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Warm nationalism: Mapping and imagining the Jordanian nation

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ABSTRACT

In 2002, fourteen years after their withdrawal from the West Bank, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan revealed its new national program known as “Jordan First.” The Palace initiated this campaign as part of its shifting national discourse which now sought to actively unite Palestinian-Jordanians and East Jordanians living to the east of the Jordan River. This campaign, and particularly its common map-logo symbol, has evolved over the last fourteen years into a rather “banal” national discourse and symbol. However, Jordanian nationalism and the everyday symbols of the Jordan First campaign are not forgotten. Instead, for many Jordanians, the campaign is a reminder of “hot” geopolitics and palpable identity politics. Drawing from Michael Billig's theorizations of banal nationalism, I examine the relationship between banal and hot forms of nationalism in Jordan and argue that scholarly work on banality needs to focus attention on the connections between these categories. As such, I suggest that framing nationalism as something quite “warm” can in many instances more aptly capture the complexity of nationalism. Using a multi-method approach that includes analyses of national maps and map-logos of Jordan and in-depth interviews with Jordanians about their national identities, I highlight the connections of hot and banal nationalism. Through my analysis, I also show that a Jordanian national identity is multi-scalar, merging Arab supranationalism with Jordanian and Palestinian identities; and thus I also extend Billig's work to examine the multiple scales of nationalism.

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1. Introduction

In November 2002, King Abdullah II of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan revealed the Jordanization program known as “Jordan First.” This official program sought to shift Jordan's national discourse from one that had focused on regional connections with the Arab world and Palestine, to one that focused on Jordan. Jordan First has been regarded as a purposeful campaign that attempted to re-define the relationship between Jordanian citizens and the state, and to encourage all Jordanians to unite under a common identity (Milton-Edwards & Hinchcliffe, 2009, 66). The program included a massive public relations campaign with billboards, pins, bumper stickers, and other promotional materials. The main symbol of this campaign is a map-flag logo (Fig. 1), which soon became commonplace. The Jordan First symbol, as well as the Jordanian flag, images of King Abdullah II (as well as the crown prince, and the past kings), and outline maps of the Jordanian nation are everywhere in Jordan – government buildings, highways, private businesses, and in people's homes. In many ways, the symbol of the Jordan First program seems like a banal symbol of nationalism. It is a part of the everyday reproductions of nationalism and is both ubiquitous and rather unremarkable.[1] But as I'll show in this paper, ubiquitous symbols of the nation do not render Jordanian nationalism forgotten or apolitical. The images and discourses that epitomize the Jordan First campaign have indeed become commonplace over time, but these images and discourses emerged from and still remind Jordanians of “hot” regional geopolitical disputes with Israel, Palestine, and the Arab world, as well as palpable identity politics within Jordan. Using a multi-method approach that includes analyses of national maps and map-logos of Jordan and in-depth interviews with Jordanians about their national identities, I extend Billig's work in two interconnected ways.

First, I argue that we need to focus our attention on the *connections* between hot and banal nationalism instead of favoring one category over the other. Billig frames banal nationalism as the common, mindless, and forgotten symbols and practices of

[1] As this article was going to press in June 2016, the Jordanian government launched a new campaign focusing on their military involvement in the war against Daesh and in celebration of the 100 year anniversary of the Arab Revolt. The Jordan First campaign seems to have been replaced by this new campaign.

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Fig. 1. This is the common map-flag-logo of both the "Jordan First" and the "We Are All Jordan" campaigns. (Color figure available online.)

nationalism. Banal nationalism is contrasted to hot nationalism, which is understood to be passionate, emotional, and often marked with violence and extremism (6, 43–46, 128). Though Billig notes that the banal and hot are connected and that the banal is never innocuous, nevertheless banal and hot nationalisms have often been framed as categorically different (Jones & Merriman, 2009). In this paper, I focus my attention on the connections and blurring of the hot and banal as opposed to focusing on one or the other category of nationalism. My analysis of iconic symbols of Jordanian nationalism and people's perceptions of these symbols shows that Jordanian nationalism is not banal, common, mindless and forgotten; nor is it hot, passionate, emotional, and violent. By focusing on the connections between what *could* be categorized as either banal or hot, I show the direct, pervasive, and enduring linkages between these well-accepted categories of nationalism. As such, I suggest the idea of "warm" nationalism and stress the importance of examining people's perceptions as two ways to delve into the connections and blurring of the hot and banal. Ultimately, by focusing on the blurred category of warm nationalism as well as on people's perceptions, the complexity and heterogeneity of nationalism becomes evident.

The second way that I extend Billig's work is to show that Jordanian nationalism transcends multiple scales. As it has been well established across the social sciences, national discourses exist at many scales and are not confined to territorial or state borders (Agnew, 2007; Anzaldua, 1999; Appadurai, 2006; Ong, 1999; Paasi, 2001). Yet Billig's argument that nations have not unraveled in the "postmodern era" re-creates standard scalar divisions and situates nationalism within the state.[2] Thus, I highlight the importance of examining nationalism outside the territorial state. Jordan's national discourse has drawn greatly from discourses linked to state borders, but it has also been defined by Arab supranationalism and Palestinian nationalism.

Building from literature that stresses the importance of examining images and discourses in tandem with everyday lived experiences (Bernazzoli & Flint, 2010; Castree & MacMillan, 2004; Crampton, 2009; Dittmer, 2010; Kitchin & Dodge, 2007), I examine common symbols of Jordanian nationalism alongside Jordanians' perceptions of the nation. I focus on maps and map-logos specifically because of the significance this type of image has in symbolizing national territories (Anderson, 1991; Herb, 1999; Winichakul, 1994). Yet an analysis of maps or map-logos tells a partial story only. By conducting interviews with Jordanians about their own geographical imaginings of the Jordanian nation, I highlight the complex and varied meanings that these national images can invoke. Examining images in tandem with geographical imaginings of the nation allows me to highlight the complexity of Jordanian nationalism, the uneasy categorization of hot or banal, and the multi-scalar aspects of Jordanian nationalism.

In the remainder of this paper, I first contextualize the emergence of the Jordanian state and the subsequent construction of a national identity, focusing specifically on the multi-scalar geopolitical issues that became central to the Jordanian national discourse. Second, I discuss Billig's concept of banal nationalism and provide greater detail into how I extend his thesis to focus on (1) the connections between the hot and banal and (2) the multiple scales of nationalism. Then I examine several maps and map-logos that are parts of Jordanian national atlases and Jordanian government campaigns, alongside interviews I conducted within Jordanians about these national symbols.

2. Constructing the Jordanian nation

The state of Jordan emerged during the WWI era.[3] In 1921, after years of negotiations between British and French leaders, the newly formed League of Nations accepted the proposal to create the British Mandate of Transjordan out of the fallen Ottoman Empire. Prior to this period, there was no regional territorial entity referred to as Jordan or Transjordan (Massad, 2001, 27). With the acceptance of the mandate, the British installed Abdullah I of the Hashemite Dynasty, as the nominal ruler of Transjordan. The citizenry of the newly formed state was comprised of around half a million Arab Bedouins (Brand, 1995).

In 1946, Transjordan achieved independence and soon there afterward it changed its name to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Like many states across the globe, Jordan's national identity was constructed after the state was created (Massad, 2001, 8; Anderson, 2005). Jordan's national identity is, of course, multifaceted and fluid. It draws from discourses about the Hashemite Dynasty, Islam, the ancient past, and Bedouin culture. Yet, as I focus on in this paper, multi-scalar geopolitical issues pertaining to Arab, Palestinian, and Jordanian identity are all central to the Jordanian national discourse (Pappe, 1994).

One central component of the Jordanian national discourse is an Arab identity. As designated in its 1952 constitution, Jordan is officially an Arab state, and nearly all Jordanians speak Arabic. But well before the 1952 constitution, the idea of Arab unity was central for the burgeoning Jordanian nation. For example, at the onset of the 1921 mandate, King Abdullah I had proclaimed his desires to unite the territories of Transjordan, Palestine, and Syria as one Arab nation (Shoup, 2007, 21; Susser, 1994, 212; Nevo & Pappe, 1994,

[2] Billig does not clarify his usage of the terms nation, state, or nation-state. In this paper, I adhere to the generally accepted categories of nations as places of identity and meaning, states as sovereign administrative entities, and nation-states as the supposed coming together of the two.

[3] Under the Ottoman Empire, some state building began in Jordan by settling Bedouins and structuring economic relations between the governing body in Istanbul and the cities and villages outside the center (Anderson, 2005, 34).

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