Dave Poitras

NATIONHOOD AT WORK

An Ethnography of Workplaces in Montreal and Brussels

From:

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How do nations continue to be made on a daily basis? In this important contribution to nationalism studies, Dave Poitras explores how nationhood and the idea of living in a world of nations are experienced in the cities of Montreal and Brussels. Drawing on ethnographic research, he identifies three typical ways of enacting nationhood in workplaces, thereby capturing the various dynamics through which non-political actors "do nationhood". In particular, Dave Poitras examines the distinct mechanisms whereby nations are made and demonstrates how individuals' everyday activities legitimize Montreal's and Brussels's unique social constellation within their respective federal state.

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Content

Chapter 3. The Power of States and Routines:
The Work Task Dynamic Operated by Nationhood | 125

SECTION 2
THE UNQUESTIONABILITY OF A WORLD DIVIDED INTO NATIONS

Introduction: A Sociology of Lived Nationhood in Montreal and Brussels

The historian and philosopher Ernest Renan is one of the first scholars to define the nation in an abstract sense. At a conference in 1882, he asks: *What is a nation?* He defines the nation as a modern historical construction. It has emerged, according to him, in conjunction with converging facts that prompted a significant number of individuals to wish to live together under specific conditions while sustaining both the idea of a common past and foreseeable future objectives. For this idea to be successful, he notes, the nation must be a daily plebiscite (Renan, 2012 [1882]). In spite of this somehow romanticized view on the matter, Renan raises an issue that was not properly addressed within the field of nationalism before the end of the next century: its everyday aspect. Indeed, most investigations of nationalism and its various phenomena throughout the 20th century have focused on macrosociological issues such as the emergence of the nation as a product of modernity (Gellner, 1964; 1983; 1991; Anderson, 2006 [1991]; Kedourie, 1961) and its pre-modern origins (Smith, 1987; 1991; 1998; Hutchinson, 1987). Only in the 1990s did a meso and micro-sociological turn take place, echoing back to Renan's position that regardless of how a nation came into being, its existence rests on everyday plebiscites. It is in this subfield of the sociology of nationalism, everyday nationhood studies, that my research is anchored and to which it contributes.

Rogers Brubaker's investigation, *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town* (2006), which he conducted in collaboration with Margit Feischmidt, Jon E. Fox, and Liana Grancea, remains up to this day one of the most complete works on the salience of nationhood in everyday life. It is not only a remarkable empirical investigation; it is also theoretically innovative. In Cluj, a Romanian town inhabited by "ethnic groups" of Hungarians and Romanians, Brubaker et al. investigate through ethnographic work, archives, and interviews how ethnicity and nationhood are "embodied and expressed [...] in everyday encounters, practical categories, common sense knowledge, cultural idioms, cognitive schemas, mental maps, interactional cues, discursive frames, or organizational routines, social networks, and institutional forms (Brubaker

et al., 2006: 6-7). In this study, Brubaker et al. empirically examine the nation as "a category of practice" rather than as a "category of analysis;" this is a crucial conceptual distinction that echoes back to one of Brubaker's earlier work: "Instead of focusing on nations as real groups, we should focus on nationhood and nationness, on 'nation' as a practical category, institutionalized form, and contingent event [because] to understand nationalism, we have to understand the practical uses of the category 'nation,' the ways it can come to structure perception, to inform thought and experience, to organize discourse and political action." (Brubaker, 1996: 7)

After analyzing and accounting for the town's tumultuous nationalistic history in an extensive way, their main concern is to understand how ethnicity works: where it is and when it matters, in everyday life, and "without automatically taking ethnic groups as [a] unit of analysis" (Brubaker et al., 2006: 8). As Thomas Hylland Eriksen rightly notes, "if one goes out to look for ethnicity one will find it and thereby contribute to constructing it" (2002: 161). With such a posture Brubaker et al. examine ethnicity "alongside a range of alternative, non-ethnicized ways of seeing and being; to study ethnicity alone is to impose ethnicity as an analytical frame of reference where it might not be warranted; it is to risk adopting an overethnicized view of social experience" (Brubaker *et al.*, 2006: 16).

In their study, Brubaker et al. conclude that nationhood and ethnicity are most of the time irrelevant in an individual's daily life: "Most Clujeni do not frame their cares and concerns in ethnic terms [...] ethnicity is only intermittently salient [...] many nominally interethnic interactions are not experientially interethnic [...] social connections, political power, economic interests, and moral corruption are more readily invoked than ethnicity in explaining who gets what and why. And ethnicity has little bearing on strategies for getting by or getting ahead." (Brubaker *et al.*, 2006: 363) While this outcome is of interest, their investigation does not explain the mechanism behind the mobilization of the national category (Martigny, 2010: 13). As political scientist Vincent Martigny observes, Brubaker's et al.' investigation neglects the fact that if the national referent is not always predominant, people still interact in a social universe wherein the nation is signified to them daily, and in which this community is often considered to be the most legitimate and significant form of belonging (*ibid.*). In other words, Brubaker et al. do show when and where nationhood becomes salient (in institutions such as churches, associations, or schools along linguistic lines; families through names and habits; or language practices in diverse situations), but they largely overlook how it happens, and how it comes to matter. They often discard potential nationhood issues by arguing that another category or form of identity or belonging than the national is most relevant to a given situation. Briefly, they fail to identify how nationhood is *experienced*.

Does the category nation have to be explicitly used for nationhood to matter? Or is it possible to experience nationhood in other any other ways?

In order to examine how nationhood is experienced in Montreal and Brussels, I have developed a new approach by using the concepts provided by a "phenomenologically-based sociology" (Endreß, 2005: 4), which combines aspects of Max Weber's and Alfred Schütz's approach to sociology.[1] This conceptual approach, I argue, allows to investigate *lived nationhood*, or the experienced meanings of living in a world divided into nations. I present in what follows the basis of a sociology of lived nationhood which will help me overcome the aforementioned shortcomings of previous research designs used to investigate everyday nationhood.

Lived Nationhood: The Experienced Meanings of Living in a World Divided into Nations

The conceptual approach I elaborate in order to investigate lived nationhood is meant to help me examine the implications of living in a world divided into nations. It treats nationhood, the idea of a world of nations, as a "body of 'knowledge' […] socially established *as* 'reality,'" and is thus "concerned with the analysis of the social construction of reality" (Berger and Luckmann, 1991 [1966]: 15). In exploring lived nationhood through individuals' experiences, this approach ultimately sheds light on the *ongoing* "construction" of nations in day-to-day activities: something that remains little explored.

Acknowledging that nations are constructs, however, has become common sense in the field of the sociology of nationalism; nations are not and have never been primordial aspects of the world. As the sociologist Andreas Wimmer mentions, there is indeed a "constructivist consensus" in nationalism studies on the idea that nations, or ethnic groups, are constructed (2013: 2). It has, according to Brubaker, become "complacent and clichéd" to argue for such an obvious statement (2004: 3). Because nations are constructs, as the phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty would most likely also argue (1945), they hide and make incomprehensible complex activities and phenomena of everyday life. To be understood, one must go below the "objectified world of sciences" and treat nations as "generators of meanings." To go below the objectification of the nation and to grasp the meanings it generates, I suggest focusing on lived

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1 | According to Thomas Eberle, "there is no such thing as a 'phenomenological sociology'" (2010: 134) —except, as he admits, under George Psathas' writing (1973; 1989). On this matter, Thomas Luckmann clearly distinguishes sociology as an empirical science, and phenomenology as philosophy, which can, however, be helpful to the social sciences (Luckmann, 1973: 164). This is how phenomenology informs my approach to sociology, which I practice through an empirical fieldwork.

experiences through which meanings are first given; meanings allowing individuals to perceive and make sense of the world, but that are later on forgotten (Merleau-Ponty, 1945: 31 and 69).

Throughout my research, I explore nationhood as it is lived; not so much out of interest for the nations themselves as out of interest for the understanding of how the meaning of living in a world of nations is constituted in the activities of individuals. Individuals are the point of entry into investigating lived nationhood. Obtaining direct access to "the actual stock of knowledge" of a person, which is nothing more than the sedimentation of all of his or her experiences defined by the previous situations he or she has encountered (Schütz, 1970: 123; see also Eberle and Hitzler, 2004: 67), would be ideal. It is, however, hardly feasible. What can be more seriously considered is a way to identify and interpret a fragment of an individual's knowledge and understandings through his or her actions; more precisely, considering the objects at hand, practices and expressions in which nationhood may be identified through interpretation. In so doing, I will have access to the individual's experienced meanings of living in a world divided into nations. Nationhood, in this perspective, is treated as a "finite province of meanings" in which it is the meaning of individual experiences that constitutes reality, and not the ontological structure of objects (Schütz, 1962: 230).

In order to explore the experienced meanings of living in a world of nations, I will look into actions that are social, a central dimension to Weber's interpretive sociology. According to Weber, "we shall speak of 'action' insofar as the acting individual attaches a subjective meaning to his behavior—be it overt or covert, omission or acquiescence. Action is 'social' insofar as its subjective meaning takes account of the behavior of others and is thereby oriented in its course" (1978 [1921/1922]: 4). Understanding social action is best done by aiming to grasp individual motives, that is "a complex of subjective meaning which seems to the actor himself or the observer an adequate ground for the conduct in question" (*ibid.*: 11). Hence, aiming to understand how the idea of living in a world divided into nations is experienced, I will inter-subjectively investigate motives underlying social actions.[2]

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2 | In Schütz's work, as Eberle notes, "understanding is not a category of the social sciences, but a method of everyday practice in the life-world" (Eberle, 2014: 12). Schütz, however, agrees with Weber's "entry point" with regard to the researcher's interests: "The postulate of subjective interpretation has to be understood in the sense that all scientific explanations of the social world can, and for certain purposes must, refer to the subjective meaning of the actions of human beings from which social reality originates" (Schütz 1962, 62; see also Nasu, 2005: 126-132). Schütz, nevertheless, is further interested in describing the universal structure of subjective orientation and the conditions of actions than their consequences (Endress, 2014: 46), which is why I priv-

The sociologist Barbara Thériault notes that "motives point to a sociology that proceeds by the reconstruction, and not the constitution, of action, which has, for its end, the understanding and thereby the explanation of a phenomenon we have before our eyes and try to render intelligible" (2013: 49; see also 2010: 208). Reconstructing actions may not underline nationalist motives, but it could nonetheless lead to the understanding of a phenomenon involving nationhood. Whether being an element of the context in which the action is performed or the outcome of the action itself, nationhood could be observed through motives, but also through cognitive schemas, under institutional forms, or assumed collective knowledge suggesting individuals to act in a specific way because of the idea of a world of nations. In exploring lived nationhood through the reconstruction of actions, I am primarily interested in examining "the interpretation and generation of sense, carried out by those living in the social world, [through] cultural objects which constitute themselves in the processes of generation and interpretation of sense in the social world, and 'understand' those cultural objects by inquiring back into their constituting sense" (Schütz, 2004 [1932]: 438 quoted in Endreß, 2014: 46). The focus on individuals and their motives, therefore, must not make me lose sight of the social world.

Sociologists often remind us that human beings are individuals as much as social beings. Eviatar Zerubavel notes that we are "products of particular social environments that affect, as well as constrain the way we cognitively interact with the world;" we do not only personally experience the world through our senses, "but also impersonally, through [our] mental membership in various social communities" (1997: 6-7; see also Schütz and Luckmann, 1974: 243). In this perspective, the nation is to be conceived as a mere community or form of belonging among others in which individuals experience the world, but also of which individuals are a product. The nation represents a finite province of meanings, among others, readily available for individuals to use; it is part of "the intersubjective world which existed long before our birth, experienced and interpreted by Others, our predecessors, as an organized world [...] given to our experience and interpretation [...] in the form of 'knowledge at hand' [which] function[s] as a scheme of reference" (Schütz, 1962: 208). Considering nationhood as a way of "perceiving, interpreting and representing the social world" (Brubaker, 1996: 7), as the idea that the world is divided into nations, loosens the focus on the potential inherent importance of the nation. It impels considering it also as unimportant, at times. In other words, instead of seeing it as

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ilege Weber's approach to motives and to understanding. I am, of course, interested in describing the way nationhood structures the life-world, but to do so, I choose to further focus on the way nationhood structures actions, i.e., by investigating motives underlying individual actions through empirical observations. I am thus exploring individuals' subjectivity, and I aim to inter-subjectively understand their actions.

an entity potentially embracing every facet of a society, it represents one form of belonging alongside others and with which it can intersect, such as gender, religious confessions, generational classifications, or social classes. But most of all, it represents a practical category (Brubaker, 1996, 2004, 2006) that is to be observed through actions and the contexts in which practices and expressions take place. While a sociology of lived nationhood adheres to these premises, I wish to nuance them. I argue that it is not because an individual does not directly use the category nation that nationhood does not matter, i.e., that s/he is not experiencing the world of nations in any other way.

I do not only aim to explore and understand what "objects" generate a sense of nationhood or are interpreted as reflecting nationhood in everyday life. With the help of a phenomenologically-based sociology and an interpretive sociology, I inquire into the "constitutive sense" of actions but also objects in their contexts, which, through interpretation can lead to better identify different aspects of nationhood in everyday life.[3] In grasping different motives underlying actions, I explore if, when, where, but also how nationhood comes to matter in day-to-day activities in order to uncover the different experienced meanings of the phenomenal manifestation of nations. The categorization of motives stemming from such an approach will necessarily result in a typification.[4] By uncovering these motives, I will reveal various conditions of action with regard to nationhood. A sociology of lived nationhood will not only allow me to unveil the implications of living in a world of nations and its ongoing construction, it will also shed slight on the multiple ways through which nationhood comes into actions; the multiple ways in which nationhood is *enacted*.

Having depicted how a sociology of lived nationhood best represents a conceptual approach to investigating the experienced meanings of living in a world divided into nations, I will frame and conceptualize in what follows the two milieus in which the empirical research takes place: Montreal and Brussels. Although the information regarding both sociopolitical scenes is brief here, I will complement it in due time throughout the book.

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3 | While I do favor a German school of thought in the elaboration of the conceptual approach that will allow me to investigate lived nationhood, my interests in everyday life are not unfamiliar with those of French sociologists. In his seminal book *L'invention du quotidien* (1990 [1980]) or *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau, for example, seeks to understand how people individualize and address societal phenomena through mundane activities (see also Martuccelli and de Singly, 2012).

4 | As suggested by Alfred Schütz, "the sum-total of these various typifications constitutes a frame of reference in terms of which not only the sociocultural, but also the physical world has to be interpreted, a frame of reference that, in spite of its inconsistencies and its inherent opaqueness, is nonetheless sufficiently integrated and transparent to be used for solving most of the practical problems at hand" (1964: 233)

Nationhood in Bi-Ethnonational Milieus

Like Brubaker in his Cluj investigation (2006), I also focus on individuals within a city. This is the most appropriate scale for an investigation of everyday phenomena of the nation; it impels exploring how nationhood "works" in an individual's life and routines, i.e., without prioritizing national narratives, a state, or a national or ethnic group treated as a homogenous entity (Brubaker et al., 2006: 7). This perspective may avoid the researcher falling into the methodological nationalism trap of "assuming that nation/state/society is the natural social and political form" (Wimmer and Glick Schiller, 2002: 302) or into groupism by automatically taking nations, races, or ethnic groups as basic units of analysis (Brubaker, 2004: 8; 2006: 8). In my research, I add another "anti-groupism" factor to the investigation: a second city. Exploring a similar phenomenon in two distinctive cities leads, I believe, to a more dynamic understanding of lived nationhood. It further compels to loosen the focus on the master national narratives associated with the populations under investigation, and it also strengthens the central position of the object of research over the location in which it is investigated. In other words, it encourages accounting for lived nationhood over state nationhood and historically grounded knowledge.

Beyond my personal affection for Montreal and Brussels, the juxtaposition of the cities offers thought-provoking intersecting points for an investigation on lived nationhood. They are both located in what I call bi-ethnonational sociopolitical spaces, Canada and Belgium, in the sense that the central state recognizes two major ethnonational groups.[5] Moreover, both cities are located in territories "targeted" by sovereignist projects from Quebec and Flanders. The activities of these movements, in Brussels as much as in Montreal, have led to the adoption of policies aiming to reflect in many aspects of public life the official ethnonational character of the space each city is located in. These are, respectively, Brussels (Brussels-Capital Region, as a federated entity), and the federated province of Quebec. Both cities, however, are grounded in different "social constellations." As I illustrate below, I understand the social constellation of each city to be constituted of two dimensions: the "state-centered," institutional, official, or formal status (in which the main ethnonational traits that

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5 | It can be said that Belgium is a trilingual—tri-ethnonational—country. Its German-speaking population, however, represents less than 1% of the total population. Moreover, the German-speaking community is centered over a hundred kilometers from Brussels—the entity of interest in my research—in the far East of Belgium, on the German border. Also, it can be said that Canada is a multi-ethnonational country. The multiple Canadian first nations represent about 3% of the population, and mostly live in reservations. Although recognized, indigenous languages do not have an official status in the country.

are meant to be "defended" by politics) and its more empirical status (the actual significance of those traits for the state and its politics "in practice"). Besides contextualizing my investigation "from above," the differences or similarities between the social constellations open the door to a discussion of their impact on lived nationhood in each city.

The Social Constellation of Montreal

As part of a federated state, Quebec has power over most public linguistic matters in the province, such as the policies regarding the language of advertisements and the languages of education. Montreal—or the municipalities of the Greater Montreal (the Metropolitan area of Montreal)—thus has no leverage with regard to language usages on its territory. *La Charte de la ville de Montréal*, a document published by the Quebec government, states in the second line of its first article that "Montréal est une ville de langue française" (Québec, 2000: C–11–4 art. 1). The same document is available in *one* other language, English, the *Charter of Ville de Montréal*, in which it is also stated that "Montréal is a French-speaking city" (Québec, 2000b: C–11–4 art. 1). From a state-centered or a formal point of view, contemporary Montreal is hence a unilingual French-speaking city, privileging individuals that have and use French as a language—whether it be their mother tongue or not.

Being part of an official Canadian language minority in Quebec, English speakers of the province, who mainly live in the Montreal metropolitan area, have the right to receive services in English. The English-speaking community living in what is today Quebec has always been a powerful elite influencing diverse affairs of the area, even before the 1867 Canadian Confederation Act (Rudin, 1989: 223). Even though they have always been a minority in Quebec, their authority allowed English speakers living in Montreal to run "the most important affairs of the city" throughout the years (Boone, 1996: 70).[6] In comparison with French-speaking minorities living in other provinces throughout the 19th and most of the 20th century, English speakers of Quebec have had their own separate public institutions since 1869, most notably those of a confessional and educational nature (Corbeil et al., 2010: 63). In spite of Quebec's 1977 *Charte de la langue française* (Charter of the French language, or Bill 101) making French the only official public language of the province, as well as making Quebec the only unilingual French-speaking province of Canada, the

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6 | In an article entitled *Language Politics and Flood Control in Nineteenth-Century Montreal*, Christopher Boone reconstructs a 19th century event depicting relations between the two main language groups of the city: "In miniature, the struggle for flood control illustrates the tensions between a privileged anglophone minority and an expanding francophone majority for control of the city's resources and design" (1996: 70).

English-speaking community has maintained their long since acquired vested rights. English, as exemplified by the *Charter of Ville de Montréal*, the English Montreal School Board, and in the possibility for administration in the boroughs to be bilingual English-French, hence remains a language "available" for public usage within institutions that are under Quebec's jurisdiction.

As statistics show, English is a widely used language in schools, public services, and workplaces, but also at home in the Montreal metropolitan area (with slightly higher percentages on the Island of Montreal [Statistics Canada, 2007]). In some boroughs (Pointe-Claire, Westmount, Baie d'Urfé, Hudson, and Côte-Saint-Luc), over 70% of the population speaks English as their first language (Corbeil et al., 2010: 102). In a federal report based on statistical data entitled *Portrait des minorités de langue officielle au Canada: les Anglophones du Québec*,[7] the authors reveal that in two of the main public services area under Quebec's jurisdiction—health care and justice, including interactions with layers, judges, and all levels of police officers—English speakers have in the past used English to communicate up to 80% of the time in some cases (Corbeil et al., 2010: 59–62). In the Montreal metropolitan area, 50.9% of the individuals with French as their mother tongue identify themselves as French-English bilingual, while this number rises to 69.3% for individuals who have English as a first language. In 1971, Allophones (individuals having another language than French or English as a mother tongue) living in Quebec largely favored English as a "public language" (up to 71%), whereas in 2006, approximately 50% of Allophones chose French, while the other half chose English as their main language of communication (Statistics Canada, 2007: 24; Corbeil et al., 2010: 96). In primary and secondary school, however, 81.5% of Allophones studied in French in 2006, compared to 14.6% in 1971 (Lachapelle and Lepage, 2010). This large difference in numbers is due to the 1977 Bill 101, which only admitted to English-speaking schools children whose father or mother are Canadian citizens that have received the majority of their primary school education in English in Canada to public English-speaking schools (Québec, 1977: C–5 art. 73). The Bill has often been recognized as effectively "designed to force immigrants and Canadians who had migrated [to Quebec] from other provinces to adopt the francophone culture" (See, 2010: 201; Riendeau, 2000: 353–4). As shown by the 2006 statistics, however, the percentage of Allophones pursuing their studies in French after secondary school drops to 46.2% (Lachapelle and Lepage, 2010).

I sum up the social constellation of Montreal as follows: individuals living in Montreal are meant, from an institutional or formal point of view, to be socialized to the characteristics of the French-speaking groups, or the

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7 | Portrait of official language minorities in Canada: Englishcspeakers of Quebec (2010).

French-Québécois. Through education, media, public communications, and policies, the state is thus meant to favor ethnonational traits (language, history, symbols, contemporary and historical personalities, religion, and "folkways") of *one* ethno-linguistic group over others. In virtue of being present in Montreal for over a century before ethnonational traits of French-Québécois became, from a formal point of view, favored over others in the province, the English-speaking group, or the English-Québécois, as a minority, assures that English remains an "available" language for public usage within institutions under Quebec's jurisdiction. As a consequence, the ethnonational traits of a second ethnolinguistic group continue, in a restricted way and under special conditions, to be shared through education, media, public communications, and policies. The English-Québécois traits are "institutionalized-as-a-facilitation." In this sense, I qualify the social constellation of Montreal as "officially" uni-ethnonational while leaning towards bi-ethnonational "in practice."

The Social Constellation of Brussels

The Brussels-Capital region is a federated entity of the Kingdom of Belgium. In total, Belgium has six federated entities, which territorially and institutionally overlap with each other. Three of these are regions: those of Brussels-Capital, Wallonia, and Flanders; and the three others are communities: those of the Flemish(-speaking) community, the French(-speaking) community, and the German(-speaking) community. Being a region on its own, Brussels-Capital is also part of both Flemish and French communitiesalthough the region of Flanders' parliament has since the second federalization in 1985 fused with the Flemish community's parliament, now forming one government. This is the Flemish government, also based in Brussels, which reflects a greater will to be politically unified or strong than the French speakers of the country, who are divided between Wallonia and Brussels. Communities' competences concern "cultural matters" such as education, museums, social care, and communications, whereas those of regions rather focus on "economic[al] matters" such as territorial management, socio-economic planning with regard to business, industries, and energy, and the organization of municipalities (Belgique, 1994: C–4, art. 127 and art. 134). Hence, "the overlap between the two main communities [Flemish and French] within the limits of the Brussels region makes Belgian federalism very modestly non-territorial: [...] 'person-related competences are [...] entrusted to the communities, [...] while the regions' assemblies and executives are in charge of 'place-related' competences" (Van Parijs, 2013a: 2). In other words, many of the institutions found on the territory of Brussels-Capital actually depend on the Flemish and French communities.

On a cultural level, because "Brussels is not recognized as a specific entity, and is hence not recognized as a community, Flemish and French communities

are largely competent with regard to communitarian matters in the Brussels region. The latter remains represented as a city in which Francophones and Flemings cohabit" (Sinardet, 2008: 146, my translation).[8] While this configuration makes contemporary Brussels officially French-Dutch bilingual (Belgique, 1994: C–1 art. 4), the citizens' representation "organized through two distinct electoral colleges and sub-parliaments," that of both French and Flemish parties, still "rests on the assumption that all Brusselers belong to one and only one 'nation' with segregated educational and cultural institutions, and that the Brussels subset of each of these two nations needs to have its own separate political space" (Van Parijs, 2013: 4). Because the same constellation holds true at the federal level, Van Parijs speaks of Belgium as a "binational" democracy (2013). Its political institutions, Sinardet suggests, make the "Belgian federal system [unique], in the sense that it has created on the same territory two types of federated entities, which is the exteriorization of a compromise between the mostly Flemish will of a decentralization on a cultural level—translated into communities—and the mostly Wallonian will of a decentralization on a socioeconomical level—translated into regions" (Sinardet, 2008: 141, my translation).[9] Being culturally, economically, and politically central to the country, Brussels seems "adapted" to reflect Belgium as a whole.

From an institutional or formal point of view, contemporary Brussels is thus a city leaning towards being bilingual French-Dutch, thus privileging individuals of the French and Dutch linguistic groups–whether they be native speakers or not. Nevertheless, as many authors agree, Brussels, "though bilingual in law is francophone in fact" (Loh, 1975: 219); French being "the most important language, [the] *lingua franca* [that] dominates public language use" (Janssens, 2008: 14). In Brussels, "about two thirds of the respondents [of a survey conducted in 2011] report that French was the language or one of the languages that were spoken at home in their childhood," the second language being Arabic (21%), "which has now overtaken Dutch (20%) as Brussels' second native language" (Taalbarometer, 2011, quoted in Van Parijs, 2013b: 14). With

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8 | "Bruxelles n'est pas reconnue comme entité spécifique et donc pas reconnue comme communauté, les communautés flamandes et françaises sont largement compétentes en ce qui concerne les matières communautaires de la région bruxelloise. Celle-ci reste donc représentée comme une ville où cohabitant francophones et Flamands" (Sinardet, 2008: 146).

9 | "Le système fédéral belge est unique dans ce sens qu'il a créé sur le même territoire deux types d'entités fédérées, ce qui est l'extériorisation d'un compromis entre la volonté surtout flamande d'une décentralisation sur le plan culturel—traduite par les communautés—et la volonté surtout wallonne d'une décentralisation sur le plan socio-économique—traduite par les régions". (Sinardet, 2008: 141)

regard to linguistic competence, 89% of Brusselers claim to know French, 30% English, 23% Dutch, and 18% Arabic (*ibid*.: 16).

I characterize the social constellation of Brussels as being "mirrored" to that of Montreal; bi-ethnonational becoming "official," and uni-ethnonational becoming "in-practice." Individuals living in Brussels are meant, from an institutional or formal point of view, to be socialized to characteristics of two linguistic groups of the city: French speakers and Dutch speakers. Brussels is thus meant to favor ethnonational traits (language, history, symbols, contemporary and historical personalities, religion, and "folkways") of *two* ethno-linguistic groups through education, media, public communications, and policies over others. Since the foundation of Belgium in 1830, the French-speaking group has, however, always been more influential in Brussels, and is still today the dominant ethnonational group to which most Brusselers are socialized to, in spite of the slight increase of Dutch speakers rising in the last decade (Van Parijs, 2013a: 17). The social constellation of Brussels is hence "officially" bi-ethnonational while leaning towards being uni-ethnonational "in practice."

In the following point, I reflect upon how I conducted and constructed the fieldwork "from below." This will be the occasion to discuss the methods with which I empirically explore lived nationhood, or the experienced meanings of living in a world of nations.

An Ethnography of Lived Nationhood: Shadowing the Nation *at Work*

In investigating lived nationhood, I am most interested in how individuals enact and express the idea of a world of nations rather than in focusing on the representations people have of the nation or nations to which they belong. I have thus privileged an ethnographic approach in constructing the fieldwork. When I first began, however, I was undecided about how to proceed or which empirical method I should choose.

At the very beginning of the research, the possibilities of my chosen field appeared endless. Perhaps naïvely, I wanted to investigate every type of everyday situation I could possibly find. These ranged from conversations in cafés to the more family-oriented contexts of homes, via work environments, day-to-day commuting, and sporadic events such as dinners, public gatherings, parties, leisure activities, and sports. I went out in Montreal alone or with a participant—as Brubaker et al. (2006) had done over a course of several years in Cluj—to investigate lived nationhood. Uncertain, at first, of the type of ethnographic approach I should adopt to work with informants, I simply asked individuals if I could follow them throughout their day; if possible, from their morning coffee to their workplace and dinner. Six people in Montreal agreed to help me in what would be a preliminary fieldwork—albeit usable as empirical

information for the research. I literally followed most of these first participants throughout their day, or almost. Understandably, I was not welcome everywhere and at all times. There were everyday environments in which my presence as a researcher—a complete stranger in most cases—felt inappropriate or awkward, be it at home, early in the morning for coffee, or during dinner and transportation. I quickly started to question the actual feasibility of conducting such observations.

After following these six participants in Montreal and having attempted a first analysis of my observations, I came to the conclusion that the richest material was that emerging from workplaces. I then decided to only focus on individuals in this type of environment. A further motivation for this approach was that my informants did not necessarily enjoy being "stalked" for too long throughout their day, especially outside their workplace. In addition to the way the work environment somehow imposed itself as the locus of the fieldwork, the specificities of this type of social context perfectly suits an investigation into lived nationhood. Limiting the fieldwork to workplaces not only made the empirical investigation more feasible, but it also, I argue, made the research more convincing. Solely exploring workplaces allows me to show—as I delve into in Section 1—the great variety of nationhood phenomena in one type of environment.

I made my fieldwork observations while following one individual at a time in his or her work environment. Ethnographers refer to this technique as "shadowing" (McDonald, 2005; Quinlan, 2008; Bartkowiak-Theron and Sappey, 2012; Gilliat-Ray, 2011; Kussenbach, 2003, 2012). Because my aim was to empirically observe if, when, where, and how nationhood matters in everyday life through individual actions, shadowing was the best way to carry out the empirical phase of my investigation and to construct the fieldwork. The shadowing technique is one of a wider group of methods referred to as "mobile." Margarethe Kussenbach describes mobile methods as "techniques of data collection during which researchers move alongside participants" (2012: 252). Shadowing helps uncover the actions an individual performs in an organized group—such as a work environment—that existed prior to the arrival of the researcher (*ibid.*: 257). By following *one* member of a group over an extended period of time, and by asking questions to generate a running commentary on the activities observed, the shadower aims to reveal "the subtleties of perspective and purpose shaping [actions] in the real-time context of an organization" (McDonald, 2005: 455–456). Investigating "what people actually do in the course of their everyday lives [and] not what their roles dictate of them" (Quinlan, 2008: 1480), the shadower not only observes "daily work and personal insights, but also systematically collect[s] and record[s] their contextual setting including organizational structures and processes, and their immediate colleagues' behaviors and reactions to particular events" (Bartkowiak-Theron and Sappey, 2012: 8).

In both cities, I asked friends of friends or acquaintances to help me find my way in diverse workplaces. Because being followed over hours and days was often perceived as a burden, the bond of trust was obviously easier to establish with the friends of friends or acquaintances than with complete strangers. Although I did contact some organizations by myself, such as police districts, media groups, or taxi companies, these attempts were met with a negative response or no response at all. As Barbara Thériault also notes, researchers' use of their friends' networks to put pressure on a person of interest often causes a potential key informant to "feel obliged" to give an affirmative answer to the common friend of the researcher (Thériault, 2015: 5). After having asked among organizations and my network of friends in both cities, all I had to do was to wait for answers, or reach out to individuals I was told could be interested in meeting me.

Before actually following informants in their workplace, I came into contact with many individuals. I had, at first, very few criteria to guide the selection process. Concealing the topic of my research as to avoid biases, I would mainly tell potential participants that I was interested in following people who engaged in a minimum of interaction in their work environments, whether it be with clients, colleagues, or other fellow worker. Basically, as to give possible informants a better idea, I would tell them that it would not be interesting for me to work with someone who sat behind a computer screen all day. Most of all, I emphasized the fact that I would need to be able to follow them throughout their entire work routine, for a period ranging between one and three days. Avoiding any references to nationhood, I said that the objective would mainly be to observe everyday interaction in work environments while asking for comments, when possible. Because they could sense that participation would entail a burden upon them, the great majority of people I asked refused to take part in the study. Moreover, those who were interested in helping me still had to convince their superior(s)—when there was one, which was the case for most places visited—to allow me to accompany them. This was an aspect I had not thought of at the very beginning of the fieldwork when I was contacting organizations. Relying on the help of participants in charge of letting me into their workspace was crucial in accessing work environments.[10]

In total, I was able to become the "shadow" of ten individuals in each city. Fortunately, the workplaces I had the chance to visit, and the professions of the individuals I had the pleasure of working with, were very diversified. They covered a wide range of work tasks and environments. The following graph lists

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10 | In cases where my informants were successful in convincing their superiors, I sometimes had to sign a form in which I would agree to keep some information undisclosed, provide an official document from my universities stating my academic position and faculty affiliation, or write a cover letter.

the professions of the people I was able to follow within their work environments for one to three entire days.

Professions of the Participants in Montreal and Brussels

Montreal	Brussels
College French Literature Teacher	Piano Tuner
Nurse	Current Affair Journalist
Restaurant Manager	Piano Seller
Special Education Technician	Veterinarian
Writer/Publisher	Economics Journalist
Carpenter	Owner of a Camera Store
Building Technician	Human Resources Employee
Environmental Technician	Representative of a SatelliteTV Company
Paramedic	Construction Entrepreneur
Fruit-Stand Manager	Makeup Artist

As hard as it may have been to obtain a favorable answer from potential informants, the shadowing technique allowed me to have an in-depth and meaningful access to an individual's lived experiences in his or her everyday work environment.[11] From practices to discussions between my informants and their

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11 | Indeed, not only did approaching one individual at a time help me gain access to environments that are often closed, it also allowed me to observe and collect first-hand field notes of activities, "rather than second hand-accounts" obtained from interviews, discourses, or writings (McDonald, 2005: 466). This asset is of course not specific to shadowing; it is common to all ethnographic approaches. But in contrast to many ethnographic approaches, the shadower entirely assumes his role as a researcher. While shadowing, I never intended to be seen as an "indigenous" by my informants. Standing next to the participants, I observed and listened to individuals at work; I also asked questions in order to engage in conversations about the matters at hand so as to obtain explanations for issues and elements as they happened. In so doing, I had the opportunity to "actively explore [the] stream of experiences and practices" of my informants as they moved through and interacted with "their physical and social environment [along] activities that existed before [I] entered the scene and will continue to exist after [I] depart," which is what is most specific to shadowing according to Kussenbach (2003:

colleagues, customers, or myself, from decorations, items, and spontaneous interpretations or potential interpretive paths to other observations, my notebooks quickly became filled with descriptions, which in turn were shaping the fieldwork. The field notes resulted in thick information (Geertz, 1973) regarding individuals' practices and expressions, the environments and social relations in which they were observed, and the positions my informants held within the complex and interrelated processes of their workplaces (Quinlan, 2008: 1482).

Once I had completed the ethnographic part of the fieldwork with a participant, I requested an interview. They lasted between fifteen minutes and three hours, and mainly focused on the observations made in the workplace.[12] I asked interviewees one recurrent question: "What are you most preoccupied with at work, and how do you deal with this issue?" The idea was to see if, and how, individuals discursively framed everyday activities and situations of their work environment with the category nation. As for the other questions, I mostly asked my participants to comment further on some of the observations I had made, which, of course, I thought involved nationhood. After the interview, I would tell my participants more precisely about my research topic. I always added that if they did not want me to use the field notes I had made with their help I would discard them. All participants allowed me to keep the material, and none of them appeared aggravated after discovering the main interest of my research. Most of them actually said that they completely understood why I had wanted to conceal my work objectives. Some informants even confessed that they were relieved to learn about my real inquiry, because they had thought

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463; 2012: 257). By inviting my participants to comment on what they were doing as they were conducting their activities, sharing their views on the matters at hand or other aspects of their lives, it was certainly engaging on their behalf, which is why I always made sure that such a commitment was understood before I followed them.

12 | With the first six participants, I experimented with different types of interview methods. Twice, I gathered two informants together. In the case of the two other participants, I asked them to have his and her life partner, respectively, take part in the interview. Following sociologist Michael Skey's methods (2011) when working on everyday nationhood, the idea was to create a day-to-day conversation in which people talked about daily issues, whether these were personal topics such as work, aspirations, or vacations, or more public subjects such as politics and economics. By the help of these interviews, I wanted to understand how and for which topics individuals discursively frame ideas with the category nation in banal conversations. Each of these four interviews lasted for one to three hours. They were very successful, but because I had changed the scope of the ethnographic aspect of the fieldwork, limiting it to work environments, I also reviewed the interview strategy.

that my work was uninteresting up until that point—as I had previously only told them that I was working on everyday interactions in workplaces.[13]

While designing strategies and experimenting with methods to investigate nationhood through trial and error, I continued to review my field notes in order to sharpen my object of research and the main question of the inquiry, almost until the very end of the work. After all, the fieldwork of a sociologist advocating the use of qualitative methods is not meant to validate a pre-established problem or hypothesis; the fieldwork rather is the starting point of the problematization (Kaufmann, 1996: 20). After I had attempted a first interpretation[14] of the early empirical material and noticed how the multiplicity of everyday life environments would be problematic, the scope of the fieldwork could quickly be readjusted to the workplace. Yet, at the time, I was still looking for another way to approach and organize the empirical material.

Because I was conducting my fieldwork in two cities, I wanted to find a way to organize and interpret the field notes of Montreal and Brussels in parallel, in order to prevent having distinct chapters or sections of chapters focusing only on one city. I wanted to avoid a "groupism" analysis, and account for lived nationhood in a dynamic way without focusing on groups or historically grounded knowledge. Inspired by the *histoire croisée* approach that aims to investigate empirical cases "through one another, in terms of relationships, interactions and circulation" (Werner and Zimmermann, 2006: 38), I attempted to combine material from a Montreal-based work environment with another one from Brussels.

When I started to assemble the empirical material, I began with my own experiences of meeting with a participant, a journalist in Brussels. Bearing in mind that "a central goal of phenomenological description is to destabilize those unexamined assumptions that organize our pre-reflective engagements with reality" (Desjarlais and Throop, 2011: 88), I reviewed my day, writing

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13 | Some participants never even really asked about the objectives of my research. But others did try to learn more about my work, and were at times very insistent. In these cases, at first, I started talking about phenomenology, by telling them that I was interested in learning about the structures of their work tasks and interactions in their work environments. If they had more questions, or asked for examples, I would tell them that I was looking for practices or ways of doing things involving knowledge that they had forgotten learning in the first place. Only one participant continued to question me at this point. I then told him that I could not disclose the precise nature of my research until after the interview. He understood and continued to help me.

14 | I first focused on the mere relationship my participants had with nationhood without necessarily taking into account the context in which it appeared. While this first attempt at interpreting my material was in line with my research interests, I felt that it did not do justice to my observations.

down, step by step, what I had observed, heard, and thought about some of the issues that were raised. Without taking anything for granted, I problematized things that most people would see but to which they would most likely not pay much attention. While writing, I reached a point where I had to account for a brainstorming session in which my informant, a journalist, and his colleagues were trying to figure out what news should feature in the television program later on that day. Various topics were brought to the table, which made me wonder, as I was listing the suggestions, what would have been brought to the table in Montreal on the set of a similar news program on the same day. Lingering on the matter, I remembered discussing with a teacher of French literature in Montreal how he decided what topics or authors would feature in his lessons on a particular day. While the teacher was of course not concerned with news, the decision process he was going through reminded me of the one I had observed in the brainstorming session at the television station in Brussels. I then decided to tell the story of the journalist and the teacher in parallel, for certain aspects of their work tasks were similar. Writing about different work environments, with different professions and objectives, I found myself constructing a first *encounter* between Brussels and Montreal by crossing material from both cities in which similar work-related activities appeared to intersect.

At this point in the writing process of the encounter, I was still unsure about how the narrative would unravel, what it would actually account for, and how I would be able to use it as an "interpretative tool" for the field. But as I kept going metaphorically from Montreal to Brussels and *vice versa*, I realized that the story I was shaping was revolving around the accomplishment of a work task in which nationhood was at play. The encounter I was constructing between two work environments located in different cities had permitted work tasks to emerge in which national elements were involved. In aiming to understand how informants had been carrying out their tasks within the contexts and parameters of their respective work environments and particularly how nationhood was structuring the work tasks at hand, I was trying to break down the encounter into different components: the determinants of both work places, and the motives that underlay my informants' actions with regard to the activities allowing them to accomplish the task in question.

First, I asked myself: Which of my observations of the participants impacted the processes or the outcomes of the work tasks at hand and did not depend on my informants? This led me to take into account various elements of the workplace: the guidelines from the employer, the incursions of colleagues, the professional codes stemming from my participants' jobs, the public policies from the regions or the states, or again the time frames in which the tasks needed to be accomplished. I wondered which of these work environment elements were relevant to the tasks under investigation and in which ways they were meaningful when my participants interacted with them while conduct-

ing the tasks at hand. Second, reconstructing individual actions—from what I had observed and heard from participants—while considering interactions with the above-mentioned elements, colleagues, or clients of the workplaces and the outcome or intended outcome of the tasks, I asked myself: How did my participants subjectively relate to nationhood while conducting a work task involving national elements? To answer this question, I reconstructed the motive underlying the actions leading my participants to accomplish their work tasks.

At first, I was uncertain of the role such sociological encounters could play in the structure of the research. Yet, I tried to construct others. In reworking the descriptions of the fieldwork in line with the feuilleton approach, which consists of a story-driven writing style that remains grounded in empirical material (Dumont-Lagacé and Thériault, 2016; see also Thériault, 2017; Kracauer, 1998 [1930]), I accounted for these encounters through narratives which, in the end, became the heart of the research. I found myself constructing multiple encounters, which all consist of work tasks involving national elements that represent typical everyday cases of lived nationhood.

Main Research Question

Drawing on Brubaker, and with the tools of a phenomenologically-based sociology and an interpretive sociology in mind, I elaborated in the introduction of this book a conceptual approach to investigate what I refer to as lived nationhood, or the experienced meanings of living in a world of nations. Aiming to understand how nationhood is experienced by individuals in Montreal and Brussels—the research problem of the book exposed in the Preface—I suggested taking interest in the constitutive sense of actions, but also objects within their contexts, which, through interpretation, will lead me to better identify different aspects of nationhood in day-to-day activities. In examining motives underlying social actions in which nationhood is involved, by reconstructing not only the action itself but also the outcome of the observed practices and expressions within their contexts, the investigation of lived nationhood, I argued, will allow me to unveil the ongoing construction of the idea of a world of nations and the implications of this idea on individual's everyday experiences. Most importantly, it will help me shed light on the multiple ways in which nationhood is enacted by individuals in everyday life.

In ignoring the manifold ways in which nationhood can be experienced or enacted, previous studies stemming from the field of the sociology of nationalism do not appear to consider the various dynamics through which nations are made on a daily basis. A sociology of lived nationhood will help me examine through the multiplicity of everyday nationhood phenomena how individuals are "doing nationhood" and "making nations" on a daily basis, i.e., how individuals enact the idea that they live in a world divided into nations, and thereby

reproduce it as such. Besides, being personally and intellectually connected to Montreal and Brussels, it was both obvious and necessary for me to conduct such an investigation in these two cities—after all, it is because I have lived in both cities that I work on nationalism. While the implementation of the measures that constituted the social constellations of each city are of concern throughout the book, I am nonetheless mostly interested in understanding the *relationship* individuals have to nationhood in such bi-ethnonational milieus by exploring lived experiences. In identifying this relationship, I will be able to reveal the ways in which nationhood is enacted in the bi-ethnonational contexts of Montreal and Brussels, and the mechanisms through which nations are made. Therefore, the central question I want to explore in this book is: *How can the relationship with nationhood be understood and characterized in the bi-ethnonational milieus of Montreal and Brussels?*

Division of the Book

The book is divided into two sections. In the first one, I will examine five work tasks—constructed through the sociological encounters—in which national elements play a key role. By unveiling the motives of individuals accomplishing these tasks, I will shed light on the relationships they have with nationhood in the work environments of Montreal and Brussels. In characterizing these relationships under three ways of enacting nationhood, I will also identify three work tasks dynamics and the ways in which they each operate with regard to nationhood. With the help of a typology, I will establish a nexus between a specific way of enacting nationhood while accomplishing a work task and the way this task operates with regard to nationhood. Each work task dynamic corresponds to a mode of operating nationhood: a theoretical construct applicable outside work-related activities that entails a unique way of enacting nationhood and legitimizing elements as national. The chapters of Section 2—Chapters 1, 2 and 3—are divided along these three work task dynamics and modes of operating nationhood.

The second section of the book will discuss the main results of the research. First, in Chapter 4, I will discuss the theoretical impact of my findings with respect to the field of the sociology of nationalism. I will reflect upon the investigation of lived nationhood in work environments, and return to the research design I constructed to carry out the empirical investigation. I will then concisely present the typology of the work task dynamics and modes of operating nationhood as developed in Section 1. I will discuss how each mode represents a specific way of "doing nationhood" and "making nations." Second, in Chapter 5, I will focus on the bi-ethnonational social constellations of Montreal and Brussels and discuss how my research furthers our understanding of nationhood in the sociopolitical contexts of both cities.

Besides leading me to understand and characterize how the idea of living in a world divided into nations is experienced through the accomplishment of work tasks, the encounters I construct in the following section of the book reveal in an original way singular phenomenal manifestations of the nation as they are lived in Montreal and Brussels. These manifestations are chosen on the basis of their "typicalness" with regard to lived nationhood; they necessarily are banal phenomena that most people—perhaps even more so people familiar with both cities—will recognize without, in all likelihood, ever having paid much attention to them.