

# Introduction: Below Peace Agreements: Everyday Nationalism or Everyday Peace?

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## Funding information

Arts and Humanities Research Council, Grant/Award Number: AH/P005365/1

## KEYWORDS

everyday nationalism, Kosovo, national identity, peacebuilding, post-conflict, reconciliation

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

This themed section brings together the scholarship on everyday nationalism and everyday peacebuilding to better understand national identity production and reproduction in post-conflict societies. It elucidates the role of power hierarchies in these processes through the empirical analysis of actors, agency, and action at the intergroup and intragroup levels. The articles lie at the intersection of bottom-up and top-down approaches, which enable them to study the complex interaction between everyday dynamics and existing institutional frameworks in societies affected by conflict. The themed section addresses the question: how are national identities engaged, reinforced, or transformed through everyday practices and processes in a peacebuilding context? Our perspective on how nationalism and national identity are produced and reproduced is not normatively loaded—either positively or negatively. We show the complexity of nationalism and the numerous, sometimes unpredictable, roles that it can play in the context of peacebuilding, where producers and consumers of national symbols change frequently and where the formal and informal domains are not strictly delineated. This approach allows us to theorize about human agency, reflexivity, and normativity in both nationalism and peacebuilding.

In order to study how everyday practices reinforce or transform polarized national identities in the aftermath of conflict, we look at the level below formal peace agreements, where everyday processes can be observed and analysed. Our analysis contributes to the scholarship on peacebuilding, which thus far has been preoccupied with peace agreements and their institutional effects. The emergence of an everyday perspective in peacebuilding and nationalism studies reflects a broader cross-disciplinary shift towards investigation of everyday, bottom-up dynamics

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in sociology, security, politics, international political economy, transnationalism, citizenship, ethnicity, and multiculturalism, among others. Everyday nationalism investigates individuals, their agency, and their interaction with the symbols, rituals, and identities of the nation (Knott, 2015). It shares with banal nationalism its focus on the representation and reproduction of nationalism in everyday life and popular culture and engages explicitly with nationalism of ordinary people (Antonsich, 2015; Billig, 1995; Edensor, 2002; Fox & Miller-Idriss, 2008). Everyday nationalism is a critique of the top-down and state-centric approach and focus on elites and institutions in nationalism studies (Cohen, 1996; Condor, 2010; Hearn, 2007; Knott, 2015) at the expense of ordinary people and everyday processes. Similarly, the “local turn” in the critical peacebuilding literature, with its focus on the everyday (Boege, Brown, Clements, & Nolan, 2009; Mac Ginty, 2008; Richmond, 2011), rejects the reductionist conceptualization of peace in terms of the one-way implementation of economic (free market) and political liberalization from the global core to the periphery (Cunliffe, 2012; Paris, 1997) and their state-level effects at the domestic level. Scholars of critical peace and conflict studies have called for a shift in emphasis from the state, its institutions, and its elites to communities and citizens (Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013; Sharp, 2014).

These shifts have revealed “historical blind spots” in our understanding and study of peacebuilding and nationalism (Sharp, 2014, p. 166) and paved the way for investigation of plurality of actors and complexity of political, cultural, and social processes. However, there have been no efforts to date to bring these two analytical perspectives together, which this themed section does. Theories of everyday peacebuilding and bottom-up peace formation (Richmond, 2013) help us theorize the role of power in everyday nationalism, while everyday nationalism brings the consideration of identity to the study of everyday peacebuilding. We situate construction and reconfiguration of national identity at the intersection of the bottom-up and top-down dynamics shaped by institutional constraints and exercise of emancipatory agency in a peacebuilding context.

## 2 | AGENCY, REFLEXIVITY, AND NORMATIVITY IN EVERYDAY APPROACHES

Ideas of human agency, reflexivity, and normativity figure in both everyday nationalism and everyday peacebuilding in different ways, but they have not been brought into a dialogue with everyday nationalism and peacebuilding to study national identity formation. By exploring the emancipatory potential of human agency, reflexivity of practice, and the normativity of bottom-up agency, the articles in this themed section advance our understanding of everyday nationalism by investigating formative dynamics in the assertion, transformation, and engagement of national identities in the post-conflict context and their effects on post-conflict peacebuilding and reconciliation. The articles assume that neither a top-down nor a bottom-up approach in isolation can reveal how everyday interactions unfold within existing institutional frameworks in fluid post-conflict environments. Our approach recognizes limitations of the analytical pursuit of the concepts of agency and reflexivity that overlook the intersection between top-down and bottom-up processes. Everyday approaches can lead to a binary understanding of the top-down and bottom-up, the everyday and the elite, and the international and the local (a critique that has also been made of critical peacebuilding; see Paffenholz, 2015). In addition, on their own, they risk simultaneously overstating and understating the critique of the effects of peace agreements through an exclusive focus on institutional effects and an inability to capture ongoing processes in the realm of the mundane. Similarly, an approach that focuses on bottom-up human agency may overlook the impact of institutional frameworks within which human agents exist and operate (Malešević, 2013, p. 130). Ultimately, in a broader context of post-Cold War liberal peacebuilding, where the importance of local processes has gained increased importance in understanding the challenges of overcoming conflict, the themed section makes the case for considering the importance of identity construction as a symbolic dimension of peace rooted in the structural configuration of institutional infrastructure and power hierarchies within it.

## 2.1 | The emancipatory potential of human agency

Human agency, defined as actions that build the social and institutional nature of both peacebuilding and nationalism, is crucial to explaining everyday processes, as well as the responses they elicit (Kostovicova & Glasius, 2011, p. 14). Peacebuilding and nationalism do not operate with uniform, homogenous national audiences, which means that their messages are not always consistently consumed, articulated, and mobilized (Antonsich, 2015; Skey, 2011). Approaches from above regard the everyday as passive and unconscious, failing to take into account how individuals daily and actively deliberate and practice these notions (Rossetto, 2015). Scholars of everyday peacebuilding argue that top-down approaches ignore ordinary individuals' agency and capacity to act by regarding the everyday as homogenous. They disregard the everyday effects of nationalism and conflict, their local roots, and the power relations they produce (Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013, p. 768). By doing so, they implicitly reproduce and naturalize existing hierarchies of power, ideology, and interest that hamper reconciliation (Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013). The focus on human agency in the everyday approaches to peacebuilding can be leveraged in order to unpack the role of power in everyday nationalism, which has thus far been largely ignored. This allows us to study emancipation by empathetically rethinking and reflecting on the (re)distribution of power (as well as authority, rights, and legitimacy). It forces us to recognize the complexity of the roles of individuals in these processes and study how individuals interact within existing institutional frameworks. We can understand these crucial aspects of nationalism and peacebuilding by examining the interaction between microlevel and macrolevel dynamics, by drawing from both bottom-up and top-down approaches, and by examining their intersection.

## 2.2 | Greater reflexivity of practice

In order to gain a better understanding of the role of power in relation to identity construction, it is necessary to engage with the reflexivity of practice embraced by scholars of everyday peacebuilding but largely overlooked in the scholarship on everyday nationalism. The reflexive critique of everyday peacebuilding can be leveraged in nationalism studies. By doing so, it opens this body of scholarship up to a more ethically sensitive approach to peace agreements that avoids creating new conflicts and dependencies, which often plague top-down approaches (Lidén, 2009). At the same time, we reveal bottom-up processes that are overshadowed by prioritizing the developments in the institutional domain. This analytical lens allows us to question our current understanding of nationalism as a static and binary concept that occurs only at the state or national level, on the one hand, or at the everyday level, on the other. By contrast, our approach takes into account the many layers between these two levels, as well as the numerous variations they take, resulting in a broader perspective on everyday nationalism, from which we can interrogate many assumptions of the field. For example, should analyses of everyday nationalism examine minority or majority groups? Or are the key processes underpinning everyday nationalism mobilization and legitimation, as well as their interaction?

## 2.3 | Addressing the normative assumptions of bottom-up agency

The study of both nationalism and peacebuilding is imbued with normative assumptions. A reflexive practice can help researchers of nationalism and peacebuilding approach their subjects from a position of greater normative open-mindedness by addressing and redressing power hierarchies and dominant ideologies. Peacebuilding is often accepted as unquestionably "good," while nationalism is often seen as unquestionably "bad" (Hansen, 2011). Through questioning prescribed normative labels, it is possible to better understand the complex and continuously shifting circumstances of everyday peace and reconciliation in which peace agreements operate. Top-down peacebuilding efforts can be undermined by everyday nationalism; the use of national symbols can aid bottom-up peacebuilding and although opposing discourses can compete, at times they can also work in concert with each other.

### 3 | BELOW PEACE AGREEMENTS: THE KOSOVO CASE STUDY

Kosovo offers a typical case of post-conflict peacebuilding. Peace agreements primarily address institutional processes and actors. The expectation is that the agreements' implementation will set on track peace and reconciliation processes in divided societies, even in cases when those agreements do not include special transitional justice provisions (Kissane, 2016, pp. 185–214; Caspersen, 2016; Fortna, 2003). Consequently, the processes that take place below the level of peace agreements, either those that are a response to their provisions or unfold independently of them, have largely remained out of the purview in both scholarly and practitioner communities. The single case approach allows us to analyse minute and varied dynamics of identity production and reproduction in this single case but to also make theoretical conclusions that are relevant to the universe of cases (Landman, 2008).

The conflict in Kosovo ended in 1999, following the NATO military intervention, without a peace agreement between Kosovo Albanians and the Serbian regime. Under the United Nations transitional administration (King & Mason, 2006; Visoka, 2016), a reversal of the former asymmetric power relations occurred within a context of a new frozen conflict (Fridman, 2013; Fridman, 2015). The weaknesses in the UN-led approach to peacebuilding in Kosovo led to another attempt at peacemaking under the auspices of the EU. In 2013, Kosovo and Serbia signed their first agreement on the normalization of their relations in Brussels (dubbed the “Brussels Agreement”). The 10-round negotiation process saw the two sides promoting very different understandings of the agreement (Ernst, 2014)—an ambiguity that continues well to the present day—without resolving differing views held by Serbs and Albanians on key provisions (Bieber, 2015). The result is a paradox: the implementation of the peace agreement lags, but the process of peacebuilding is still considered “ongoing” (Weber, 2016). The scholarly literature about postwar peacebuilding processes in the aftermath of the wars of Yugoslavia's offers insights informed by bottom-up approaches to peace and reconciliation, but it is limited by its almost exclusive empirical focus on postwar Bosnia-Herzegovina in anthropological studies of societal dynamics (Bougarel, Helms, & Duijzings, 2007; Helms, 2013; Hromadžić, 2008, 2015). Emerging bottom-up perspectives on post-conflict Kosovo have been informed by post-liberal peace approaches (Pavlović, Zaharijević, Pudar Draško, & Rigels, 2015; Richmond, 2006), a focus on local agency (Randazzo, 2017) and human security (Kostovicova, Martin & Bojicic-Dzellilovic, 2012). The articles in this themed section address a theoretical and empirical gap in the scholarship on Kosovo and Kosovo-Serbia relations by exploring the dynamics of everyday nationalism and everyday peacebuilding in tandem. They look how top-down and bottom-up processes intersect and interact in order to better understand varieties of everyday nationalism, as well as how nationalism is challenged and reproduced in post-conflict settings.

### 4 | EVERYDAY NATIONALISM AND EVERYDAY PEACE

By bringing together the scholarship on everyday nationalism and everyday peacebuilding, this themed section identifies and responds to undertheorized dimensions of the everyday in the context of societies affected by violent conflict. It encompasses the analysis of actors, agency, and actions both at the intergroup and at the intragroup level. With their rich empirical evidence, the articles attest to complexities and messiness at the level of the everyday. This complexity and messiness cannot be comprehended independently of power relations inherent in nationalism and national identity construction. The role of power hierarchies and the manner in which they are implicated in the production and reproduction of national identity have not been sufficiently understood. By engaging with the concepts of human agency, reflexivity, and normativity, these articles help us theorize and understand varied forms and implications of everyday nationalism, where producers and consumers of national symbols frequently change and are not necessarily strictly delineated across formal and informal domains.

Studying the intersection of everyday nationalism and everyday peacebuilding allows for greater awareness in the study of peace agreements. Such an approach can highlight the ambiguity of roles and meanings of actors and processes in reconciliation, which are often far messier than mechanistic frameworks suggest. Nationalist

mobilization can reappear even in stronger forms and sparks resistance to peace just as it can coexist with an absence of ethnic tensions in everyday life; at the same time, it can also reveal how top-down peacebuilding discourses can be co-opted for nationalist purposes at the level of the everyday or reinforce or even trigger more nationalist reactions to peacebuilding in post-conflict societies. Articles in this interdisciplinary themed section apply a qualitative approach to deconstruct bottom-up and top-down processes and outcomes, as well as their intersection.

Visoka's article examines how elites, monoethnic subterranean movements, and ordinary people can become obstacles to sustainable peace in the aftermath of conflict. His analysis applies both bottom-up and top-down perspectives to show that everyday nationalism involves peace-breaking dynamics, through vernacular acts, that can occur at any level of society and that can block pathways to peace (Visoka 2020). In order to counter this trend, everyday pacifist acts are required. In her contribution, Fridman (2020) investigates how processes of peace formation from below can counter both everyday and elite nationalism. She examines a bottom-up, civil society-based initiative aimed at transforming Serbia-Kosovo relations, the "mirëdita, dobar dan!" festival. The event challenges both everyday and elite nationalisms by connecting with civic identities of younger members of civil society and creating platforms that go beyond ethnicization. Krasniqi, Sokolić, and Kostovicova (2020) also highlight dynamic use and reconstitution of identity within a nation. They examine from an everyday nationalism perspective a public art installation in Kosovo aimed at tackling the stigma associated with wartime sexual violence. The project resonated with dominant and patriarchal discourses, thereby implicating itself in the reproduction of traditional gender roles in the everyday performance and articulation of Albanian nationhood. Finally, Luci and Schwandner-Sievers (2020) show how local and international actors operating in post-conflict environments can, in their attempts to address issues of reconciliation, reproduce nationalist narratives through everyday nationalism. Their anthropological approach, based on observing interactions between Western students on an exchange project in Kosovo, provides insights into outsider-insider dynamics in the context of hot nationalism and outside intervention.

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**How to cite this article:** Kostovicova D, Sokolić I, Fridman O. Introduction: Below Peace Agreements: Everyday Nationalism or Everyday Peace? *Nations and Nationalism*. 2020;26:424–430. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12595>