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# Geographies of everyday nationhood: experiencing multiculturalism in Melbourne

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**ABSTRACT.** In this article, we explore the geographies of nationhood manifest in everyday life, arguing that our quotidian surroundings continually reproduce the nation as we engage with them. We show that nationhood is obvious and ubiquitous in the lives of people when they are asked to attune to it, and that even when not in the forefront of attention, it partly informs how we make sense of our daily experiences. This is not to claim that nationhood is fully formed or coherent, a separate substratum waiting to be tapped into or closely defined by an identifiable symbolic repertoire, if only we pay attention. Instead, we demonstrate that nationhood is emergent in everyday life, is reproduced continuously and intimately entangled with the sensations, routines, material environments, public encounters, everyday competencies, memories, aspirations and a range of other affective and embodied qualities that comprise how we understand and inhabit our worlds. This mundane experience involves shifting between reflexive and unreflexive states, and the method we deploy - photo-elicitation - is devised to draw out these oscillations and heighten the attunement of participants to the usually unreflexively apprehended taken-for-granted national qualities of everyday space. Here, we aim to empirically foreground the neglected spatial dimensions that characterize the experience of banal nationalism.

**KEYWORDS:** Australia, Banal Nationalism, Everyday Nationalism / Nationalism From Below / Local Nationalism, Multiculturalism

## Introduction

In this article, we explore the geographies of nationhood manifest in everyday life, arguing that our quotidian surroundings continually reproduce the nation as we engage with them. We show that nationhood is obvious and ubiquitous in the lives of people when they are asked to attune to it, and that even when not in the forefront of attention, it partly informs how we make sense of our daily experiences. This is not to claim that nationhood is fully formed or coherent, a separate substratum waiting to be tapped into or closely defined by an identifiable symbolic repertoire, if only we pay attention. Instead, we demonstrate that nationhood is *emergent* in everyday life, is reproduced continuously

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and is intimately entangled with the sensations, routines, material environments, public encounters, everyday competencies, memories, aspirations and a range of other affective and embodied qualities that comprise how we understand and inhabit our worlds (Sumartojo, 2017). This mundane experience involves shifting between reflexive and unreflexive states, and the method we deploy – photo-elicitation – is devised to draw out these oscillations and heighten the attunement of participants to the usually unreflexively apprehended taken-for-granted national qualities of everyday space. Here, we aim to empirically foreground the neglected spatial dimensions that characterize the experience of banal nationalism.

The particular spatial setting that underpins our arguments is Melbourne, Australia. Our research participants live, work or study in this city, although some are from other places and one third of participants were not Australian citizens at the time of the study. As we explain below, their accounts of attuning to ‘everyday nationhood’ varied but a few dominant themes emerged. The most prominent banal experience of everyday space and routine to which they became newly attentive was multiculturalism, evidence of which all participants identified, from the objects in kitchen cupboards and local stores, from seasonal embellishments in the built environment to their online habits of maintaining international connections. Accordingly, the paper focuses on how our research participants describe multiculturalism as a banal element of their everyday lives, where and why this mattered geographically to them, and what it can tell us about everyday nationhood.

A scholarly focus on the everyday dimensions of national identity stems from Michael Billig’s (1995) important intervention in foregrounding the sheer banality of nationalism. Yet Billig’s exploration is largely confined to the discursive means by which banal nationalism is accomplished. Since then, accounts have focused on other everyday cultural, material and spatial constituents of nationhood, including Frykman and Löfgren’s (1996) examination of national habits, Palmer’s (1998) discussion of the body, food and landscape as unremarked but mindful ‘flags’ of national identity and Edensor’s focus on quotidian spaces, practices and objects (2002, 2004). Yet despite these contributions, Billig’s entreaty to explore the banal dimensions of national identity in greater empirical depth has been partial and patchy.

Merriman and Jones (2016) assert that we need to move beyond national symbolism or the iconographic qualities of objects to consider how different materials afford particular actions and are sensually and affectively apprehended. We concur in focusing upon how people ‘dwell’ in place, sensuously adapting everyday practices from the past, and we move away from symbolic, representational and cognitive perspectives and towards a consideration of the banal experience of everyday space. Dwelling is embodied and sensual, bound up in the coordination of movements and quotidian routines, in what we focus on and ignore. Yet as we explore, in lived experience, the affective, the sensory and the symbolic meld and merge, as reflexive and unreflexive modes of moving, dwelling and working interweave.

### Everyday/national space

To emphasize, in this paper, we focus on those aspects of banal nationalism and national identity that inhere in the everyday experience of familiar space, quotidian settings that form a usually unreflexively apprehended backdrop to daily tasks, pleasures and routine movement. We contend that rather than the iconic historic site, national sporting occasion or grand state ceremony, the mundane, habitual world is the bedrock upon which a sense of national identity is reproduced in daily life. We reproduce this homely space in repetitive, habitual enactments and routine engagements – in daily household tasks, commutes to work or school, visits to local shops and pubs or walks in the local park. Seamon (1979) terms these routine journeys ‘place ballets’, manoeuvres that foster a mundane, unreflexive sense of dwelling and consolidates what Crouch (2011) calls ‘lay geographical knowledge’, through which people know where things are and how tasks should be accomplished. Such practical competencies include knowing where to buy particular commodities, how to drive a car, buy an alcoholic drink and catch a bus.

These modes of inhabiting place are further sustained by the ways in which they are shared by others. While inhabitants do not robotically perform similar routine practices at all times, they share a range of habits so that a sense of ‘cultural community’ may be co-produced by ‘people together tackling the world around them with familiar manoeuvres’ (Frykman and Löfgren, 1996: 10–11), strengthening affective and cognitive links and producing somewhat stable networks of relationships, objects and spaces. Collective choreographies delineate spatial and temporal constellations at which a host of individual paths and routines move and coincide at local cafes, garages and transport termini to constitute what Massey (1995) terms ‘activity spaces’, spaces of circulation and meeting that collectively contribute to a shared ‘common sense’ of dwelling. These shared habitual routines and familiar spaces underpin common sense notions that this is *how things are* (Edensor, 2006).

Crucially, we emphasize that these everyday spaces are also profoundly sensual and affective settings, are not reiteratively performed by detached, disengaged individuals. These are forms of embodied knowledge that are constituted by an understanding deepened by time and embedded in memory (Lippard, 1997), so that the accumulation of repetitively sensed mundane textures, smells, sounds and sights become sedimented in individual bodies. Consider the subtleties of climate, everyday plants and birdsong that pervade gardens, parks, streets and neighbourhood backyards, or the ways that people move and talk, the taste and smell of local food, the noises of the streets and the affective intensities that accumulate in public spaces and on public transport.

Critically, these modest everyday arrangements merge a sense of the local with national belonging since many of the features encountered in the familiar environs of home and neighbourhood extend across national space. People serially witness a host of architectural, infrastructural, commercial,

recreational, institutional, domestic and environmental commonalities that pervade national space beyond the local. Post offices, police stations, state benefit offices, train stations, town halls, electricity sub stations and libraries are serial institutional characteristics found in most locales. Landscapes across the nation are saturated with other common features, including familiar chain stores and supermarkets, the vernacular architectures of housing estates and suburbs, smaller features such as phone-boxes, telegraph poles, trams, national advertising campaigns and road signs and non-human commonalities including weather, light, air, trees and birds. These multiple serial elements make national space knowable, and in an era of hugely increased mobility, they contribute to the ongoing production of an 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1983). Most of the time, the everyday features of banal national space are unreflexively apprehended, yet there are times when they come into sharp focus. Most evidently, when we travel to unfamiliar realms, mundane features seem peculiar, with different infrastructural details, commercial and residential architectures, road signage and street furniture, and this may be compounded by unusual smells, sounds, textures and climatic conditions.

This spatial integration of the local and the national highlights, as Agnew (2004: 228) insists, that it is vital to consider the geographical contexts in which national identity is expressed and experienced rather than understanding the national as an 'overarching wave that washes over all places to similar effect'. For though abstract nationalist ideological constructions often assert a uniformity across national space, nations invariably exhibit a profoundly heterogeneous character. Consequently, there are many local ways of sensing national belonging; indeed, places are key sites in which 'individuals make sense of their relationship with the nation' (Jones and Fowler, 2007: 335). Rather than passively responding to abstract nationalist sentiments and claims, places have the potential to actively 'shape the evolution of nationalist ideology' rather than merely responding (ibid: 336) or assert their distinctive local identities and expressions so that they may be 'rearticulated into a broader politics of the nation' (ibid: 337). In this paper, the locality in which national identity is expressed is central Melbourne. We make no apologies for this, for national identity is always expressed within a local context, and the local is indissoluble from the nation. Yet we also acknowledge that particular localities, with their economic, social and cultural idiosyncrasies, experience and express diverse ways of belonging to the nation, as our empirical analysis discloses.

This relational understanding of the everyday spaces in which we live also prompts consideration of the contemporary circumstances in which global flows of people, ideas, cultures, commodities and information (Appadurai, 1990) extend into, across and from places as never before. Besides being 'actively produced out of its connections with the local', the nation is also recreated out of global connections (Jones and Fowler, 2007: 338), increasingly colonized by multiple elements from elsewhere that supplement, or sometimes replace, features that have previously endured. Such transformations

frequently provoke anxieties that change is accelerating too rapidly, changes through which seemingly durable spaces are under threat. Despite such concerns, most people continue to live in familiar space, and identities remain shaped by national, local and domestic routines, habits and schedules. Critically, that which once was perceived as new, perhaps 'out of place', is apt to become incorporated through processes of 'glocalization'. Restaurants, shops and commodities that derive from other places typically come to augment other quotidian fixtures. Despite pessimistic assertions about the effects of globalization on the local and the national, most of us live in recognizable worlds distinguished by distinct material structures and institutional arrangements. Accordingly, in our empirical analysis, we discuss how elements that originated from elsewhere may be more inclusively understood as an integral part of what constitutes contemporary national identity.

### **Grounding everyday national identity**

We contend then that everyday encounters and experiences in familiar, local, everyday spaces are integral to what Billig calls a 'form of life which is daily lived in a world of nation-states' (1995: 68). As we have emphasized, the sense of national belonging that is reproduced by these practices and sensations is usually unreflexive but constitutes a latent power that may surface at particular moments. The national thus hums quietly in the background of everyday life. As Olsen (2010: 5) insists, 'societies or nation-states are not cognitive sketches resting in the minds of people; they are real entities solidly built and well tied together.' And for Fox and Idriss-Miller (2008: 537), the nation 'is not simply the product of macro-structural forces; it is simultaneously the practical accomplishment of ordinary people engaging in routine activities.' The nation is continually reproduced and emergent in our everyday lives, rather than a category that sits apart from other things we do or experience. Yet attending to the geographies of this typically unrecognized aspect of being in place is difficult, and requires an approach that brings to the surface sensory, affective and representational expressions in local spatial and temporal contexts. In considering such a focus, Merriman and Jones call for

non-deterministic and relational accounts of the processes of emergence and intermit-  
tence, 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. (2016: 1)

In this issue, Fox urges attention to be paid to the 'edges of the nation: those moments, spaces and contexts where the nation vacillates between the explicit and the implicit, where it's taken-for-granted dimensions can be more readily coaxed out with a well-placed breach.' However, instead of seeking out these 'edges', moments of dissonance or rupture in which the nation suddenly

springs into notice, we consider the national to be intimately entangled with mundane dwelling, slipping in and out of awareness in relation to the many other social, material, affective, sensory and temporal aspects of our everyday lives. For while national moods, feelings, emotions, atmospheres and affects may appear spontaneous, 'exceed[ing] attempts at engineering and directing' them (Closs Stephens, 2016: 185), they are more frequently characterized by repetitious, rhythmic circulations, movements and affective ties (Merriman and Jones, 2016). Accordingly, we invited our research participants to attune to the register of the national in their lives to reveal how everyday nationhood was conceived and experienced not as an abstract quality but as inextricably connected to particular everyday surroundings and reproduced through daily habits, routines and competencies (Edensor, 2002). Here, we insist that the national is a constant presence, part of the rich experience of the everyday that sometimes emerges to attract attention. Importantly, as we demonstrate, our research participants were readily able to attune to this experiential everyday dimension and explore the meanings for them that it revealed.

Our study took place in the summer of 2017 in Melbourne, Australia. We asked ten research participants, six men and four women, ranging in age from their 20s to 60s, to take ten photographs each of things that reminded them of the nation during one daily routine, such as commuting to work. Three participants were recent migrants to Australia, and all currently lived or worked in inner Melbourne, although several had grown up or lived in other cities or in rural areas. In selecting these participants, the intention was not to try and somehow 'sample' Australians, even as we acknowledge that a range of factors – race, gender, age, for example – profoundly shape how people experience their surroundings. Nor did we select a 'representative' group to investigate anything specifically about multiculturalism – it is rather that this emerged as a key response in their participation beyond our expectations. As we also recognize, asking participants to attune themselves to the national would invariably reflect the distinctive contexts of the local environment in which they lived, moved and worked, in this case, the inner suburbs of Melbourne. We then video or audio-interviewed participants, asking them to explain what their images depicted about 'nationhood'. In this way, we were able to 'share and access elements of everyday experience that would not be accessible through traditional verbal interviews or participant observation' (Pink and Sumartojo 2017), by asking them to explain how they sensed, understood and valued nationhood by referring to the photographs.

The use of photo-elicitation also implicitly required participants to define nationhood on their own terms – we did not give examples of the kinds of images we anticipated people might take nor provide any specific instructions other than to ask them to take photographs in the course of a normal day; Antonsich (2016) takes a similar approach in his study of Italian identity, and the use of photographs to explore everyday life is well-established (Rose 2016: 316). By asking participants to decide for themselves what everyday nationhood looks and feels like, we diverged from studies that define the



nation in particular political, social or cultural terms, or centre it as a category of experience that somehow stands alone. Furthermore, our approach to photo-elicitation was to invite participants to create newly reflexive understandings about their everyday worlds by 'bring[ing] to the fore normally unspoken dimensions of experience, meaning and knowing' (Pink 2013: 95). Some participants supplemented their images with photographs they had taken previously, but that they wanted to share with us as relevant to the research task. In this way, a rich and varied set of photographs emerged, along with detailed discussion of their significance.

Several common themes emerged in the interviews; here, we focus on a key refrain shared across all participants' accounts that revolved around encounters and experiences with Australian multiculturalism. Accordingly, in the empirical sections that follow, we focus on how people describe, understand, sense and value the centrality of multicultural diversity in the experience of everyday nationhood. To reflect the order in which our participants narrated their experiences, we begin with stories they related about the presence of nationhood in their homes, then move out, via public transport, to markets, shops and workplaces. We draw on these empirical findings to underpin our central contention that banal nationhood can be thought of as an articulation of an everyday ongoing experience; here, this is strongly associated with multiculturalism as a distinctively *Australian* quality. Before we commence our analysis of the empirical findings, we briefly contextualize the historically significant emergence of multiculturalism in an Australian context.

### **Australia and multiculturalism**

The experience of everyday national identity identified by all participants was oriented around encountering social and cultural diversity. In choosing photographs and subsequently exploring why these choices had been made, interviewees emphasized their everyday encounters with various spaces in which different ethnic groups mingled, diverse cultural influences coagulated and hybridized national practices took place. As a theme, multiculturalism addresses the connections between the lived everyday experience of nationhood and the political and institutional edifices that help to recreate it in particular ways in different places. This emphasis seems to endorse Australian Prime Minister Turnbull's (2016) claim that the country is the 'most successful multicultural society in the world', highlighting its prominence in both national policy and everyday reality. Moran (2011) asserts that Britishness has been de-centred as Australianness has shifted away from an ethnic towards a civic and territorial emphasis, especially stimulated by the arrival of non-British immigrants after World War Two. In becoming progressively embedded in an emerging Australian national identity, multiculturalism has been crucial for handling diversity. Promoted by successive governments with varying degrees of enthusiasm, the nation-building emphasis in official constructions



of Australian multiculturalism has been met with broad public approval. In the context of the state in which our study is based, Victoria, the research of Lentini et al. (2009) reveals that many see multiculturalism as a major factor in increasing tolerance, and conceive it integral to contemporary Australian identity, promoting a wide appreciation of local diversity.

This is underpinned by the fact that 45% of Australians were themselves born overseas or have a parent who was. Metropolitan areas such as Melbourne are home to people from a very diverse range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds. While multiculturalism in Australia is recognized as mostly 'working' (Soutphommasane 2012), it is not uncontested and cultural difference can give rise to anxiety, scepticism or hostility (Noble, 2009b). In her ethnographic study of the Sydney suburb of Ashfield, for example, Wise (2010a, 2010b) insists on the inescapably emplaced nature of contemporary multiculturalism, and identifies its sensory challenges and social discomforts, showing how changes to neighbourhoods and routines can challenge everyday habits. Hage (1998) similarly focuses on the experience of multiculturalism, arguing that certain white groups seek to maintain cultural supremacy by containing the political involvement of non-white Australians. More broadly, ethnicity and multiculturalism are a prominent, ongoing topic of political and social conversation across Australia, discussed frequently and explicitly in everyday discussions about food, sport, language, security, migration, access to housing and leisure. Yet these discursive and political dimensions are not sufficient to establish a consensus that multiculturalism constitutes an integral element of national identity. It has to be lived, grounded in everyday practices and places, as we now demonstrate in discussing our empirical material.

### **Everyday nationhood and multiculturalism in Melbourne, 2017**

As Sopher observes, home can equally refer to 'house, land, village, city, district, country or, indeed, the world', transmitting the sentimental associations of one scale to others (1979: 130). Bringing things from the wider world into the home establishes connections with other places and times, as the home becomes a central node within relational networks. The home is the most intimate of the everyday spaces we inhabit. Though usually conceived as a private realm, it is always an interface between the outside and the inside, the social and the individual, and accordingly, domestic designs, projects and practices are influenced and part of wider cultural and social processes. In underpinning the sociality of home, the term 'home-making' pinpoints the ways in which we 'make ourselves at home' by following particular social and aesthetic conventions in furnishing and decorating interiors and cultivating our gardens. As Young argues, the home 'supports the bodily habits and routines of those who dwell there' (1997: 136), and practices of home-making and gardening

follow recognized arrangements that pass across spaces and times, and extend beyond homes and locales, but are dynamic and contested. Nevertheless, by considering the serialities produced across national space, we can identify styles of fencing, garden ornamentation and décor that generally fall within a recognisable vernacular range. Moreover, in considering how edible vegetables and fruits are grown in gardens according to shared practices of cultivation and are subsequently transformed into food in kitchens, we can identify how cooking and gardening are connected affective and sensory spaces that constitute part of what Ingold and Kurttila (2000) term 'taskscape'. The taskscape is an everyday space to which inhabitants have a practical and sensuous orientation that is shared but also continuously adapted. We can consider both gardening and cooking as ongoing domestic practices through which national space and belonging is (re)produced.

This is exemplified by A, who in pointing to shared conventions of outdoor living space, including the installation of decking, outdoor dining areas, balconies and barbecues, explains that as a gardener who creates kitchen gardens for customers, he also grows food for his own table, having a vegetable bed, and olive, peach and bay trees. However, a photograph of his own back garden is a cue to move towards an understanding of a wider national realm of shared garden cultivation (Figure 1).

I'm a food grower, it's a big movement since 2004, people want to grow their own food ... it's always been there. There's a fine tradition of Greeks and Italians who came in the 50s and 60s and every time you go past a house in Coburg or Prahan [two Melbourne suburbs], the front garden and back garden are going to be a food garden. But now more and more other Australians have been getting into that. In summer, you'd have all the Mediterranean vegetables like tomatoes, eggplant, zucchinis, lettuce, salad, and herbs. In the winter you'd have leeks, all the different brassicas, lettuces, celery. People just grow as much stuff as they can and Melbourne's got a good temperate environment so it's quite good in that respect.

A also mentioned that he liked to grow native species in his garden, part of a well-established practice of encouraging indigenous vegetation to reproduce a sense of nativeness and belonging. Head and Muir (2006) identify shared practices of Australian gardening, including those that distinguish between 'bush' and garden, and remove native plants, and those that combine both forms of vegetation. This reveals the tensions and dualisms that have been conjured by different approaches to gardening. For A, the diverse products cultivated from gardens are seen as instantiating a hybrid, multicultural Australia that enhances everyday eating. Once resulting from migrant practices that endeavoured to sustain cultural traditions, these growing practices have been adapted and subsequently extended across the nation's gardens. A considers that such practices from elsewhere have enriched and influenced Australian gardening and food consumption (Atsuko and Ranta, 2016). This mundane practice in an everyday space is one in which A feels that he shares, following his reflexive deliberations upon the photograph of his garden. His



**Figure 1.** A's backyard garden. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

garden and the practices he carries out in it are thus part of a much broader, emergent everyday Australianness, in which gardens are 'membranes around webs of connectivity that extend across multiple scales' (Head et al., 2004: 327). This contrasts with Tilley's (2008) suggestion that the somewhat reified gardening practices and aesthetics of British and Swedish gardeners are likely to become reinforced and exclusionary in response to an acceleration in the multicultural qualities of these nations.

Domestic space was a site of encountering a national sense of multiculturalism in a very different way for J, a Colombian who has lived in Melbourne for 7 years. His daily routine was to check multiple social media and news sites, in both English and Spanish, in a particular order. This was a way of remaining connected to his family and public culture in Colombia, a banal yet vital way of connecting to the affective, sensory, material and digital aspects of his sense of identity. In focusing upon this usually unreflexive habitual digital practice, J articulated an understanding of his own Australianness as itself multicultural;

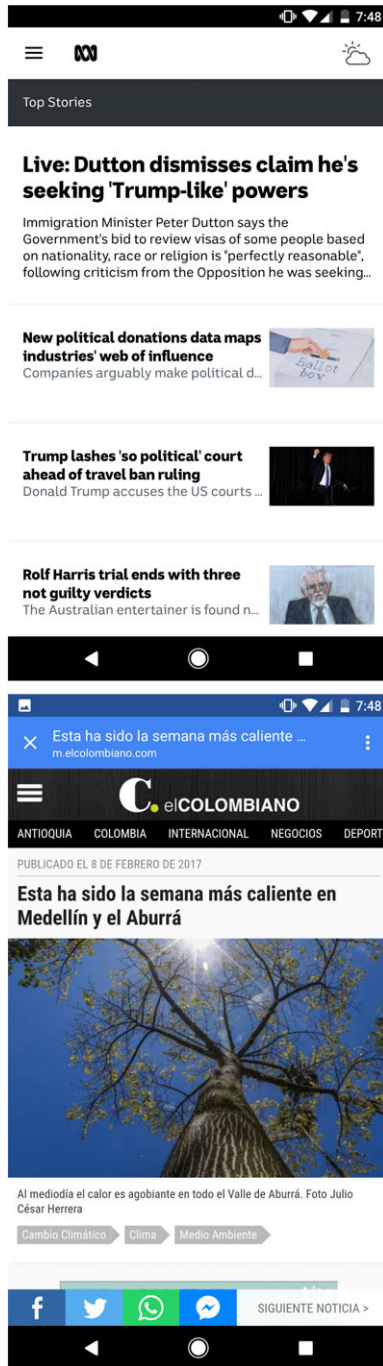
through reflecting upon his daily routine, he conceived himself as a product and beneficiary of Australian diversity. His deep connections with other places constitute a part of his everyday life as an Australian (Figures 2–3).

Because I'm a migrant, I came to Australia without proper English and I think that has a strong influence in my idea of nation and nationhood ... my experience of nationhood is double because I feel that in my area I'm moving across these two countries, of course I live in one but I'm all the time in contact with the other country. My experience of nationhood is very digital ... so WhatsApp for example is something that is constantly ... not just a reminder, it's like 'being there', for example, we have family groups ... this is my family's group which is huge it has 56 members so there are all the time messages coming ... then I have another group with my dad my mum, my sister and M [his partner], and there are different levels of intimacy ... there's a constant flow of news, of things that are happening in Columbia ... so it's a very informal, everyday sort of thing but it's a strong connection ... The first thing I do in the morning, the first app I open is the ABC News from Australia, and then I go through Facebook, Instagram, many more things, and the last one is a Colombian newspaper ... so in the morning, first thing in the morning, I'm like experiencing first this national dualism ... I'm interested in what's happening in these two countries at the same time.

Here, a 'national dualism' was an ongoing part of J's banal, everyday life, as with the lives of many migrants as they stay connected to their 'home' countries by travelling, accessing social media, consuming familiar foods or celebrating national events or holidays. The domestic, routine practice of J's social media use and news consumption from both Columbian and Australia was something he identified strongly as his own experience of multiculturalism and nationhood, one that drew together the structures of global media with the intimacy of regular, hand-held use of his smartphone. It was through the practice of checking accounts and using his phone that J could most readily identify nationhood – and himself as national in various ways – in his everyday life in Melbourne.

In considering spaces outside the domestic sphere, Wessendorf (2014) identifies a distinctive 'parochial' realm in which communal relations, often among familiar neighbours, take place in more convivial, intimate ways than in those public spaces in which we encounter difference. Such spaces might include a workplace, school, corner shop or market where traders and customers meet on a regular basis, and they become parochial as the social relations that emerge become habitual and frequent. In such settings, commonplace social interactions are shaped by 'civility towards diversity' (Lofland, 1989: 464). Such ordinary ease with encountering difference was evident for our participants who conceived it as a form of *everyday* nationhood, and several hinted that they considered it unremarkable, although they had become more aware of its prevalence following our request that they attend to it.

Photography newly attuned participants to this aspect of their surroundings outside the home as they walked, cycled, drove or caught trains or trams to make routine journeys to shops or workplace. In considering the everyday affects and sensations of the national, Merriman and Jones (2016: 10) argue that the 'material, elemental and functional qualities of mobility



**Figures 2–3.** Screenshots from J’s Australian and Colombian news sites that he visits everyday. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]



infrastructures are key to how and why they become caught up in particular affective relations and atmospheres', reverberating with particular moods, emotions, feelings and memories during journeys. In this way, spaces of mobility may channel convivial encounters, affective connections and shared sensory engagements that are intricately entwined with a shared sense of nationhood (Figure 4).

This was exemplified in D's description of his usually unconsidered feelings about taking the tram, an extensive element in Melbourne's inner city transport network. Sometimes crowded and smelly, hot or noisy, trams possess quite distinctive sensory affordances and are a routine part of experiencing and moving around the city for many residents. As D explained, they are also important sites of intersection and assembly with fellow travellers:

An enduring memory for me is like, getting on the tram in Melbourne. It's something I've done since I was a little kid and its one of the times I think where you're sort of forced to be in the same space as everyone. I think the tram's interesting in that it brings everyone together in one space and you get all kinds of different people of different ages going off to do different things. So the tram for me is Melbourne, and that's my Australia. I guess the reality of the nation is that it's a shared space for a lot of people and the tram is a sort of Melbourne microcosm of the nation in that sense. A lot of



**Figure 4.** D's photo of a Melbourne tram. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

people come into the city and meet on the tram so it's kind of where you see quite a random selection of people in the city from different backgrounds and kind of get a bit of a glimpse of what the country is like in a bigger way. We're less in our own little bubbles in the tram; you're forced to interact with different people.

Amin (2008) argues that such shared spaces have the capacity to generate tacit human response to conditions of 'situated multiplicity', in which bodies, mass and matter are temporarily thrown together. Crucially, he maintains that the shared social conventions and ethical practices that emerge are unreflexive, shaped by habits and routines rather than conscious will. Rather, they contribute towards the collective domestication of such spaces into kinds of 'patterned ground' that come to be intimately known by regular passengers – though in our example, a more conscious reflexivity is facilitated by the task of photographing. This more sensory form of knowing place, Amin contends, can accommodate the excess of meaning and thereby foster an ease with multiplicity. Wise and Velayutham (2014) insist that these shared spaces work best when they are consistently maintained, furnished with material infrastructures and functioning amenities that encourage a comfortable temporary dwelling.

Yet, as Lobo (2014) shows in a different Australian context, such public spaces – in her case, a bus – can become the site of very strained tensions between the different individuals and groups who move within them, stirring up negative affects and emotions, and becoming places of anxiety. This tension may emerge in contexts in which identifiably non-white bodies seem to stand out from normative somatic and social dispositions. Such bodies 'that fail to inhabit whiteness may feel uncomfortable, angry, fidget and move around rather than sink easily into space', and this may further intensify unease among fellow passengers (Lobo, 2014: 722). Such disharmony may be informed by the divergent histories and geographies of racialization and can heighten a sense of difference within shared space.

Wilson (2011: 645) also shows how bus travel demands 'the co-presence of strangers within mobile space' and 'a highly attuned awareness of others', as well as shared obligations and social conventions. These shared doxa are essential in such sites of close physical contact and multiplicity; if they are thought to be violated, stricture can be harsh, and potentially entangled with an intensified reinscription of difference. However, though she acknowledges that shifting events might generate irritation, frustration and alienation, they may also engender a cheeriness and conviviality wrought through how 'temporary bonds of passengering might form between strangers through contingent and situated activity'. Wilson's more optimistic scenario seems closer to the largely convivial tram journeys shared by Melbourne's hyper-diverse passengers described by D.

For others, routine walks through their neighbourhood afforded opportunities for attunement, encounter and reflection about everyday nationhood. For example, on the way home after walking his daughter to school, a distance of



only a few hundred metres, B photographed the top of a local Russian orthodox church, its golden onion domes peeking above the red-tiled roofs of local homes, a scene he regularly observes. As he describes:

The roofline [of the church] is magical and here it is stuck in boring suburban East Brunswick. To me that represents some of the better aspects of the immigration process – we're built on immigrants and some of them have had the financial wherewithal and the intent to take some of their culture ... I presume wonderfully evocative to the people who financed and created it in terms of where they came from. I quite like the fact that it's just sort of dumped in a suburb ... It's OK for that to be here in an inner suburb, because that's part of what we do and who we are.

This architectural juxtaposition, experienced habitually by B and subsequently photographed, prompted more extensive reflections about immigration and multiculturalism, describing it as both banal ('dumped in a suburb') and significant and central to Australian identity ('part of what we do and who we are'). Importantly, it was the combination of the multiple shiny domes with less visually arresting domestic roofs that drew his attention, the assembling of different built elements that both manifested new cultural forms and came to symbolize for him a way of interacting that was unique and valuable (Figures 5 and 6).

Another participant, L, commented on a similar hybrid architectural form that she photographed on her daily walk from where she parked her car, over the Yarra River that bisects central Melbourne, and along the riverfront to her office:

This is a bridge I walk under everyday [to work] ... the reason why I took this photo is actually more about the Chinese New Year decorations. I like the fact that as a nation, we celebrate Chinese New Year. We're not Chinese, we have a lot of Chinese immigrants, but I like the fact that publically and around Melbourne, I'm assuming Sydney, I'm assuming most other cities, we celebrate Chinese New Year. That to me says to me that we embrace other cultures and the excitement of other people's celebrations. In this area in particular they put quite a lot of decorations around, so it's actually quite noticeable, and it's really nice to see, it's really nice to walk around every morning and see all the different parts of all the decorations.

For L, the red lanterns had both representational and more-than-representational value. They were a cheerful and festive addition to her surrounding environment that she noticed with pleasure when they were annually installed. At the same time, her enjoyment of them was augmented by what she valued as explicitly and symbolically Australian – a commitment to 'other people's celebrations'. These were events that she felt comfortable with even though she recognized that she was not completely familiar with them. Nevertheless, they signify a national inclusiveness that resonates across everyday environments.

Though initially, the erection of buildings and less permanent festive decorations may threaten a sense of belonging, rather than overwhelming local space with forms of difference that defamiliarize the local environment, such

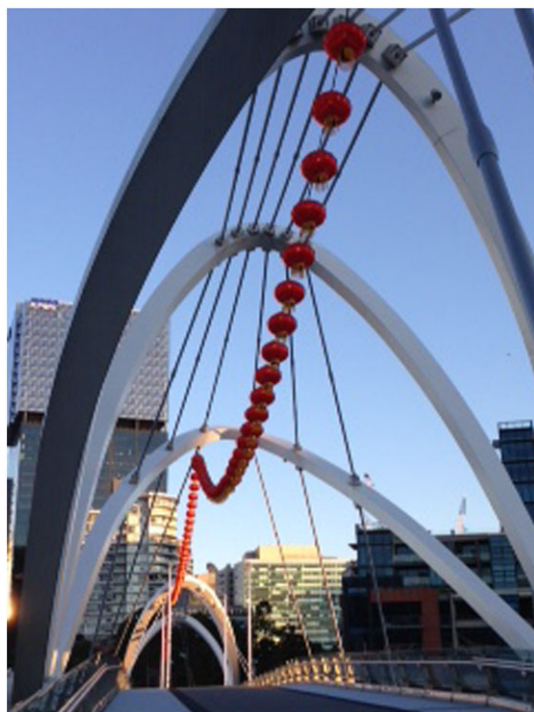


**Figure 5.** B's photo of the roofline of an Orthodox near his house. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

features are typically inserted into an already familiar realm in which they initially stand out but gradually become part of a familiar spatial palimpsest. Elements from elsewhere thus become contextualized within already existing regular arrangements, are spatially domesticated as they become woven into everyday routines and habits. Here, they have more enduringly come to stand as signifiers of Australianness (Figure 7).

Such hybrid forms continuously emerge, combining cultural influences in novel configurations of Australianness. A supplied the above drawing of the Australian Islamic Centre in Newport, in the suburbs of Melbourne, and explains:

This is a drawing by an architect called Glenn Murcutt of the Newport mosque. So Australia for me is like a palimpsest of cultures and every culture rewrites over the culture before and adapts bits of it. This is another culture, much to the horror of many people in Australia, a very ancient culture called Islam which is setting up community in Australia and the nice thing about this visualisation of the entrance to the mosque by Murcutt is that the Muslim community down there have allowed an Australian architect, of genius, to bring in an Australian narrative in terms of the use of light whilst always referencing the Muslim culture and that to me is a symbol of the fact that cultures can work and live together creatively and something extra can come out of that.

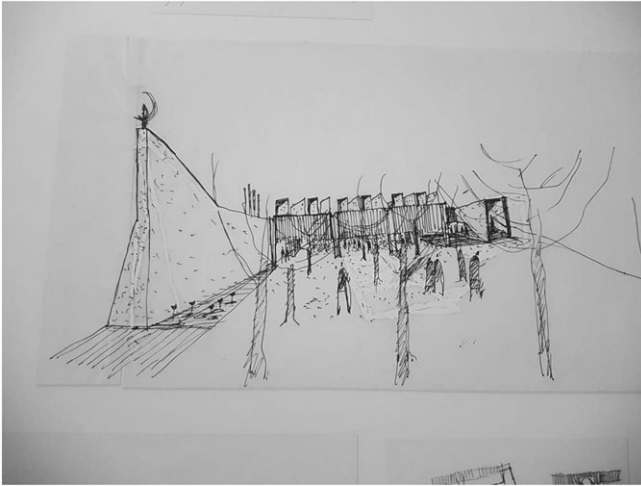


**Figure 6.** L's image of a footbridge festooned with lanterns for Chinese New Year. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

In describing her everyday work practice, B also described a similar recognition of the diverse skills and influences that contribute to creative practice, qualities that are part of what Wise and Velayutham (2014) term 'convivial multiculturalism'. As a homeware designer, B uses factories and workshops to cut, process and finish her fabric products, and in this account she describes a family-owned business that she has worked with for a long time, accompanied by an image showing a large roll of linen being cut by a special machine (Figure 8):

This guy's ... [he represents] the kind of people that I work with, this guy's an immigrant, he's a third or fourth generation immigrant, they started a factory ... I really like working with all these people with all their different stories ... there's a sense of family and community within that factory, and the way that they deal with me is an embodiment of that family, you know, it's not just business, we're all working on something together and we're all going to push it forward. [in terms of the nation] It's about the variety again of people that I work with and the kind of ethnicities, there are multiple ... this is how it is, these people are the people that have the knowledge and expertise ... and I really enjoy finding out about their traditions.

B values the experiences and expertise of the people that do this work and feels that her products are a form of collaboration with them; as we have argued above, this demonstrates everyday nationhood is a form of emergent



**Figure 7.** A's architectural drawing of a new mosque.



**Figure 8.** B's photo of a factory fabric cutter. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

assemblage. In B's case, this draws together people with different family and cultural backgrounds from her own; expertise demonstrated and embodied in working spaces; the machines, spaces and sensations that accompany them; and the longstanding immigrant history of this neighbourhood and its many small textile industries. B relies on a community of workers and factory owners to heat-set, cut, finish and wash her products, a process that relies on specialized skills in handling textiles so that they are not damaged and her design vision can be realized. In this case, it is through the fabric and production processes that B comes into contact with and shares knowledge and information far beyond material outcomes – as she says 'we're working on something together'. For her, multiculturalism is expressed through shared goals and collective manual effort in which relationships are enacted and built, and skills and knowledge are shared. In concert, these conjure a sense of identity that is both highly specific and routinized, embedded in the everyday but also identified as special and Australian by B herself after further consideration of her everyday work practices and encounters.

For B, the skill and expertise were a significant part of what she valued about the encounter with the fabric cutter she photographed. This was entangled with his personal history of immigration and a 'sense of family and community' that she felt included in, although her own cultural background was different. Noble (2009a) refers to the acceptance of people who are different as 'unpanicked multiculturalism', contrasting it with the 'panicked multiculturalism' which has dominated debates on cultural and religious diversity – and B hints at how this might flow between people of different backgrounds, rather than just being extended from one, dominant group to another less powerful one. Our participants show how this can be built upon: their approach to multiculturalism is not merely 'civil' or 'unpanicked', but one of actively valuing it as an aspect of Australianness that they experience regularly.

A fresh food market was another example of an everyday site at which a sense of everyday nationhood emerged from the mix of diverse cultural tastes and cuisines, and echoes A's remarks about the food grown in domestic gardens in contributing to emergent national consumption practices and diets. In this case, a visit to Footscray market in an inner-city neighbourhood with a high migrant population was prompted by showing an overseas visitor around, and this attuned D to what was significant and valuable as signified in the photographs he took (Figures 9 and 10):

I feel like Melbourne and Australia in general is a place, which more people want to come here than leave. It's very common to meet people who weren't born here or whose parents weren't born here. There's a celebration of that in this photo, two people originally from the UK who met in Australia were outside the Footscray market, which I think is a really fantastic place that's one of the best places in Melbourne. It's really cheap; there's lots of unusual stuff from all around the world. It's a little bit grimy, you've got cherries, the English fruit next to dragon fruit, so I think there's an





**Figures 9 and 10.** D's photos of Footscray market. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

interesting juxtaposition there between this traditional European Anglo food with traditional Vietnamese food.

Like the tram, the market is a space of 'situated multiplicity' in which people come to affectively and sensorially feel at home. By routinely encountering serial spatial designs, commercial signs and the 'sounds and smells that circulate the flows of bodies' in spaces such as 'markets, bazaars and communal gardens' (Amin, 2008: 16), or car boot sales (Rogaly and Qureshi, 2013) and corner shops, people come to feel at home with this super-diversity in ways that are almost banal (Wessendorf, 2014). Wise (2010a, 2010b) describes such venues as 'transversal places' where intercultural encounters and relationships are formed, and Noble (2009a: 52) contends that this enables the creation of 'a set of relatively stable relations and ways of intercultural being which emerge out of sustained practices of accommodation and negotiation'. D anticipates the

diverse people and products that co-exist in the market, in an inclusive, somewhat loosely regulated space, and suggests that it symbolizes how Melbourne normatively welcomes and incorporates those who have arrived from elsewhere. This is further underlined by the banal assemblages produced on food stalls on which produce of various provenance are companionably arrayed.

While such produce, its tastes and scents, has initially served to provide domestic and cultural sustenance for migrants, it is also experienced and subsequently consumed by longer-term residents. Rhys-Taylor highlights the integral role of the senses in establishing a shared sense of belonging by focusing on a hyper-diverse street market in east London. Here, 'a habituated and embodied familiarity with aggregate sensoria of the market emerges' (2013: 399), a blend of affective and sensory experience that emerges out of a mundane cosmopolitan disposition to experiment, but also from the economic strategies adopted by traders to appeal to a wider constituency than their fellow migrants. Such traders, he asserts, have become 'important facilitators in the transcultural connections that characterise the social fabric of the locale' (ibid: 401). Though sensory experiences, especially of taste and smell, have been deployed to inscribe difference in exclusionary ways, to express disgust and signify that certain things and people are out of place, in this context, it is more appropriate to talk of senses as promoting 'an osmosis between cultures that underpins the production of convivial forms of metropolitan multiculturalism' (ibid: 399). Perhaps most critically, Footscray market is a shared space that is not subject to stringent control and surveillance, and more specifically, is less subject to the sensory regulation that pervades many other urban areas, underpinning Amin's (2008: 9) contention that less regulated spaces are most open to new influences and changes, offer the greatest potential for fostering 'a civic culture of tolerated multiplicity and shared commons'. Other everyday sites identified by our participants that offer banal encounters with sensory and social diversity are beaches, sporting centres, small shops, restaurants, playgrounds, parks and the streets of the central business district.

A final enduringly symbolic site of everyday multiculturalism in Melbourne, as for many other Australian cities, is the port. Passing the area of Port Phillip on their daily travels, both A and I focused their attention on how this serves as a banal signifier of Australia's maritime connections, its history of immigration and the settlement of people who came by sea, beginning with white settlement in the late 18th century and extending to the ironies of contemporary political debates about the demonization of 'boat arrivals' (Figures 11 and 12).

A focused upon the giant and venerable Station Pier which has hosted a succession of sea-going vessels over more than a century and a half:

This really illustrates that Australia is a land of cities by the sea ... That's three cruise boats at station pier ... Other than airfreight, everything comes to Australia and leaves Australia by sea. That's a huge connection and you can go down here and they'll be seven or eight big boats. You look at the port; one of the biggest ports in Australia and this is people coming to visit. And that's station pier where thousands and





**Figures 11 and 12.** A and I both took photos of Port Phillip Bay. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

thousands of immigrants were dropped. That's its connection with the wider world and was reliant on this shipping network for our livelihood.

I photographically recorded his regular weekend sailing jaunt, and developed a more critical perspective about how Port Phillip Bay stood for troubling national histories:

The is the bay, this is Port Phillip and it's such a big part of Melbourne and ports are such a big part of Australia and also just the whole sailing thing that's how people, white people ... [and] ... people who came across through Indonesia, Timor, they came on boats as well. This is what the nation's about, this is how people got here. It's funny that in the old days, Cook was lauded for getting here on a boat, whereas these days

refugees are demonized for getting here on boats. So it's interesting how that whole thing has completely turned full circle, even in the post-Vietnam war when the Vietnamese boat people came, they were ... still looked upon with some degree of admiration for doing that trip. Now people who are coming here, are, you know, it's the same thing, it's just a different political spin put on it.

Connected to the world via the sea from pre-colonial eras through colonialism and the current age of increased global connections, everyday spaces through which flows of people, goods, ideas and money have flowed proliferate in Australian cities. National identity is continually recomposed by multiple cultural, material and economic elements that come from elsewhere, and has been integral to the formation of modern Australian national identity. Despite the current exclusionary political clamour that surrounds contemporary migration, our participants recognize that this ongoing, mundane process is part of everyday national life. Furthermore, for several participants, ports and boats articulated the complexity of immigration as well as British colonialism and the dispossession of Aboriginal people that accompanied it. Further, they exemplified the ongoing development of Australian multiculturalism and connectedness to the wider world as goods and people continue to flow to Australia.

## Conclusions

This paper has explored how, by adopting one methodological approach, we might substantively investigate the banal reproduction of national identity. Through this approach, we have demonstrated how nationhood is entangled with everyday spaces, treating it as inseparable from routine quotidian experience, emergent and meaningful as we make our way through the world, rather than pre-existing and discrete. We have underpinned how sensations, affects and meanings of nationhood emerge through the unreflexive apprehension of quotidian realms and that these feelings and understandings can be articulated once participants become attuned to particular sites, practices and objects. Though we never sought to undertake a comprehensive survey of attitudes about multiculturalism, or even explore this aspect of Australianness, based on empirical research, we have chosen to honour the accounts and photographs of participants in their unanimous but unsolicited focus on the multicultural dimensions of their experience of the national. All these unsolicited responses construed multiculturalism as a positive dimension of the nation; none espoused any negative opinions about multicultural everyday experiences. We have thus endeavoured to demonstrate the many ways in which it is entangled with everyday experiences and understandings of national identity, part of the flow of mundane, quotidian Melbourne existence. In hybrid, nodal spaces of multiculturalism, and in their encounters with the people, things and immaterial qualities of the environments they dwell in, our participants build up a picture of Australian nationhood that is enmeshed in the quotidian, with meanings constantly remade in their everyday worlds. Furthermore, we have emphasized that quotidian experience is not merely

marked by shared symbolic meanings and discourses but also by non-discursive affects and sensations.

Nunn contends that people 'belong in different ways to multiple sites and collectivities, and at varying scales of experience' (2017: 218). By revealing emergent modes of attunement by our adoption of photo-elicitation as empirical method, we have shown how such categories of belonging devolve within the changing configurations of everyday life, and are here grounded in local/national urban spaces. As our participants explained their routine activities and movements through Melbourne's streets, offices, factories and public transport, they identified particular sites in which multiculturalism – often conceived as an abstract concept – was particularly manifest and tangible. These were points of everyday spatial intersection, shared with those who they recognized as having different social or cultural backgrounds. In such shared spaces, people encountered forms of everyday nationhood that they understood as 'Australian'. Antonsich and Skey warn that construals of an undifferentiated national mass of people united in affective and emotional communion can obscure differences of ethnicity, age, class and gender and thereby obfuscate their different positionalities. However, they also acknowledge that powerful atmospheres or shared emotional experiences can potentially bring together diverse people, foregrounding how 'an affective nationalism might resonate with the progressive idea of a plural, inclusive nation' (2016: 1). In this context, in their account of shared spaces in Sydney and Singapore, Wise and Velayutham (2014) observe that social researchers have tended to focus on the problems and points of conflict rather than more positive accounts of everyday intercultural conviviality, thereby contributing to pessimistic appraisals that multiculturalism 'has not worked'. Like us, they follow Gilroy's (2004) depiction of convivial cultures, honouring the modest, fleeting ways in which urban dwellers negotiate difference in creative, adaptive ways in everyday practice, sharing mundane spaces convivially, affectively and sensually.

The accounts of our research participants are mostly set in the inner suburbs and business areas of Melbourne where they live, commute, work, shop and play. The streets, parks, squares and other shared spaces are commonly conceived as sites of encounter and formation of civic culture, venues that have been purposefully constructed 'to manage public space in ways that build sociality and civic engagement out of the encounter between strangers' (Amin 2008: 6). Critically – and this seems to be borne out in our research – Amin contends that public spaces that are lightly regulated, non-hierarchically organized or over-determined by stringent policing or a rigid plan, open to new influences and change, contain the greatest potentialities for fostering 'a civic culture of tolerated multiplicity and shared commons' (ibid: 8). They allow a wide variety of humans and non-humans to encounter each other and offer wide scope for diverse social and cultural practices. The provision of such sites appears imperative in fostering the kinds of convivial settings in which our participants feel at home and experience a sense of national belonging.

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