methodological approaches to studying the everyday nation.

## Everyday nation and complexity

*Conference session at the Royal Geographic Society – Institute of British Geographers Annual Conference, London, 2017*

Contemporary political developments in Europe are putting nationalism back on the agenda, driven by right-wing populism. This session shed light on narratives of the national that bring out other stories of the everyday nation, providing alternatives perhaps to those easily found in polarized public debates. The session focused on the interplay of the everyday nation and complexity, where complexity is explored on the backdrop of current debates in societies grappling with migration-related diversity, debates where economic precariousness, inequality and the threat of terrorism are variably ignored or brought into the mix. Complexity and everyday nation was also explored from the vantage point of treating nations as complex systems whose forms emerge from below and where order may appear from chaos, and whose reproductions may appear without an 'imagined community' (Kaufmann 2016).

An 'everyday nation' approach is employed, and are normatively willing to engage with plural conceptions of nations as sources of collective identities among human beings. Thus, the session as a whole was inspired by critical approaches to diversity, and included papers drawing on data from cities, suburbs or rural areas in Denmark, Italy, Norway, Poland, and the United Kingdom.

## Negotiating diversity

*Conference session at the Nordic Migration Research Conference, Oslo, 2016*

Living with diversity, at the level of everyday lived experiences, as well as in national policy development, have by now become well-established fields of enquiry, in Scandinavia, Europe, and globally. Often research – and policy – is framed around questions of multiculturalism, accommodation of difference, and the role of the public sphere. Whilst 'diversity' need not be related to migration, and indeed such a connection may be problematic in suggesting homogeneity as a 'natural' starting point, this session focused on

the implications of diversity resulting from migration, during the past decades and until today, in the European context and elsewhere globally. It did so as an acknowledgment of the societal significance – in the public eye – of particular kinds of diversity associated with migrants, migration and mobilities, the negotiations of which merit further attention. The session explored how negotiations of diversity happen at different scales, from the neighborhood, to the national and international levels; from an individual actor perspective, but also considering state-level policies, and different meso-levels, including the roles of media, whether in print or online. The focus of the session lay on ‘negotiations’ as a proposed term to describe the multifaceted ways in which living with diversity is managed or mismanaged; welcomed, accepted or denied; practiced more or less actively; planned for, but also experienced. Through this emphasis, the processual nature of living with diversity is foregrounded, together with the inherent roles of agency.

Photo: Daniel Enchev / Flickr





## Op-eds and blog posts

- Hvem godtar vi som «norske»? [Who do we accept as “Norwegian”?], *Aftenposten*, 14 March 2017. [bit.ly/prionation1](http://bit.ly/prionation1)
- Etnisk norsk er ingen absolutt størrelse [The “ethnic Norwegian” is no absolute entity], *Dagbladet*, 9 March 2017. [bit.ly/prionation2](http://bit.ly/prionation2)
- Hva er norskhet? [What is Norwegianness?], *VG*, 17 January 2017. [bit.ly/prionation3](http://bit.ly/prionation3)
- Hvilket «kulturelt fellesskap» gir oss trygghet? [Which “cultural community” gives us a sense of safety?], *Vårt Land*, 28 June 2016. [bit.ly/prionation4](http://bit.ly/prionation4)
- Hverdagsintegrering for norskfødte [Everyday integration for the ‘Norwegian-born’], *Dagbladet*, 28 May 2016. [bit.ly/prionation5](http://bit.ly/prionation5)
- Når blir du norsk? [When do you become Norwegian?], *Aftenposten*, 8 May 2015. [bit.ly/prionation6](http://bit.ly/prionation6)
- Evig innvandrер, aldri norsk [Eternal immigrant, never Norwegian], *Bergens Tidende*, 22 January 2015. [bit.ly/prionation7](http://bit.ly/prionation7)
- Avleggs statsborgerskapslov [Outdated citizenship legislation], *Dagens Næringsliv*, 6 October 2014. [bit.ly/prionation8](http://bit.ly/prionation8)
- Kongens nyttårstaler: Et lærestykke i integrering [The King’s New Year’s speeches: A lesson in integration] *Aftenposten*, 19 January 2016. [bit.ly/prionation9](http://bit.ly/prionation9)
- On becoming Norwegian, *PRIO blog*, 28 May 2015. [bit.ly/prionation10](http://bit.ly/prionation10)
- A plural conception of the nation, *PRIO blog*, 18 August 2017. [bit.ly/prionation11](http://bit.ly/prionation11)
- A Post-Brexit We? *PRIO blog*, 4 July 2016. [bit.ly/prionation12](http://bit.ly/prionation12)



## Research Team

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### **Marta Bivand Erdal**

Marta is a Human Geographer and Senior Researcher at PRIO. She is the project leader and is responsible for overseeing the project as a whole, including broad communication efforts. She has conducted data collection in upper secondary schools in Norway, in mosques in the UK, and has analyzed data across the top-down, mediated and bottom-up parts of the project. Marta has supervised the five master's students who have written their theses as part of the project.



### **Michael Collyer**

Michael is a Human Geographer and a Professor at the Sussex Centre for Migration Research at the University of Sussex. He has conducted data collection and analysis on a case-study of mosque building processes in the UK, and contributed to the project with comparative perspectives from the British context.



### **Rojan Tordhold Ezzati**

Rojan is a Sociologist and a Doctoral Researcher (on the NECORE project). She is contributing to international mediated comparative perspectives in the NATION project, drawing on the case of terrorist attacks in France, and the 22 July terror attacks in Norway.

**Katrine Fangen**

Katrine is Professor in Sociology and Head of Department at the Department of Sociology and Human Geography, University of Oslo. She has analyzed the nation as verbalized in official documents, parliamentary debates and in interviews with bureaucrats in Norway as part of the NATION project. She has also supervised two master's students writing their theses as part of the project.

**Åshild Kolås**

Åshild is a Social Anthropologist and Research Professor at PRIO. She has analyzed the 'nation' in mediated discourses in Norway. Through this she has foregrounded what is unnoticed, unquestioned 'normalcy', whether in relation to discussions in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on 22 July, or in the case of returning 'foreign fighters' and discourses of extremism and radicalization.

**Thomas Lacroix**

Thomas is a Geographer, a Political Scientist and a CNRS Research Fellow and associate director of MIGRINTER at Université de Poitiers. Thomas has contributed to the project with comparative perspectives from the French case, including on the aftermath of terror and impacts on collective identities.

**Mette Strømsø**

Mette is a Human Geographer and a Doctoral Researcher on the NATION project. Her Doctoral Research focuses on individuals' perceptions and experiences of 'the nation' in different geographic locations (Norway). She has collected data in four locations in Norway, and has collaborated with Marta on data collection in upper secondary schools in Norway.

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## Research assistants

### **Ida Roland Birkvad**

Ida holds a MSc in Comparative Political Thought from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) at the University of London, and worked as a research assistant on the NATION project, contributing to systematically organize background information about participants in the school study in Norway.

### **Elin Martine Doeland**

Elin is a Psychologist and worked as a research assistant on the NATION project, contributing to systematize and code texts and focus group data from the school study in Norway.

### **Andrea McKinlay**

Andrea was a master's student in Migration Studies at the School of Global Studies, University of Sussex. She contributed with data collection and analysis on the case-study of mosque building processes in the UK.

### **Nina Høy-Petersen**

Nina is a Sociologist and a Doctoral Researcher at the Center for Research on Extremism (C-Rex) at the University of Oslo. She contributed with analysis of data on the nation in policy documents and speeches (Norway).

### **Cathrine Talleraas**

Cathrine is a Human Geographer and a Doctoral Researcher (on the TRANSWEL project). She has contributed to collecting and organizing media and policy documents from France and the UK, and co-authoring two policy briefs from the NATION project.

### **Mari Vaage**

Mari is a Sociologist and was a Research Assistant in the NATION project. She contributed to data collection on the nation in policy documents and speeches (Norway) and the nation in media discourses (Norway), collecting and organizing media and policy documents from Norway.

*The NATION project team would also like to thank Ana Veronica Roman, Teresa Marko Klev, Hannah Eline Ander and Sandra Feride Demiri for assistance in transcribing interview and focus group recordings as external research assistants to the project.*



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### Master's students affiliated with the NATION project

#### **Emma Barkström**

Emma was a Master's student in Global Studies at the Albert – Ludwig's University in Germany, FLAC-SO – Argentina and the Jawaharlal Nehru University of New Delhi in India. She wrote her Master's thesis on "The negotiation of religious diversity in interfaith activities: A qualitative study among religious and faith communities in Oslo" in affiliation with the NATION project.

#### **Brita Brekke**

Brita was a Master's student in Human Geography at the University of Oslo. She wrote her thesis on the experienced boundaries between religion and secularity in public space, focusing on religious buildings and symbols, in affiliation with the NATION project.

#### **Bjørnar Buxrud**

Bjørnar was a Master's student at the Department of Sociology and Human Geography, University of Oslo. He wrote his Master's thesis on 17 May speeches as integration arenas, in affiliation with the NATION project.

#### **Sandra Feride Demiri**

Sandra was a Master's student at the Department of Sociology and Human Geography, University of Oslo. She wrote her Master's thesis on how national identity is constructed in the Norwegian King's New Year speeches in affiliation with the NATION project.

#### **Sonja-Beate Egge**

Sonja-Beate was a Master's student at the Department of Social Anthropology, University of Oslo. She wrote her thesis on the relationship between national identity and Christianity in a multireligious Norway in affiliation with the NATION project.

# Master's dissertations

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**The negotiation of religious diversity in interfaith activities:  
A qualitative study among religious and faith communities in Oslo**

(Emma Barkström, Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg)

**Making space for religion:  
A spatial analysis of the construction of two religious buildings in Oslo**

(Brita Brekke, Human geography, University of Oslo)

**Negotiating the Relationship Between Christianity and National Belonging in Norway**

(Sonja-Beate Egge, Social Anthropology, University of Oslo)

**Nation-building in the King's New Year's Speeches**

(Sandra Feride Demiri, Sociology, University of Oslo)

**The 17 May speech as an integration arena**

(Bjørnar Buxrud, Sociology, University of Oslo)



# Advisory board

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Photo: Walter A Grønli / medicineheads

■ The NATION Advisory board has met annually and provided important feedback on work in progress, throughout the research process. Our advisory board has consisted of other researchers, but primarily experts working within the broad fields of diversity and migration, as bureaucrats and practitioners, and people who within and beyond their professional capacity have a genuine interest in the implications of migration-related diversity for contemporary nations.

Hanna Asefaw  
Grete Brochmann  
Thomas Hylland Eriksen  
Faiza Kassim Ibrahim  
Bushra Ishaq  
Noor Jdid  
Cecilie Haare  
Jørgen Haavardsholm  
Katarina Heradstveit  
Omar Syed Gilani  
Julian Kramer  
Bjørn Olav Megard  
Silje Vatne Petersen  
Karen Sofie Pettersen  
Mikkel Rytter  
Anne Sender  
Shoaib Sultan  
Sarvendra Tharmalingam  
Espen Thorud  
Lars Østby



# Selected publications

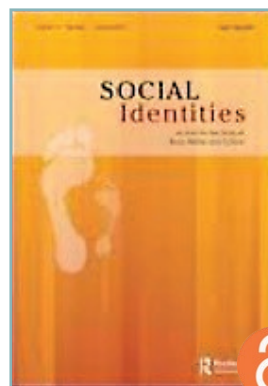
These are publications that are based on research within the project. As this report goes to press, they are in various stages of completion; about a third have been published and the remainder fall into two categories:

**In preparation:** has been drafted and is undergoing revisions.

**Under review:** has been submitted to the publisher and is being evaluated.

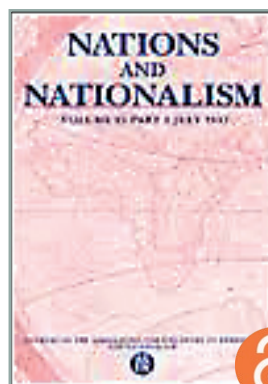
Publications that are freely available online are marked with an Open Access logo and accompanied by a direct link to the full-text document. Titles of articles that have not yet been published may change in the course of the review and publication process.

Updated information about final publications can be found at [www.prio.org/nation](http://www.prio.org/nation)



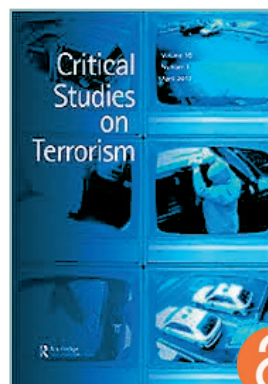
- 1 Kolås, Åshild (2017) 'How critical is the event? Multicultural Norway after 22 July 2011.' *Social Identities: Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture*, 23(2): 1–15.

[bit.ly/nationprio1](http://bit.ly/nationprio1)



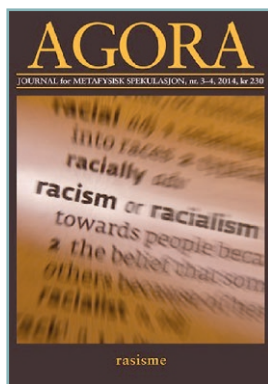
- 2 Buxrud, Bjørnar and Katrine Fangen (2017) 'Norwegian national day oratory: constructing and reconstructing a national we.' *Nations and Nationalism*, 23(4): 770–789.

[bit.ly/nationprio2](http://bit.ly/nationprio2)



- 3 Fangen, Katrine and Åshild Kolås (2016) 'The "Syria traveller": Reintegration or legal sanctioning?' *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 9(3): 414–432.

[bit.ly/nationprio3](http://bit.ly/nationprio3)



- 4 Fangen, Katrine and Mari Vaage (2014) 'FrP-politikerens innvandringsretorikk i posisjon og opposisjon.' *Agora: Journal for metafysisk spekulasjon*, 3(4): 30–63.



- 7 Erdal, Marta Bivand and Åshild Kolås (In preparation) 'Norwegian identity revisited: "Ethnic Norwegians" in the print media.'



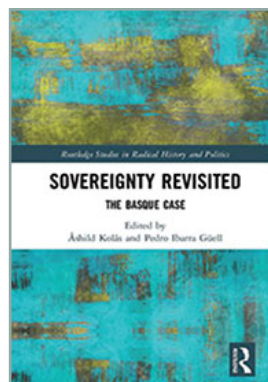
- 5 Fange, Katrine and Sandra Feride Demiri (In preparation) 'The state of the nation: The King's annual addresses as windows into nationhood.'



- 8 Collyer, Michael, Erdal, Marta Bivand and Andrea McKinlay (In preparation) 'Constructing mosques: Architecture, imagination, belonging.'



- 6 Erdal, Marta Bivand and Mette Strømsø (Under review) 'Interrogating the boundaries of the everyday nation through first impressions.'



- 9 Kolås, Åshild (2017) 'Introduction: Basque sovereignty revisited.' In Kolås, Åshild and Pedro Ibarra Güell (eds) *Sovereignty Revisited: the Basque Case*. London: Routledge, 1–19.



10 Ezzati, Rojan Tordhol, Erdal, Marta Bivand and Thomas Lacroix (In preparation) ‘Belonging in the terror-struck nation: The cases of France and Norway.’



11 Strømsø, Mette (Under review) “All people living in Norway can be Norwegian”: How ordinary people blur the boundaries of nationhood.’



13 Strømsø, Mette, (In preparation) ‘Contributing to belong: Nation and everyday life in Norway.’



14 Erdal, Marta Bivand (2017) ‘Mobilitet og tilhørighet.’ In Jordhus-Lier, David and Kristian Stokke (eds) *Samfunnsgeografi: En innføring*. Oslo: Cappelen Damm, 275–289. [Mobility and Belonging, in Introduction to Human Geography].



12 Strømsø, Mette (Under review) ‘Nation and diversity in parents’ reflections on choice of neighbourhood.’



15 Erdal, Marta Bivand and Mette Strømsø (In preparation) ‘Accommodating dialogue and friction: Focus group methodologies as tools for human rights education.’





**16** Erdal, Marta Bivand and Katrine Fangen (In preparation) 'Bridging the constitutional and the everyday nation: Bureaucrats on conflicts around the meaning of national identity in Norway.'



**19** Erdal, Marta Bivand and Mette Strømsø (2016) *Norskhet i flertall*. [Plural Norwegianness]. PRIO Policy Brief, 14/2016. Oslo: Peace Research Institute Oslo.



[bit.ly/nationprio19](http://bit.ly/nationprio19)



**17** Erdal, Marta Bivand (Under review) 'Negotiating the diverse nation: From metaphor to analytical tool.'



**20** Erdal, Marta Bivand and Cathrine Talleraas (2015) *Becoming One of Us?* PRIO Policy Brief, 11/2015. Oslo: Peace Research Institute Oslo.



[bit.ly/nationprio20](http://bit.ly/nationprio20)



**18** Erdal, Marta Bivand (In preparation) 'Ignoring, fearing or engaging with 'nation' in migration studies.'



**21** Talleraas, Cathrine and Marta Bivand Erdal (2015) *Contestations over National Identity and Diversity*. PRIO Policy Brief, 10/2015. Oslo: Peace Research Institute Oslo.



[bit.ly/nationprio21](http://bit.ly/nationprio21)

# Negotiating the Nation in Present-Day Europe

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Nationalism and the political salience of national identities are on the rise in contemporary Europe and beyond. This rise is often associated with populist movements. These include populist political parties, several in position across Europe today, whose politics are characterized by isolationism and anti-immigration stances, and right-wing populist groups, that are characterized by xenophobia, sometimes overt racism and anti-Semitism. Meanwhile, mobilizations of the nation need not only be analyzed as causally connected with populism. In fact, there is a critical need to engage with the national from contrasting vantage points, in order to unravel the roles that the nation as a shared fate community continues to play in today's globalized world.

Recognizing the salience of the shared fate in a future somehow territorially intertwined, more often than not a shared language, and dependence on the same political institutions for safety, is arguably an important future-oriented corrective. It encompasses the dynamic nature of nations, as these appear on the ground. This matters politically because it has an impact on what visions of future society are being offered. Such visions draw on assumptions about difference, and about what can or cannot constitute national communities, in the plural, or not.

'There is more nation beyond neo-nationalism. It is the duty of scholars to make it appear' writes political geographer Marco Antonsich. Throughout our research, we find the nation to be something that is *happening*, that is co-produced, as an active site. The national is not, as such, more important than other identity markers: sometimes it is, other times not. Yet, the nation matters, politically and in everyday life. For this reason, it is important for us as researchers to make the nation visible, as it appears in all its





Photo: Jon Rawlinson / CC / Flickr

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complexity, inconsistency and difference. But also in the sense of shared belonging, of co-responsibility for the society in which many of the grandchildren of today's adults are likely to be growing up together.

An academic response to the politicization of difference, to the rise in populist movements that instrumentally capitalize on xenophobia, should be to meticulously and scientifically unravel the nation, as it appears beyond, beneath, and with varying emotional reactions to the national iterations of neo-nationalists. This is an academic endeavor in its own right, but it is also a societal commitment. Without it, knowledge-based policymaking in increasingly diverse European societies will lack fundamental insights and tools that might enable constructive approaches to building shared national futures.





We are immensely grateful to all the individuals who shared their thoughts and experiences with us through texts, interviews and focus groups, thereby making this research possible.

**Who is a nation?**  
**Where is a nation?**  
**When is a nation?**  
**Why is a nation?**  
**How is a nation 'a nation'?**

This report presents insights from the research project Negotiating the Nation: Implications of Ethnic and Religious Diversity for National Identity (NATION), funded by the Research Council of Norway. Between 2013 and 2017, researchers in Norway, France and the UK have collected and analyzed data on top-down, mediated, and bottom-up iterations of the nation, and their interactions. The nation has been approached as an empirical phenomenon, as a political project which enables mobilization, and as a dynamic and changeable social group, for which time and space are crucially important.

We hope that the insights and tools from the NATION project can help enable constructive approaches to building shared national futures.