

## Nationalism as classification: suggestions for reformulating nationalism research

Alexander Maxwell\*

*School of History, Philosophy, Political Science & International Relations, Victoria University of Wellington, Wellington, New Zealand*

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Instead of thinking about “national identity,” scholars of nationalism would do well to study nationalism as a process of classification, treating national conflict as disputes over nationalized categories. Disputes over national classification take various forms: patriots argue over which category applies, which categories exist, and which categories have which status. Techniques for imposing classificatory categories also deserve attention. The contributors to this themed issue of *Nationalities Papers* illustrate the power of analysis based on classification.

**Keywords:** National identity; classification; nationalism theory

In recent years, scholars have often investigated the nation using “identity” as an analytical concept. Building on an existing critique in the theoretical literature, I suggest that the analysis of “identity” is poor tool for understanding the various phenomena normally studied under the broad umbrella of “nationalism,” such as nationalist rhetoric, nationalized politics, concepts of nationality, images of the nation, and so forth. The term “identity” has too many conflicting meanings: its use too often misleads, rather than clarifies. Several problems in the broader field of nationalism studies are more usefully analyzed as the study of classification. After briefly recapitulating some problems with the terminology of “identity,” this article will survey and differentiate various social, political, or historical problems that scholars might instead study as problems of classification.

Analyzing nationalism as “identity” has only recently attained its great popularity. Scholars of nationalism rarely used the term before World War II. Between 1800 and 1960, according to the Google Books database, no books used the words “national identity” in the title. Two book titles using the phrase appeared in the years from 1960 to 1970, and another two between 1971 and 1980, and six between 1981 and 1990. Since the collapse of Communism, however, scholars have taken to the term with enthusiasm. Fifty-one book titles using the words “national identity” appeared between 1991 and 2000, and over 100 between 2001 and 2010.<sup>1</sup>

Scholarly journals reflect the new terminological fashion. The founding editors of the journal *National Identities* opened the 1999 inaugural issue by proclaiming “to conceptualize and attempt to express the existence of a ‘nation’ is to ascribe to it a certain identity,”

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\*Email: [alexander.maxwell@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:alexander.maxwell@vuw.ac.nz)

since “only by seeking to answer the anterior question ‘what is national identity’ ... can we begin to approach the question ‘what is a nation’” (Editors 1999, 5–6). The journal has proved a success, and in 2005 began publishing four issues a year instead of three.

Much talk of “identity,” of course, transcends nationalism. Scholars also talk about gender identities, sexual identities, religious identities, linguistic identities, class identities, professional identities, and so forth. Several scholars have posited “multiple identities,” theorizing about the interaction between non-national and national “identities” either from a theoretical perspective (Tajfel 1981; Josselson and Harway 2012; Spickard 2013; Brubaker 2015), or in innumerable case studies.

Given how many scholars have recently been working through the lens of “identity,” inevitably some have done so in a sophisticated way. However, insightful studies typically rely on a plethora of modifying adjectives. For example, David Laitin’s work on “identity in formation,” for example, not only theorized two types of “national identities,” namely the “national revival” and “competitive assimilation,” but contrasted them with “personal identities,” “constructed social identities,” and “conglomerate identities” (Laitin 1998, 24–29, 14–15, 16–17, 31–32). Even if Laitin makes his terminology work, I nevertheless suggest that the issues he tackles as questions of “identity” could more succinctly and precisely be formulated with other analytical terms, and without the danger that modifying adjectives may be omitted.

Ambiguity is the main difficulty with the concept of “identity.” In a series of theoretical works, Siniša Malešević (2006, 3, 7; 2008, 273, 274) criticized it as “an umbrella term for anything and everything, a shortcut which evades the rigour of explanation,” as “conceptually and operationally deeply porous,” as a “conceptual chimera not worthy of serious analytical pursuit,” and as “theoretically vapid while also lacking clear empirical referents.” He urged scholars to shift attention instead towards “solidarity and ‘ideology.’” Even Malešević, furthermore, may not have fully grasped the ambiguities of “identity” terminology. When he complained that various nationalist phenomena provide no “reliable proof of the existence of a durable, stable, and monolithic entity called ‘national identity,’” for example, Malešević (2008, 275) neglected those scholars who posit transient, unstable or internally diverse national identities.

In their influential article for *Theory and Society*, Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper systematically documented multiple contradictory meanings embedded in the term “identity.” Different scholars, they show, variously use the term to discuss both “self-identification and the identification and categorization of oneself by others” (2000, 15), to discuss both something “situational and contextual” and something solid, immutable, or enduring, and to describe both collectives encompassing large numbers of people, and to the individual in implicit opposition to society at large. In short, the word evokes both halves of three different binary opposites: self-professed vs. externally applied, enduring vs. ephemeral, and individual vs. collective. These three binary dichotomies imply  $2 \times 2 \times 2 = 8$  different situations. Brubaker and Cooper rightly conclude that “identity” is “a term so infinitely elastic as to be incapable of performing serious analytical work” (2000, 11).

Since scholars use the word “identity” for so many situations, to describe so many diametrically opposed things, it is unsuitable for communicating any one of those things. Scholars should even prefer a terminology that obfuscates to one that misleads. If scholarly works force their readers to guess which of Brubaker and Cooper’s eight situations is intended, readers may guess wrongly without realizing that they have misunderstood. The problems with identity-based terminology may have inspired a memorable remark from Stuart Hall (2000, 26) that Foucault “would not commit anything so vulgar as actually to deploy the term ‘identity.’” Yet the crime of vulgarity is ultimately a misdemeanor

against taste: a substantive argument may be made in a vulgar fashion, and fashions may change. Ambiguity and misdirection, by contrast, are more serious charges, since they threaten the heart of the scholarly endeavor. Scholars seeking precision often express themselves in an opaque jargon that restricts their ideas to narrow circles of fellow initiates. Replacing such jargon with clear terminology is a struggle worth fighting.

Even scholars restricting their attention to national, nationalized, or nationalizable “identities” must confront the full ambiguity of the term, since all the various permutations of “identity” can serve as vehicles for nationalism. The phenomenon of “Arabness,” for example, is a category that government authorities might assign to a large number of people, implicitly transforming them into a group. The category “Arab” has, for example, appeared in Indian censuses since the era of the British Raj (Khan 1893, 83), though, interestingly, it only appeared as a British census category in 2011 (Aspinall and Song 2014, 211). The Israeli census, meanwhile, recognizes neither “Arabs” nor “Palestinians:” it instead counts Muslims, Christians, or Druze (Goldscheider 2002, 78). The administrative procedures through which non-Arab governments assign or deny Arabness to a minority population thus demonstrably depend on time and place and thus form a worthy object of study. In short, Arabness, as an “identity,” may be studied as something externally applied, enduring, and collective.

Yet Arabness is also something that an individual may experience or articulate in a transient and fleeting context. Transient and fleeting “identities” leave few traces in the historical record, but anthropologists and sociologists routinely observe them in fieldwork. An informant born in Damascus might normally feel nationally indifferent, or Muslim, or experience a primary loyalty to Syria, or to the Alawite community, or any number of possible collectives. Yet this hypothetical Syrian might suddenly and transiently experience a sense of Arabness if Muslims of Pakistani origin were to insult her and an Egyptian friend in the community center of a Birmingham mosque. In short, “Arabness” may also manifest itself as something self-professed, ephemeral, and individual. Arabness can also arise in all of the eight contexts defined by Brubaker and Cooper’s three dichotomies, even if imagining relevant scenarios for the remaining six contexts is left as an exercise for the reader.

Many of the difficulties of “identity” might be avoided by turning the abstract noun into an active verb because the study of “identification,” as opposed to the study of “identity,” encourages scholars to specify the identifying subject(s) and identified object(s). A scholarly discussion of “Arab identity” invites misunderstanding; scholars could make more progress discussing which political or historical agents “identify” someone or something as Arab, when, and why.

Yet even the terminology of “identification” is broader than some of its proponents realize. Maykel Verkuyten, for example, has wrongly insisted that “identification ... refers to one’s subjective relationship to a category” (2014, 50). In practice, the verb “identify” easily extends across the dichotomies “self-professed vs. externally ascribed” and “individual vs. collective.” Government census-takers in India, Britain, or Israel who identify “Arabs” as a collective, rather than themselves as individuals, fail to meet Verkuyten’s definition, yet an analysis of census practices remains a process of identification. Rather than discuss “Arab identity,” a study of Arabism in census figures would do better to defy Verkuyten and posit “practices of identification.”

Since a historical actor who identifies something (or someone) has also classified it; however, any object of identification is also the object of classification. In such contexts, the two terminologies articulate roughly the same meaning. Brubaker and Cooper (2000, 14) treated them as essentially interchangeable when suggesting “identification and

classification” as profitable sites of inquiry. Nevertheless, “classification” remains the better analytical term. Scholars may use theoretical introductions to explain that “identities” are contingent and constructed, yet an “identity” appears to have an existence independent of the identifier and identified. The terminology of “classification,” by contrast, automatically foregrounds who is doing the classifying and what is being classified. It facilitates precision and communication by removing the possibility of inadvertent ambiguity. Scholars thus have nothing to lose but something to gain by training themselves to think of “classification” instead of “identification.”

Different aspects of the classificatory process correspond to different phenomena studied as “nationalism.” A brief survey of nationalized classification politics illustrates the potential diversity of research projects. Note that while the discussion below repeatedly refers to “conflicts” over classification, such “conflicts” need not imply violence: the word here encompasses a broad spectrum ranging from “military struggles” through “political disputes” to “intellectual disagreements.”

One might distinguish three basic types of classificatory disputes, all of which potentially make good objects of analysis. They are: (1) conflicts over which category applies, (2) conflicts over which categories exist, and (3) conflicts over the status of categories. Additionally, the study of (4) techniques for imposing categories puts intellectual disagreements into an administrative, institutional, or political context.

### **Conflicts over which category applies**

Insofar as a claim to national possession requires a patriot to apply an ethnonym, one can interpret many nationalist conflicts as disputes over classification. The patriot claims that a favored ethnonym applies, and that rival ethnyonyms do not. This most basic type of conflict over classification has attracted widespread attention.

Territorial disputes, for example, involve two attempts to apply a particular ethnonym to a contested territory. Is Alsace French or German? Is Kashmir Indian or Pakistani? Is Transylvania Hungarian or Romanian? Who can rightly claim Macedonia? Possession disputes often become particularly intense around important cities, which often become objects of vigorous national contestation. Is Jerusalem Israeli or Palestinian? Or, to give a historical example, should one speak of German Danzig or Polish Gdańsk, or multiethnic “Danzig/Gdańsk,” or something else entirely? Possession disputes may involve military or political conflict, but also encompass cultural struggles over symbolic ownership. For example, patriots routinely contest place names, their etymologies, or their legitimate applicability (Berg and Vuolteenaho 2009).

Territorial disputes often imply other sorts of classificatory conflict. Some scholars have, for example, distinguished between “legal and political” territorial disputes (Sharma 1997, 30–33), but political disputes often contest the applicability of sundry legal categories. For example, arguments about applying the designation *terra nullius* have political consequences relevant to national claims in the Pacific (Frost 1981; Watson 2002; Connor 2005), Canada (Bryan 2000; Asch 2002), Africa (Simpson 1993; Geisler 2012), or Scandinavia (Gormley 1966; Ulfstein 1995). If the leaders of a settler society claim legitimacy on the basis of *terra nullius*, indigenous intellectuals may contest that legitimacy by contesting the designation’s applicability. In this sense, a dispute over legal status, like a dispute over a city’s proper name, serves as a proxy for disputing legitimate possession.

Nationalists may also contest the application of national categories to groups of people. Political leaders and urban intellectuals often devise conflicting claims to rural populations.

Were Galician peasants Poles or Ukrainians? Are Kashmiri peasants Indians or Pakistanis? Analyzing such conflicts as classification disputes highlights a phenomenon that patriots themselves typically conceal, and that subsequent generations sometimes find surprising: the agents of classification are usually classifying others, not themselves. Andrew Burghardt (1973, 232) rightly noted that “although the peasantry formed the basis for many nationalist claims, these claims were almost always stated and urged by urbanites, generally by intellectuals of the capital city.” Conflicts over rural territory are too often framed as a conflict between “groups,” rather than competitions between competing urban intelligentsias. Either way, however, ethnographic classification may have territorial consequences. A disagreement about the ethnographic classification of peasants, who should be presumed nationally indifferent, can also become a territorial dispute, since the principle of national self-determination transforms a national claim to a rural peasantry into a national claim to the land they till.

Nevertheless, competing ethnographic classifications may articulate claims to people independent of territorial aspirations. For example, rival patriots often contest the proper classification of diaspora populations. Before World War I, both the Hungarian government and Slavic diaspora intelligentsias proclaimed symbolic rights to represent Slovak and Ruthenian migrants in the United States (Frank 1996). People who migrated from the Turkish Republic to the Federal Republic of Germany, to give a more current example, may find patriotic entrepreneurs variously attempting to mobilize them as Turks, Germans, or Kurds (Bruinessen 1998; Lyon and Uçarer 2001; Østergaard-Nielsen 2003).

Nationalists, finally, contest the application of national categories to practices, objects, or symbols. In 2006, for example, Greeks, Turks, and Arabs also fought the so-called Baklava war to proclaim national ownership of the famous dessert (Roufs and Roufs 2014, 153). Adela Peeva’s (2003) film “Whose is this song?” similarly documented Bulgarian, Turkish, Greek, Albanian, Bosnian, Macedonian, and Serbian claims to the same folk melody. Intellectuals may proclaim national ownership of prestigious monuments, historical figures, or artifacts. Current Greek and (Slavo-) Macedonian claims to the legacy of the star of Vergina, and to the ancient Macedonian heritage generally, have attracted considerable scholarly attention, both by scholars participating in the debate (Papavizas 2006; Shea 2008; Tziampiris 2011) and scholars fascinated by the salience of ancient symbols in contemporary politics (Roudometof 1996; Danforth 1997, 28–55). Patriots also contest the symbolic ownership of historical figures as national symbols. Sticking with the Macedonian example, Alexander the Great (Danforth 1997, 163–174) has become the object of symbolic contestation. More generally, patriotic intelligentsias dispute symbolic ownership of scientists, authors, painters, explorers, or other cultural heroes.

### **Conflicts over which categories exist**

While insisting on the applicability of one particular category, participants may go so far as to deny the existence of a rival category. In disputes of the first type, patriots on both sides proclaim “your category does not apply here, mine applies instead.” In disputes of this second type, patriots of one side tell the other: “your category does not exist.”

Separatists and their allies often deny the existence of overarching national categories. Irish, Welsh, or Scottish patriots, for example, routinely deny the existence of a “British nation.” Proclamations of national non-existence are easy to document. Political figures denying the existence of a Czechoslovak nation, for example, emerged among Czechoslovakia’s external enemies in Hungary and Germany (Observer 1938, 17, 25; Hitler 1944, 240), Slovak patriots in the Slovak diaspora (Hrobak 1958, 5, 12), and Slovak patriots



within Slovakia itself (Braunius 1939, 178; Rychlík 1995, 352). Denying the existence of an overarching category evidently makes an attractive strategy for struggling leaders of an otherwise subordinate group.

Alternatively, opponents of separatism may deny the status or existence of a subordinate group. During the first Czechoslovak republic, various Czech patriots saw Slovaks as a subcategory of Czechoslovaks, which they in practice treated as a subcategory of Czechs. The end result was to deny Slovak national existence. As Tomas G. Masaryk, Czechoslovakia's first president, proclaimed in 1921, "there is no Slovak nation. That is the invention of Magyar propaganda. The Czechs and Slovaks are brothers" (cited from Leff 1988, 138). Turkish nationalists have also denied the existence of Kurds by positing instead "Mountain Turks" (Gunter 1988). Chinese nationalists similarly reject the notion of a Taiwanese nation, viewing the island and its people as straightforwardly "Chinese" (Schubert 2008, 86). A certain symmetry governs such professions of national non-existence, since a proclamation of Taiwanese, Kurdish, or Slovak national distinctiveness necessarily comes at the expense of wider Chinese, Turkish, or Czech(oslovak) aspirations. Supporters of Chinese, Turkish, and Czech(oslovak) aspirations have thus denied the existence of subordinate nations to justify the legitimacy of a broader national concept.

Patriots may also refuse to recognize a category without seeking to claim ownership of its population, but simply in the hope of denying legitimacy to opposing political claims. Israelis, for example, often deny the existence of a Palestinian nation without arguing that Palestinians really belong to the category "Israeli" because a Palestinian nation would implicitly possess the right to a Palestinian state, while undifferentiated "Arabs" could, perhaps, be settled in extant Arab states (Yost and Bassiouni 1971; Kelman 1992; McMahon 2010). Article 20 of the 1968 Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) charter reciprocally denied the existence of an Israeli nation without claiming Israelis as Palestinians, suggesting instead that Jews "are citizens of the states to which they belong." The widespread tendency to assume that "nations" have legitimate claims to statehood explains the popularity of denying nationhood: by refusing to acknowledge a "nation," one denies its representatives the right to legitimate statehood, or more generally the right to make political demands.

States often use their authority to impose a certain formulation of group loyalty by insisting on one category at the expense of another. Israel's Supreme Court, to give a striking example, has denied the existence of an Israeli nation, insisting: "there is no Israeli nation separate from the Jewish people" (Rejwan 1999, 45). The rejection of "Israeli" as a legitimate national category obviously means something rather different when professed by the Israeli Supreme Court than when professed by the PLO. State actors have also participated in recent debates over the proper formulation of Bosnian loyalties: in terms of citizenship and nationality (Andjelić 2012), or in terms of ethnicity and religion (Dimitrova 2001).

Other denials of nationhood arise from theoretical concerns about the criteria for forming a legitimate nationality. When political thinkers apply the national criteria of their own society to another context, they sometimes reach surprising conclusions. One Georgian archpriest, presumably accustomed to deriving nationhood from imagined confessional homogeneity, memorably denied the nationhood of the United States: "America is not a nation; it is a mixture of different ethnicities" (cited in Gavashelishvili 2012, 126). This proclamation apparently has little to do with the archpriest's understanding of the United States; one suspects his true aim was to rally a domestic audience behind the Georgian Orthodox church as the foundation of Georgian nationhood. Political theorists have similarly followed the logic of their definitions to similar conclusions. Hannah

Arendt (2003, 199) also proclaimed that “the United States is not a nation-state in the European sense and never was,” since American elites formulate national unity “independent of a homogenous population and of a common past.” Seeking to analytically distinguish the “nation” from the “state,” Walker Connor (1978, 303) analogously concluded that Americans “are not a nation in the pristine sense of the word.” Modifiers such as “pristine” or “the European sense” perhaps hint at Arendt and Connor’s unease when confronted with a national category vigorously proclaimed according to unfamiliar criteria.

The criteria of legitimate nationality have varied considerably in time and place. Religion played a central role defining nationality within the Ottoman Empire, while in the Habsburg context, linguistic criteria proved more important. Racial criteria became popular in the nineteenth century, and lost that popularity after World War II. Categories often appear or disappear due to changing ideas about how to classify closely related peoples.

Indeed, lists of nation or nationalized categories perpetually change even when the criteria of nationhood remain stable. Comparing linguistic taxonomies of the Slavic peoples over time reveals that several categories have both appeared and disappeared over the last two hundred years, though fragmentation appears the dominant trend since new categories continually establish themselves. Today, to give a specific example, almost everybody recognizes a distinct Ukrainian nation, but in the past, several observers perceived only a “Little Russian” region within the Russian world (Kohut 1986; Maxwell 2015). Both politicians and ethnographers have also changed their minds about how many Turkic nations exist in Central Asia (Gladney 1996; Khalid 1999, 199–215; Hirsh 2005; Ubiria 2016, 148–71). Disputed national taxonomies thus arise not only as proxies for political conflict, but also from different philosophies of classification.

Disagreement between what biologists call “lumpers and splitters” has long characterized the history of biological taxonomies (Simpson 1945; Endersby 2009). One zoologist, specifically analyzing “lumpers and splitters of higher taxa in ciliate systematics,” urged “greater self-criticism and greater caution” in the act of classification (Corliss 1976, 430). Racial classifiers, mimicking biological methodology, have often become embroiled in similar disputes (Lieberman 1968; Gates 1997; Hochschild 2000; Lie 2004, 55–97), and while debates over racial classification have strongly influenced national thinking (Dikötter 2008), Michael Lieber (1997, 56) rightly observed that “in almost any field of classification there are lumpers and splitters.”

The emergence of new national categories has become a popular object of study. The influential work of Eric Hobsbawm (1994) has turned the “invention” of nations into a standard trope of nationalism studies. Scholars have discussed the invention of numerous nation-states, including Canada (Sandercock 2009; Zeller 2009), Egypt (Coury 1982), Iraq (Dodge 2003), Jordan (Fathi 1994), Lebanon (Firro 2002), Lithuania (Zake 2007), Serbia (Lazarević 2011), Singapore (Ortmann 2010), the United States (Wills 2002; Vidal 2004; Rakove 2010), and Uzbekistan (Kurzman 1999). Indeed, one London publisher has an “inventing the nation” series, so far covering China (Harrison 2001), Italy (Doumanis 2001), Russia (Tolz 2001), Ireland (Comerford 2003), Germany (Berger 2004), France (Baycroft 2008), South Africa (Johnston 2014), and Spain (Humblebæk 2015). The terminology of “invention” also appeals to scholars studying sub-state “ethnicities,” including Hispanics (Etzioni 2002) and Jews (Moore 1999; Sand 2009; Conforti 2012), or scholars of national movements emerging from a collapsing colonial empire, such as Guatemala and Costa Rica (Palmer 1991), or India and Pakistan (Talbot 2000).

The disappearance of categories, by national contrast, has attracted less attention. Even Larry Wolff (2002), who wrote an interesting study about the decline and fall of “Morloci”

as an ethnographic category, presented his narrative as the rise of “Dalmatia.” The spectacular collapse of Yugoslavia, however, provides a notable exception: several scholars have written about the failure of Yugoslavism (Wachtel 1998; Pavković 1999; Lampe 2000; Djokić 2003; Hudson 2003; Suppan 2003). Imperial decline has inspired scholars to consider the decline of nationalized, or at least nationalizable, categories, such as “Soviet” (Lieven 1998; Bassin and Kelly 2012) or “British” (Meaney 2001; Rush 2011). Nevertheless, most scholars have preferred to study the rise of national loyalties rather than the decline of imperial loyalties. In general, failed categories and failed national movements offer rich and relatively untouched material for further investigation.

### Conflicts over the status of categories

The emergence of national categories often involves the reinterpretation of an existing category. Patriots seeking to “invent” a nation often invoke some pre-existing loyalties: a new “national” category might have enjoyed a long history as a “tribal” category, as a “regional” category, as an “ethnic” category, or as something else imagined as not-quite-national. Opponents of such movements deny only the category’s national status, not its existence. Thus when one side of a dispute claims “my category designates a nation,” opponents offer some not-quite-national status: “your category is a mere region/tribe/ethnicity/nationality.”

In several conflicts of this third type, rival intelligentsias dispute whether two categories are mutually exclusive. A subordinate non-national category may coexist with a larger, encompassing national category. Just as membership in the category “English” implies membership in the category “British,” so too, Thomas Hennessey argued (2005, 229), “neither Britishness nor Irishness were mutually exclusive” before World War I. Irish Republicans sought, and in Ulster still seek, to make them mutually exclusive. In recent years, to give a more contemporary example, the category “Montenegrin” has for many former Yugoslavs recently ceased to be compatible with the category “Serbian” (Troch 2014). Both Serbs and Croats have often imagined the categories “Serbian” and “Croatian” overlapping in complicated ways, but the recent trend is to declare them mutually incompatible (Wachtel 1998; Troch 2013). Slavic Macedonians now typically view the category “Macedonian” as mutually exclusive with respect to “Bulgarian,” but in the past have seen former as a regional loyalty compatible with the latter (Maxwell 2007). Declarations of mutual compatibility or mutual exclusivity thus form profitable objects of study.

The status of classificatory categories has often had administrative consequences. Imperial or colonial bureaucracies sometimes devised ranking systems with several rungs, and thus had to decide whether to classify a given group as a “nation,” “tribe,” “race,” “nationality,” “stock,” or under some other heading (Hudson 1996; Krishnamurthy 1996). Soviet scholars, inspired by Communist models of cultural and economic development, routinely evaluated whether or how a group might elevate itself from “tribe” to “nationality,” and then from “nationality” to “nation” (Hirsh 2005; Kemper and Conermann 2011). Non-Soviet scholars, however, have also imagined transformations “from tribe to nation” (Gellner and Micaud 1972; Gourd 1984; Akiner 1995; Kidwell 2008), or “from nationality to nation” (Aguirre 1995; Bilinsky 1996), and so forth. The status of a category in such taxonomies had significant consequences because such taxonomies facilitated or impeded access to resources, political influence, or prestige.

Disputes over a category’s status nicely link the study of national taxonomies to linguistic taxonomies. National and linguistic classificatory regimes often resemble each other (Maxwell 2015), and the relationship between language planning and nationalist agitation has attracted attention from both sociolinguists (Haugen 1966; Fishman 1974; Kroskrity



2000) and scholars of nationalism (Anderson 1983, 69–84; Kamusella 2004; Kamusella 2006). Much as patriots struggle to affirm nationhood against opponents who dismiss their collective as a mere region, tribe, or nationality, so too may linguistic nationalists struggle to affirm language-hood against opponents who dismiss their variety as a mere dialect, jargon, accent, and so forth. Yet while national and linguistic taxonomies sometimes diverge from each other in unexpected fashion, linguistic debates of the dialect vs. language type quintessentially illustrate conflict over the status of a nationalized category: patriots seek to claim or deny the prestigious status of “language.”

### **Techniques for imposing categories**

The great variety of classificatory disputes explain why the arguments deployed by various sides take so many diverse forms. Classificatory disputes form a subset of the history of ideas, but scholars studying such disputes should examine not only intellectual history, but the many political or administrative strategies employed to promote one classificatory regime or another. Such techniques themselves form a final object of study for nationalism scholars interested in classification.

Governments, and the various institutions that comprise them, have many tools for imposing categories, or promoting one type of category over another. The yellow badges of the Nazi era vividly illustrate the state’s ability to impose a category on the clothing of a population under its control (Friedman 1955), but schemes for mandatory national garments have not always been directed at persecuted minorities. Indeed, patriots have often tried to impose nationalized clothing on the population as a whole: the cockade or red cap of the French Revolution, the Ottoman fez, the so-called Mao jacket, and other similar garments have served as icons of nationality (Ribeiro 1988; Finnane 1996; Quataert 1997; Maxwell 2014).

State-issued documents form a less obtrusive but equally powerful technique for imposing a national category onto a population. Imperial Russia (Avrutin 2010, 53–85), the Soviet Union (Zaslavsky and Luryi 1979; Garcelon 2001; Simonsen 2005), and apartheid South Africa (Bowker and Star 1999) created identification cards that assigned citizens to an obligatory national category. Cards that associate their bearer with a disfavored category might spectacularly curtail an individual’s rights or freedoms. While the technologies of nationalized identity papers facilitate tyranny and disenfranchisement in totalitarian states, it remains relevant in less oppressive political contexts. Even the most liberal of democracies issue passports (Torpey 2000), I.D. cards (Lyon 2009), drivers’ licenses (López 2008; Waslin 2013), and so on. A recent study by Edward Higgs (2011), furthermore, documents the interplay between governmental institutional records and private databases, such as credit ratings. Official papers can profoundly affect an individual’s relationship to society at large, as Teresa Scassa (1996) showed in a remarkable study of how governments impose or forbid certain ethnic surnames in state-issued identity documents.

The state governs not only by associating individuals with categories, but also by gathering information about its population as a whole. The politics of census categories, as noted above, has often proved important for distributing resources or wielding force. Several scholars have considered census classification from a theoretical or comparative perspective (Petersen 1987; Denton 1997; Goldscheider 2002; Kerzer and Arel 2002; Aspinall 2009). Detailed case studies exist about the census politics of former imperial states, such as the Habsburg Empire (Vranješ-Šoljan 2008; Göderle 2016), Czechoslovakia (Paul 1998; Klawida 2015), British India (Pant 1987; Peabody 2001; Guha 2003) and the

Soviet Union (Hirsch 1997). Additionally, scholars have also studied census politics in individual countries, such as China (Hoddie 1998; Mullaney 2010), India (Bates 1995; Guha 2003; Karade 2008), Kazakhstan (Dave 2004), Malaysia (Hirschman 1987), South Africa (Khalfani and Zuberi 2001; Christopher 2002), Ukraine (Arel 2002) and the United States (Lee 1993; Anderson and Fienberg 2000). Insofar as population maps draw on census data, the politics of nationalized cartography can also be studied as an extension of census politics, even if non-state actors play important roles.

Finally, the state may seek to reify national categories through everyday objects. Michael Billig (1995, 40) famously drew attention to “unwaved flags” in post offices in his book on “banal nationalism,” and scholars inspired by Billig’s insights have extended his analysis to other official or semi-official objects, such as road signs (Jones and Merriman 2009; Azaryahu 2012) or school textbooks (Montgomery 2005; Benwell 2014). The state’s ability to influence the wider social environment, though not unlimited, remains wide-ranging and multi-dimensional.

The ability of individuals to resist state-sponsored categorization also has many dimensions. Michael Skey (2009, 337), while praising Billig’s contribution, rightly criticized him for “privileging ... a top-down approach.” Grass-roots organizations can also promote national categories “from below,” as demonstrated by numerous comparative and theoretical studies of so-called “national awakening” (Hroch 1985; Brock 1992; Gellner and Breuilly 2006, 57–61). State-sponsored symbolic politics also enable a symbolic politics of resistance, since patriots can promote nationalized objects “from below.” In nineteenth-century Hungary, for example, smoking tobacco became a symbol of patriotism, and when the imperial government imposed a tobacco monopoly, the refusal to smoke official tobacco demonstrated patriotic opposition to the Habsburg regime (Maxwell 2012).

Indeed, much nationalist contestation takes place between competing patriotic intelligentsias. In the Habsburg monarchy, German patriotic organizations contested ethnic borderlands with Czechs and Slovenes while the Habsburg authorities sought primarily to keep the peace (Judson 2006). Greeks and Slavs both claim exclusive ownership of the category “Macedonian” not only in the Balkans, where rival states compete on a variety of symbolic domains, but also in Canadian and Australian diasporas (Danforth 1997).

### **Studying classification**

The study of nationalism as classification, in short, encompasses several key questions in nationalism studies. As concerns questions of intellectual history, it provides scholars with a succinct analytical terminology more precise than the terminology of “identity,” because it foregrounds the classifying actor, whether singular or collective, and the object of classification. It also directs attention to particular institutional practices that promote one or another taxonomy.

In this themed issue, contributors explore the politics of classification in Eastern Europe. They take a diversity of approaches, even though none of these contributions directly address violent conflict. Instead, the contributors address the techniques and consequences of classification. Contributors variously examine both state actors and popular patriotism, alluding to various tensions between the two. The papers also draw on a wide variety of source material: ethnographic maps, census returns, law textbooks, and grammar books.

Gayle Lonergan considers the politics of census classification in Bulgaria. Ethnographic figures played a central role in the creation of the Bulgarian state: the short-lived division between Bulgaria proper and East Rumelia arose from competing Russian and British

statistical estimates. Lonergan, however, focuses primarily on Bulgarian census-takers. The Ottoman state, famously, had classified its citizens into a religious community known as a *millet*. Independent Bulgaria, seeking to distance itself from its Ottoman past, adopting the language-based approach to nationality promoted at the 1872 statistical congress in St. Petersburg. Nevertheless, relics of the Ottoman approach persisted in Bulgaria's 1881, 1885, and 1888 censuses. Bulgarian census officials counted Bulgarian-speaking Muslims as Turks but Greek-speaking Orthodox Christians as Bulgarians, thus conflating language with nationality, and defined nationality on confessional criteria that resembled those of their Ottoman predecessors. Different criteria for national classification thus resulted in dramatically different population statistics, even for censuses held just a few years apart.

Rok Stergar and Tamara Scheer examine how the Habsburg monarchy helped establish national languages. The decision, for example, to translate state laws into certain languages helped some potentially nationalizable categories win popular recognition, just as the decision not to translate into other languages hindered efforts at winning recognition for other categories. Imperial institutions engaged in linguistic classification by deciding which languages to acknowledge in parliament, census forms, the army, and so forth, which are important consequences for the establishment of certain linguistically defined categories. While imperial institutions did not wish to promote ethno-linguistic national movements, its practical decisions framed and shaped popular patriotism, even if, as Stergar and Scheer recognize, Habsburg citizens often contested state classificatory decisions, or simply "refused to be put in boxes."

Catherine Gibson examines the work of Russian cartographers Petr Keppen and Aleksandr Rittikh, documenting how their maps promoted Russian territorial claims. Rittikh, for example, articulated claims to various cities through cartographic decisions through the Russification of city names. Gibson devotes considerable attention graphic choices, showing how the use of lines, hatching, and shading helped reify ethnographic frontiers, and how color choices proclaimed ethnographic difference or similarity.

Sacha Davis compares civilizational hierarchies between different national groups in Transylvania, as depicted in British travel writing. British travelers ranked national groups onto civilizational hierarchies in different ways, reflecting different criteria of nationhood: they variously interpreted the diversity of Transylvania's population in religious, linguistic, or racial terms. Yet criteria of nationality prove surprisingly irrelevant to traveler's judgements. Davis finds the hospitality networks the dominant variable: travelers adopted the prejudices and preconceptions of their hosts.

My own contribution, finally, examines the politics of ethno-linguistic classification through the lens of three Panslav activists: Jan Kollár, Ljudevit Gaj, and Ludovít Štúr. After documenting at length their belief in a single Slavic nation speaking a single Slavic language, the analysis turns to historiographical misrepresentation: both linguists and historians prove unwilling to acknowledge fully the Panslav ideas of historical actors. Since contemporary scholarly opinion rejects the notion of a single Slavic language, contemporary scholars refuse to acknowledge it in Kollár, Gaj, and Štúr. The wide gap between the primary sources and the secondary literature highlights the importance of examining categorization systems within the context of nationalism's intellectual history.

## Note

1. Search for title: "National Identity" with restricted publication dates at Google Books Advanced Search, URL: <[https://books.google.com/advanced\\_book\\_search](https://books.google.com/advanced_book_search)>, accessed 25 February 2017.

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