

# Parents' reflections on choice of neighbourhood and their transformative potential for future conceptualisations of the nation

## Abstract

This article contends that parents' reflections on choice of neighbourhood provide insights into a transformative potential for future conceptualisations of the nation. Built on 30 interviews in Oslo, Norway, this study shows that when choosing a neighbourhood for *where* their children will grow up, parents create the spatial and social frame of the everyday life within which their children will be socialised – of which socialisation into the nation is one element. Through their socio-spatial preferences, one elicits their notions on who belongs where in the neighbourhoods of Oslo, but also to the nation. Balancing ideals and values both for their children and for themselves, the parents draw on multiple temporalities – past, present, and future – of an imagined community, which in turn offer evidence that how nation and diversity coexist, changes with time. A change, where diversity is envisioned as an *integral part* of the nation; as both contradictory *and* intertwined.

Key words: Everyday nation, diversity, neighbourhood, temporalities, Norway

## Introduction

The nation is considered a mundane backdrop to everyday life – ‘unseen, unheard, unnoticed’ – yet it is something that occasionally crystallises as an event (Brubaker, 1994; Brubaker, Feischmidt, Fox et al., 2006; Skey, 2011). With this in mind, Jon Fox (2017: 26) asks the important question: how do we know that the nation is there? He suggests that, at certain times and places, the nation is on the ‘periphery of consciousness’ and potentially accessible. Given that ‘we are not born into our nations’ (Fox, 2017: 35), but rather, we learn to take the nation for granted (Throssell, 2012), childhood socialisation suggests itself as a useful entry point to explore this question. But in this age of migration and increasingly complex population compositions, what conception of the nation are children socialised into, and how? Traditionally, the topic of national socialisation has been explored from the vantage point of either parental transmission of national identities to their children (Unterreiner, 2017) or teaching the nation in schools (Mavroudi & Holt, 2015). This article examines parents’ reflections on *where* this socialisation into the nation is or ought to be occurring (parents with children living at home, hereafter parents). More specifically, it examines parents’ *reflections* on their choice of neighbourhood as a way to explore the production and reproduction<sup>1</sup> of the everyday nation.

When choosing a neighbourhood – a spatiality – where their children will grow up, parents create the frame within which the children will live their everyday lives and be socialised – this is also where they will be socialised into the nation. Although home is the primary arena for socialisation (Brattbakk & Wessel, 2017), neighbourhoods, like schools, are important secondary arenas. Much of the current research on neighbourhoods explores a neighbourhood’s effect on the children growing up there. However, parents have their own ideas about what constitutes a

favourable neighbourhood for their children (Brattbakk & Wessel, 2013; Danielsen & Lundberg, 2010; Toft & Ljunggren, 2016). The socio-spatial patterns within any city are complex and attributable to a range of decisions and processes, both individual and structural in nature. Some have argued that individuals tend to have a socio-spatial preference for social homogeneity (Bailey, Gent & Musterd, 2017), although recent research in the Netherlands has found evidence of increased population mixing in most neighbourhoods (Zwiers, van Ham & Manley, 2017). Nevertheless, the claim of homogeneity is supported by the neighbourhood research in Oslo, which emphasises class mobility, ‘white flight’ and school catchment area in explaining parents’ choice of neighbourhood (Ljunggren, 2017; Morken, 2012; Søholt & Lynnebakke, 2015; Vassenden, 2007).

The parents in this study reflect on population composition, and on who belongs *where*, e.g. within a territorially defined nation and/or a neighbourhood. In doing so, they reveal their notions of the relationship between territorial and relational space (Cresswell, 1996; Jones & Merriman, 2012). The increasingly complex composition of the populations of European countries contradicts, in the minds of many (notably, supporters of the expanding right-wing populist parties), the imagined (homogeneous) community of the nation (Anderson, 1983). However, the reflections of participants in this study show that the nation and what might be referred to as migration-related diversity (ethnic, racial, religious) in fact coexist; they are revealed as both contradictory *and* intertwined. For the participants not only include past and present conceptualisations of the nation, they also reflect upon the future. It is this future-oriented transformative potential of their reflections to which the present study contributes empirical and theoretical insight. A transformative potential, which comes to the fore through the longstanding tensions between (i) nation and diversity, and (ii) nation and neighbourhood (local). On the

former, the present study empirically substantiates that notions of nation and diversity as mutually exclusive are misguided at best (Fox, 2017; Kymlicka, 2015; Matejskova & Antonsich, 2015). On the latter, it argues the importance of including the nation as part of analysis in neighbourhood research, rather than – as tends to be the case presently – treating the nation as a taken for granted background expectancy, without explicitly addressing it.

The focus of this article is on the *reflections* that help create the spatial and social frame of the everyday. These reflections provide a non-breaching strategy to help make explicit the otherwise implicit foundations of the nation in everyday life. I ask first: How, and to what extent, can parents' reflections on the choice of neighbourhood provide insight into (re)productions of the everyday nation? By focusing on what is made explicit in these reflections, I subsequently ask: How, and to what extent, do nation and diversity coexist?

This article is built on 30 semi-structured interviews with 'ordinary' people conducted in two city districts (administrative levels) in Oslo, Norway between June and November 2015. By 'ordinary' people, I mean individuals with a variety of unique, intersecting identities who were not chosen to represent any particular profession or group (as defined by citizenship, ethnicity, religion, or class position). What they have in common is that they all live within a shared national space (Bauböck, 2002). Additionally, all but one is a parent and some are also grandparents.

The article is structured as follows: I start by elaborating on the conceptual framework by linking nation, diversity and everyday life, and I provide a discussion of how to make explicit the otherwise implicit foundations of the nation in everyday life. I then give a brief presentation of the method and a short description of the contexts of Oslo and Norway. Next, by addressing the

two research questions in turn, I first establish how parents' reflections provide insight into (re)productions of the everyday nation. I then continue to describe what is made explicit – namely, how nation and diversity coexist in parents' reflections on their choice of neighbourhood. Finally, I conclude by considering the transformative potential of the parents' reflections on choice of neighbourhood and how these provide insights into future conceptualisations of the nation.

## Nation, diversity and everyday life

Within both scholarly and popular debate, there is a persistent narrative that nation and migration-related diversity (ethnic, racial and religious) cannot coexist (Antonsich & Matejskova, 2015). Since the 1990s, the nation(-state) has by many been rejected as a meaningful socio-spatial entity due to processes like globalisation and international migration. As the nation – in line with nationalism as an ideology – is presumably built upon a perceived notion of homogeneity, immigration is thought to weaken a sense of national solidarity. For this reason, diversity is considered by many to be the greatest challenge to a cohesive national future (Kymlicka, 2015).

How contemporary research on the nation and on diversity tend to engage – or disengage – with each other contributes to upholding the mistaken notion that nation and diversity are mutually exclusive (Antonsich, 2018; Matejskova & Antonsich, 2015). Indeed, contemporary research on the nation is to a large extent preoccupied with how nationalism can create unity out of diversity. Yet, at the same time, it rarely addresses diversity as an *integral part* of the nation. A few notable

exceptions to this are, from an everyday perspective, the work of Antonsich and colleagues, where they argue that diversity holds the potential to rewrite mainstream notions of the nation (see e.g. Antonsich, 2014, 2016, 2018; Antonsich & Matejskova, 2015; Hearn & Antonsich, 2018). And from a normative perspective, the work of Modood (see e.g. 2013) on how an inclusive national identity is key to achieving a successful multicultural society. On the other hand, research on diversity tends to reject the nation and the national on a normative basis (Antonsich, 2018; Antonsich & Matejskova, 2015; Rossetto, 2015). This rejection builds on an idea of the nation as an abstract, homogeneous and exclusive socio-spatial entity whilst other geographical scales, such as the local and the urban, are understood as lived, experienced and inclusive (see e.g. Koefoed & Simonsen, 2011; Neal & Vincent, 2013; Valentine, 2008; Wise & Velayutham, 2009). This understanding of the nation echoes traditional research on nationalism where a nation is commonly reproduced as a static category and approached as a phenomenon on the national scale (Moore, 2008).

That said, a shared feature of research on nation and diversity, at least within certain strands of these literatures (see e.g. everyday nationhood and everyday multiculturalism) is how the everyday is deployed as the ‘domain of enquiry’. The domain of the everyday provides a realm to explore the (potentially) taken for granted background expectancies in individuals’ everyday lives through their social interaction (Antonsich & Matejskova, 2015; Fox & Miller-Idriss, 2008a; Nowicka & Vertovec, 2014; Wessendorf, 2013). While everyday encounters and questions of how to interact across difference – in neighbourhoods – have received much attention in scholarly debates, the nation and the national is often reduced to a static backdrop and overlooked in analysis of diversity. In consequence, little attention has been paid to the multiplicity of roles

and functions that nationhood plays in this everyday social interaction. A key feature of this critique involves an understanding of everyday life as a realm without a fixed spatiality.

This article is situated within the scholarship of everyday nationhood. By taking this position, this article maintains a dynamic conceptualisation of the nation in which it is understood as both imagined (Anderson, 1983) and experienced (Brubaker et al., 2006; Fox & Miller-Idriss, 2008a). For individuals – as co-producers of nationhood in everyday life – draw on national imaginaries that they identify with, including other members of that nation (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). At the same time, the nation is experienced and (re)produced as a discursive reality and as situated accomplishments in everyday life (Fox & Miller-Idriss, 2008a). For, according to Brubaker (1994), a nation does not exist in itself. Rather, through social practice, it is contingent on time and space; it is an identity marker that *sometimes* emerges as meaningful (“nationness”) in everyday life.

Accordingly, the realm of everyday life – here understood as without a fixed spatiality – does not only include the geographical scales of the local and the urban. The domain of the everyday allows for an exploration of when, where, how and why the nation – as much as diversity – emerges as meaningful. And consequently, there is a potential to explore (re)productions of both nation and diversity not only as imagined and abstract features, but also as lived and experienced ones (Antonsich, 2016, 2018; Brubaker et al., 2006; Jones & Desforges, 2003; Jones & Merriman, 2012).

This article also draws inspiration from diversity studies, paying particular attention to two aspects. First, the literature contains two different notions of diversity, as proposed by Antonsich (2014) and Antonsich and Matejskova (2015). These are living *with* diversity or living *in*

diversity. The former draws on ideas of conviviality, in which diversity is something that is coming to the dominant culture – ‘us’ – and must be tolerated (Gilroy, 2004). In other words, this perspective looks at the nation as homogeneous and exclusionary. The latter perspective recognises all cultures and people as part of a diverse whole, living together, although not always harmoniously. Indeed, disagreement and difference are seen as integral to living together *in* diversity (Amin, 2012; Antonsich & Matejskova, 2015; Hearn & Antonsich, 2018).

Second, in line with the emphasis in diversity studies on how people of different backgrounds live together in densely populated urban areas, e.g. neighbourhoods, Wessendorf (2013, 2014) identifies an ‘ethos of mixing’ in public space. By this, she means that, within a given spatiality, the taken for granted order of things is to interact across difference in public but to maintain more homogeneous relations in private. Moreover, she identifies the notion of ‘commonplace diversity’. This describes a situation where, over time, differences of origin, language or religion become normal and taken for granted: not unnoticed, but rarely talked about. Wessendorf’s theorisation on interaction across difference is useful for this analysis, albeit – as with the neighbourhood literature – little attention has been paid to address the nation explicitly in this conceptualisation of everyday social interaction.

That said, the scope of the ‘everyday’ in research on nationhood has been criticised for being ahistorical – i.e. for not encompassing a temporal dimension – in particular by Anthony D. Smith (2008). While Fox and Miller-Idriss (2008a; 2008b) argue that, in their work, they are more interested in the ‘here and now’ than in the historical origins of a nation, they do not dismiss the relevance of the latter. Rather, they argue that everyday nationhood should be ‘understood in multiple temporal and spatial dimensions’ (Fox & Miller-Idriss, 2008b: 574). Whereas the past and present are included in current analyses of both the nation (see e.g. Drozdowski, 2014; Lavi,



2013) and everyday nationhood (reference removed for peer-review), discussion of the future is missing. The present study, as already hinted, offers empirical and theoretical insights regarding this overlooked dimension.

## Making explicit the otherwise implicit

Much scholarly attention has been paid to the explicit and extraordinary expressions of nationalism, such as battles for independence, right-wing extremists defending a notion of a homogenous nation, or national commemoration days. Less attention has been paid to the realm of everyday life, where the nation is (re)produced in a predictable pattern to the extent that it might be taken for granted and escape attention (Jones & Merriman, 2009). This begs the question posed in the introduction: how do we know that the nation is there? In order to address this, Fox (2017) posits a need to find evidence of *when* the nation is reproduced in a taken for granted manner in everyday life – in other words, to help make explicit the otherwise implicit foundations of the eventful nation (Fox, 2017; Fox & Miller-Idriss, 2008a; Skey, 2011).

Adding to this, the present study also examines the question of *what* is made explicit. Whilst national territories might be taken for granted and reduced to static backdrops to everyday life, more recent work on the geographies of nationalism argue that if nations are to be understood in terms of contingency, so should their territories (Jones & Merriman, 2012). Put differently, the analysis needs to consider the taken for granted power-relations in space through the situatedness of territorial and relational space in everyday life.

Fox proposes to introduce breaches in the research design to elicit what he terms ‘nationally explicit repair work’, on the spatial, temporal and political edges of the nation (see Fox, 2017). He argues that these breaches help to upset ‘the unspoken order of things [which] requires that order of things [to] be spoken to restore it’ (Garfinkel, 1967: 54, 37, quoted in Fox, 2017: 6). However, in line with Hearn and Antonsich (2018), this article maintains this notion of restoration suggests that the ‘repair work’ will return the nation back to a stable notion of normality. While the nation may be (re)produced in a predictable pattern, this does not, however, entail imperviousness to change (Jones & Merriman, 2009). Alternatively, Hearn and Antonsich (2018) propose to explore the act of breaching itself. By being open to surprise as to when the nation emerges as relevant, they contend that the breaches provide opportunity to explore their transformative potential.

Whilst drawing inspiration from the transformative potential of the breaches (Hearn & Antonsich, 2018), this article expands on the argument by offering a non-breaching strategy to help make explicit the otherwise implicit foundations of everyday nationhood. Individuals are not necessarily aware of how they are involved in (re)producing nationhood in their everyday lives and when situated in space, they (often) take the spatial and social frame of their everyday lives for granted (Fox & Miller-Idriss, 2008a). Yet, this article contends that by hypothetically disrupting this frame through prompts in the interview (see method and context section), the parents’ reflections on where their children are or ought to be brought up – particularly with respect to their aspirations for their children in the future – one may draw out reflections that exist at their ‘periphery of consciousness’ concerning the relationship between territorial and relational space, at any scale (Jones & Merriman, 2012). In other words, one may elicit their notions on who belongs where: to the nation, neighbourhood, or otherwise.

In this article, the contingency of territorial and relational space is explored through parents' reflections on their choice of neighbourhoods (Jones & Merriman, 2012). Neighbourhoods vary in size and scale as well as in their relevance as administrative areas. But understood as a spatial category, when embedded with meaning, neighbourhoods become place (Agnew, 2005). Although neighbourhoods as places change constantly, certain myths about their identities and the people who inhabit them can develop (Danielsen & Lundberg, 2010; Wessel, 2017). While hegemonic structures in place have the power to define narrations of who and what 'naturally' belong where, questions about belonging arise and concern *one's self* as much as they do others (Skey, 2011). The relationality of belonging is thus integral to questions of self-identification with a place of any scale, be it a neighbourhood and/or a nation (Antonsich, 2010; Yuval-Davis, 2006; reference removed for peer-review).

## Method and context

In Norway, notions of an egalitarianism that to a large extent conflate ideas of equality and similarity have a strong foothold. This egalitarianism upholds the idea of a nation built on an 'imagined sameness' and promotes a notion of 'sameness' which is, to a large degree, associated with homogeneity and observable similarities, e.g. skin colour (Bendixen, Bringslid & Vike, 2017; Gullestad, 2002a). From this backdrop, there arises the perception of the Norwegian nation as under pressure from increasing immigration, i.e. migration-related diversity (Eriksen & Næss, 2011). In contrast to this popular belief, the population of Norway – as in any nation (Kaufmann, 2004, 2016; Vertovec, 2007) – is, and always has been, heterogeneous. Still, diversity as the result of immigration has steadily increased during the last half-century (Brochmann &

Kjeldstadli, 2008; Gullestad, 2002b). In 2017, the population of Norway was 5.26 million, of which immigrants accounted for 14 per cent. Norwegian-born inhabitants with two immigrant parents comprise 3 per cent; those with one Norwegian-born and one immigrant parent total nearly 5 per cent (Statistics Norway, 2017). These statistics reveal how the composition of the Norwegian population has changed over time.

Within Norway, Oslo has the largest immigrant population, a term defined by Statistics Norway to include both those who have immigrated to Norway and Norwegian-born inhabitants with two immigrant parents (Oslo Municipality, 2017). Those meeting this definition comprise one-third of the city's population of 667,000. However, they are not distributed evenly throughout the city. Oslo is often referred to as a divided city, where the western half is affluent and homogeneous while the eastern half is more diverse, in both socio-economic and socio-cultural terms (Ljunggren, 2017; Myhre, 2017). For instance, in 2011 there was a 9-year difference between the life expectancy of men living in the city districts with the highest and the lowest life-expectancy rates (Statistics Norway, 2013). However, as illustrated by Figure 1 – though the east/west divide is noticeable – there are still considerable variations in the distribution of income and immigrant population within the city districts nuancing the often taken for granted place myths of both east and west. For instance, housing types and market prices vary among the city districts and also among the neighbourhoods within them. House ownership is common in Oslo, and although individuals' freedom to choose which neighbourhoods to live in is strongly affected by household purchasing power (Nordahl, 2012), this was rarely brought up in the interviews.

[Figure 1 here]

As part of a larger study consisting of 60 semi-structured interviews, this particular analysis draws on a subset of 30 interviews conducted in two city districts in Oslo between June and November 2015. The focus of this article is on reflections by parents who mostly fall into the two youngest age-brackets (20–39 and 40–59). However, it should be noted that the parents in the 60+ age-bracket had a somewhat different perspective when it came to migration-related diversity. All but one of the research participants in the latter age-bracket spoke about migration-related diversity as something they had to live *with*; that is, it is something that is coming to ‘us’ that we must tolerate (Antonsich, 2014; Antonsich & Matejskova, 2015). Since these particular research participants were already adults when international labour migration to Norway started, their attitude is not so remarkable. In contrast, all but two of the 19 participants from the two youngest age-brackets understood themselves to be a part of – living *in* – the diverse population of Oslo and Norway. The following discussions draw on the reflections of those in the two youngest age-brackets.

Recognising that populations in contemporary societies are diverse in multiple and intersecting ways, I sought research participants who would reflect this diversification of diversity among individuals inhabiting a shared national space (Bauböck, 2002; Fox & Jones, 2013; Meissner & Vertovec, 2015; Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002). In order to avoid creating a sample that risked reproducing preconceived notions of nationhood, e.g. one based on citizenship, birth, ancestry, or race, I opted for a sampling strategy where the participants’ self-identification with various identity markers was central (Brubaker, 2004). Diversification of diversity within the sample was secured for the dataset as a whole. Thus, as can be observed below, there are biases in this particular subset regarding gender and political self-identification to the left of the political centre.

My strategy for recruiting participants was flexible. While the sample was never intended to be random, all background variables were documented systematically. Within the two city districts (hereafter referred to as Oslo I and Oslo II), participants were recruited through a variety of recruitment channels, such as various associational spaces – e.g. nursery schools (parents and employees), senior centres (users) and volunteer centres (users and employees) – but also through convenient sampling strategies, such as snowballing through the extended networks of research participants and my own acquaintances. The research participants had different relationships to the city districts – while most lived there, others only worked there or were users of one of the recruitment arenas.

The sample consists of 14 interviews in Oslo I and 16 in Oslo II. In keeping with the sampling strategy, the selected city districts were more mixed than simply reflecting the east/west divide of Oslo. However, Oslo I falls within the city's west side and Oslo II within the east. For reasons of anonymity, I will not disclose their names. The sample consists of 19 female and 11 male participants. 25 participants hold Norwegian citizenship, 1 has dual citizenship, and 3 have chosen to naturalise as Norwegian citizens. The last 5 have permanent residency. Of these, 3 are European citizens and two hold citizenship in countries outside of Europe. 17 participants work full-time, 10 are retired and 3 were at home with children. Most had completed tertiary education; 6 had completed secondary school and 4, primary school. Using their last vote<sup>ii</sup> to determine political self-identification, 5 are to the right of the political centre, 5 identify as centre and 17 are to the left. 3 participants were not willing to state their political affiliation. Finally, 10 participants were in the 20–39 age-bracket, nine were in the 40–59 age-range, and 11 were 60 or older. All but one of the participants was a parent, and some were grandparents.

The semi-structured interviews were carried out using a topic-guide. All participants were invited to talk about their everyday lives and encouraged to illustrate statements with anecdotes. Thus, I employed a 'wait-and-listen' approach in order not to risk treating the nation as a salient identity marker (Fox & Miller-Idriss, 2008a). However, as part of a large project exploring bottom-up iterations of national identity in light of increasing ethnic and religious diversity in Norway, the scope of the study was on individuals' self-identification as much as on the relationality of belonging. For this reason, the conversations were followed with questions that explored the participants' own sense of belonging. However, as elaborated in the conceptual framework, the questions of 'where did you grow up and where do you live now', followed by a question of 'where is home', addressing different geographical scales in turn starting with neighbourhood, then the city and nation, prompted the reflections on the choice of neighbourhood that this analysis is built upon. Additionally, more direct questions about diversity and nationhood followed.

All of the interviews were conducted in Norwegian and were recorded and transcribed (translations in this article are by the author). They have been coded and re-coded using the software program NVivo, according to the rationale of grounded theory linked with abduction (Reichert, 2007). Whereas impressions formed during data collection provided the article's point of inquiry, the analysis is built on a systematic process of going back and forth between the data and theoretical concepts.

In the following section, I start by empirically substantiating that the parents' reflections on choice of neighbourhood help make explicit their otherwise implicit and taken for granted foundations of the nation. I then go on to analyse their reflections as they reveal the ways in

which nation and diversity coexist. Taken together, these reflections offer insights into (re)productions of the everyday nation in multiple temporalities.

## Nation in parents' reflections on choice of neighbourhood

Parents are responsible for the present and future well-being of their children and they must make many decisions in this regard. Choosing where to live is one of those decisions, and parents often have a clear idea of what constitutes a favourable neighbourhood for their children to grow up in (Brattbakk & Wessel, 2013; Lundberg & Danielsen, 2010). As the research participants in this study – the parents – reflected upon the spatial and social frame of *where* their children are being (or ought to be) brought up and socialised, they also included, reflexively or not, thoughts about the nation. Hence, through the non-breaching strategy proposed in this article, the hypothetical disruption of the everyday frame in the interview helped make explicit the otherwise implicit thoughts on the nation. In other words, they revealed the participants' underlying perceptions of the relationship between territorial and relational space, at any scale (Jones & Merriman, 2012) – such as in the following quote from Andreas, a father of two adopted children (age-bracket 6–16)<sup>iii</sup>.

When we were expecting our second child, we started to look for a bigger house. We looked at various areas. And the fact that it was a diverse and not 'Blenda white'<sup>iv</sup> environment was important. And not just in relation to adoption. It was also related to, let us call it political conviction, social belonging to the Oslo that you identify most with. And that, for my wife in particular, is not the west side of Oslo in any circumstance. (...) In retrospect, I think it was a very good choice, a very fortunate choice that we ended up here. (...) It is a much more real picture of Norway, and that you are part of... they [the children] become exposed to much



more than in other parts of the city. They get a much richer background, I believe, than in many other areas (Andreas, 40–59, Oslo II).

Drawing upon the dominant place myths about east and west Oslo, Andreas reflects on how the neighbourhood where he and his family have settled is, in his view, ‘a much more real picture of Norway’. He is thus reflecting as well on the composition of the Norwegian population and emphasising its importance within the spatial and social frame in which his children are brought up. In particular, he believes that the choice of neighbourhood will contribute to everyday experiences, which in turn will provide his children with ‘a richer background’ in the future.

Whereas Andreas speaks from the perspective of a non-migrant with adopted children, Maria (40–59, Oslo I), in the next example, speaks from a perspective of having immigrated to Norway as a young teenager. Her son was in the age-bracket 0–5 at the time of the interview. ‘Before we had our son, we used to live in the eastern part of Oslo, or the more inner east. It is more cosmopolitan, not so homogeneous’. However, after a period of living abroad and becoming parents, Maria and her family returned to Norway. And she explained, ‘We saw that there were many who were born and raised in Norway, who could switch to fluent Norwegian, but still chose to speak ‘jalla’-Norwegian. I don’t want our son to become ‘jalla’-Norwegian’. The term ‘jalla’-Norwegian refers to a sociolect often used by youth of immigrant background in eastern Oslo. Youth who use this sociolect tend to self-describe as ‘foreigners’. Maria continued:

In [country of origin], it is like, if you are born there, then you are [nationality]. But it’s not like that in Norway. He [her son] is considered a descendant. And I find that difficult. (...) I indoctrinate him by saying ‘You are Norwegian, you are Norwegian’ because he says he wants to be [nationality] like his mother. (...) We have made a conscious choice about not living in the eastern part of Oslo... Because I don’t want him to grow up in a small ghetto. I

don't want to and neither does my husband. We don't want people asking questions about why he eats sausages, or why he does this or that (...). There are challenges there [in the eastern part of Oslo]. (...) So, we have thrown ourselves, sort of, towards the west side.

In the interview, Maria spoke at length about how, while growing up, she had negotiated her own right to belong in Norway, refusing to live in what she referred to as a 'parallel society' between so-called nationals and immigrants. Although Maria and her husband had lived in a diverse neighbourhood prior to becoming parents, she did not want her family to be associated with immigration or with practices related to immigration, such as not eating hot dogs. Rather, she wanted her son to identify, and be identified by others, as Norwegian – as exemplified by the discussion about 'jalla'-Norwegian and descent. In this way, she was foregrounding the relationality of belonging (Antonsich, 2010; Yuval-Davis, 2006). To achieve her goal of bringing up her son to be Norwegian, Maria chose a frame for the everyday in which her son will be socialised into the nation, drawing, as with Andreas above, on ideas about the east/west division of Oslo. This frame includes a rejection of living in a neighbourhood characterised by migration-related diversity in favour of a more homogeneous area of the city, particularly in relation to language and descent. There are different ways to understand this, and I will return to this point. However, it is worth noting that although home ownership is more common than renting in Oslo, Maria and her husband are leasing an apartment in the west rather than buying in the east, which they could afford; thus, they demonstrate agency, unconstrained by structure, in their choice of neighbourhood.

Both Andreas's and Maria's reflections on *where* they want their children to be brought up are shaped by what they consider to be the most favourable neighbourhood in Oslo for this purpose. The nation emerges as relevant in both these parents' reflections – population composition is

regarded as essential, albeit in different ways (Brubaker 1994; Brubaker et al., 2006). Andreas reflects on what constitutes the composition of the Norwegian population; Maria thinks about language and descent.

By drawing on the nation in their reflections about the spatial and social frame of the everyday, Andreas and Maria both underscore that the scales of the national and the local may be intertwined (Jones & Desforges, 2003; Jones & Merriman, 2012). Nation is not only an abstract and imagined community, it is also something these two research participants consider as lived and experienced differently within the various neighbourhoods of Oslo. In consequence, this emphasises how, by drawing on the place myths, they perceive the various neighbourhoods in Oslo to represent different conceptualisations of the nation.

Meanwhile, interviews for this article were conducted in Oslo, the city with the largest immigrant population in Norway and characterised by neighbourhoods that vary from each other in terms of population composition (Ljunggren, 2017). Thus, parents in Oslo reflect on who and what belongs where in the nation and/or in the neighbourhood (Cresswell, 1996; Jones & Merriman, 2012). In contrast, other Norwegian cities, towns and villages are smaller and their populations are more homogeneous. Hence, in these places, the nation – in relation to migration-related diversity – may not be as embedded in the place myths. Therefore, for the parents in these other localities, the nation may not be lurking to the same extent in the ‘periphery of consciousness’ (Fox, 2017).

## Nation and diversity as contradictory and intertwined

When choosing a spatiality for *where* their children will grow up, a major insight from the data is how parents draw on multiple temporalities – past, present and future – of an imagined community, where nation and diversity are portrayed as both contradictory *and* intertwined. In other words, they draw on different conceptualisations of the nation at the same time: a nation with an imagined homogeneous past, a potentially diverse nation of the future, and the present nation where there is friction between these conceptualisations. In the section that follows, I will start by unpacking the ideals for the future and then explore the friction in the present.

### Commonplace diversity as ideal

When reflecting upon the spatial and social frame of the everyday in which they want their children to be brought up, participants in this study emphasise a mixed population composition as a value. Moreover, they express an ideal of what Wessendorf (2013, 2014) has termed ‘commonplace diversity’ for their children. The quote from Kaja (below) is illustrative. Her son is already a young adult (age-bracket >16) and she was reflected on how the diverse population of the area where he had grown up had resulted precisely in commonplace diversity.

My son has grown up in a multicultural society and I don't think he has questioned that at all. For him, it is the norm. In August, we drove him to Folk high school<sup>v</sup> where there were youth from all over Norway, but very few from Oslo, really. We were all gathered for a welcome ceremony, and he looked around rather sceptically and said, discouraged: ‘There are so many white people here’. I just started laughing. And it was – there were almost only white people and those who weren't white, were probably adopted. No-one else. To him, that was a strange environment. It says a lot about how society, at least at [name of neighbourhood] has

become... growing up there. It is a good example of how society in some areas of the city is. And how good that it [diversity] has become something taken for granted. And he [her son] questioned the opposite (Kaja, 40–59, Oslo II).

Kaja only realised that diversity had become something her son took for granted when he was placed in a different spatial and social frame from the one in which he was brought up; in the new frame, migration-related diversity is not commonplace. Kaja's realisation shows that she regards commonplace diversity as an ideal for raising her child. Whereas Kaja was reflecting on the past, many of the research participants spoke either about recently made choices of neighbourhood or hypothetical ones, as with Helge, who had just become a father (of a child between the age-bracket 0–5).

If we are to move, I want to move east rather than west, because that is the future: that people from different places with different backgrounds all live in the same place (Helge 20–39, Oslo I).

In the quote, the east/west division of Oslo and the associated place myths related to population composition are obvious. He regards the east side of Oslo as the future due to its diverse population. Although unspoken, Helge's view of the west side of Oslo is implied: he associates it with a socio-spatial preference for social homogeneity. Moreover, Helge's vision of an imagined community for the future is a place of commonplace diversity.

Most of the research participants maintain the same ideal for their children in the future and thus draw on similar conceptualisations of a nation that is not in contradiction with diversity. But as we see from the quotes above, this shared ideal does not necessarily mean that participants prefer the same neighbourhood. In the next section, I will explore the friction between present choices

and future notions of an imagined community. That said, the focus of this article is not the research participants' choices per se, but their reflections on their choices, before or after they made them.

### Friction between present and future notions of an imagined community

Most of the research participants express notions of an imagined community in the future where nation and diversity are intertwined and not contradictory. But living together *in* diversity in the present is not frictionless (Amin, 2012; Antonsich & Matejskova, 2015; Hearn & Antonsich, 2018). Not only is there friction but it is also multifaceted. The four examples below, from Katrine, Sindre, Andreas and Maria, reveal how this friction is made explicit when parents are choosing the spatial and social frame for the everyday life of their children, equally evident in their ideals for the future, their pragmatic, everyday considerations in the present, and their understanding of the past (Fox & Miller-Idriss, 2008b). They thus illustrate the (re)production of an imagined community in which nation and diversity are simultaneously in contradiction *and* intertwined.

First, several of the research participants who uphold an ideal of commonplace diversity for their children in the future chose to move to areas of relative homogeneity, both in socio-economic and socio-cultural terms. Choice of neighbourhood for families with children is, according to the parents' reflections, often related to school catchment areas and the percentage of the student population whose mother tongue is Norwegian (Morken, 2012). According to Katrine (20–39, Oslo I) who had one child (age-bracket 0–5):

I want our children to have a mix, but a mix is good, and not just in one direction. (...) I really appreciate diversity in the school, but where we are moving, I am a bit sceptical of the lack of diversity there. In a way, it is something that I fear. Because I want the children to experience diversity. At the same time, it's not good if... like some schools, there is 95 per cent with immigrant background, in relation to language, for example.

The quote shows friction between an ideal for the future and concerns for what is best for the children in the present. Katrine fears the lack of diversity in the local school, but at the same time, she reflects that language and population composition are important in choosing a neighbourhood. Moreover, in the interview, Katrine emphasised, as did many others, the importance of green and child-friendly surroundings as well as closeness to friends and family, echoing the findings of a study of Oslo which showed that residential choice was also influenced by factors other than population composition in the area (Søholt & Lynnebakke, 2015).

Second, whereas school as an educational institution is often highlighted in reflections on neighbourhood choice, several research participants also spoke of the relevance of schools and nursery schools as facilitators of informal social interaction outside of school hours. A common example offered was children's birthday parties. In Norway, there is an informal (sometimes formal) expectation, established by the schools, that all children from what is considered a 'natural' group – e.g. all girls or boys in the birthday child's group, or all pupils in the class – must be invited. Hence, children's birthday parties are to some extent a formalised social arena in the children's everyday lives, and they are much anticipated by children, starting at an early age. The birthday child is expected to send out invitations, and all invitees are expected to try to come.

Considerations of social life as it relates to school are illustrated by Sindre (20–39, Oslo I) who has three children: one in age-bracket 0–5 and two in 6–16. He described how he and his family

used to live in a diverse, inner-city neighbourhood in Oslo and how much effort they made to get all the children from their son's nursery school to come to his birthday party. He said it was difficult to get children from relatively newly arrived immigrant families, who tend to live in these neighbourhoods, to attend parties. To facilitate their attendance, Sindre and his wife coordinated with the nursery school so that the party could be held during daytime. They served halal sausages rather than the typical party fare of hot dogs, which contain pork. To ensure inclusion of children with diverse socio-economic backgrounds, they expected no gifts.

When their eldest child was to be enrolled in school, Sindre and his family chose to move away from the inner-city neighbourhood to an area of Oslo that is more homogeneous, both socio-economically and socio-culturally. In this respect, they are statistically typical (Statistics Norway, 2015). However, throughout the interview, Sindre expressed his difficulty identifying with the others living in the new neighbourhood. He described how 'class' is expressed there as 'a particular sense of Norwegianness' (Brubaker, 1994), something he found alienating, not because of his background but because of his values. Even though Sindre emphasised population mixing as a value and commonplace diversity as an ideal for the upbringing of his children, he and his partner did not want their own ideals for the future to come at the expense of their children in the present (Wessendorf, 2013, 2014). Birthday parties, and similar informal social arenas for the children, were not the only reasons for moving, but in retrospect, Sindre acknowledged the importance of the children having peers who will form a stable group for their informal social interaction in their everyday lives.

Taken together, insights from the examples of Katrine and Sindre show that, despite perceiving migration-related diversity as an integral part of the nation (Amin, 2012; Antonsich & Matejskova, 2015), parents seek to balance ideals for the future with what they believe is in the



best interests of their children in the present. In doing so with respect to decisions about *where* the socialisation of their children will take place, they (re)produce a nation based on homogeneity.

Third, Andreas (40–59, Oslo II), who was introduced earlier, emphasised the importance of diversity when he reflected on choice of neighbourhood and the upbringing of his children. He stated that living in eastern Oslo provides his children with a ‘much more real picture of Norway’ than other areas, such as those in the west of Oslo, would. However, he elaborates:

There is a class element concerning internal differences in this city district, and some of the children’s friends come from considerable limited financial means. That means that the environment here [in his neighbourhood] is much more homogeneous than in the city district as such. But the fact that the city district is this complex, I think is nice. Especially now because of the boys, that they have a larger frame around them.

Throughout the interview, Andreas maintains this ‘larger frame’ around his children as an ideal. It is a spatial and social frame that includes both migration-related and socio-economic diversity, in which his children are socialised into the nation by living their everyday lives there. Furthermore, in the interview, he spoke of how his children bring friends home, irrespective of their backgrounds. Thus, the interaction across difference occurs not only in public – i.e. in school, associational spaces, and the neighbourhood – but also in private. By contrast, in the excerpt by Andreas in the previous section, he reveals that, although having consciously chosen to live in a part of the city with a diverse population composition – based on the ideals for their children and their own self-identification with the place myths on the east side – he and his wife have simultaneously chosen to live in a more homogeneous neighbourhood in terms of socio-economic diversity than is found in the city district in general. This suggests, on the one hand,

that he and his wife are facilitating the (re)production of an imagined community for the future – where commonplace diversity is no longer an ideal but a reality and where his children can potentially transcend the ‘ethos of mixing’ that Wessendorf (2013, 2014) discusses. On the other hand, it indicates a socio-spatial preference for social homogeneity in the present, although this preference is related to socio-economic diversity rather than migration-related diversity.

Lastly, after having ‘thrown themselves towards the west’, as Maria (40–59, Oslo I) put it, she and her husband realised that, when their son started nursery school, he had the darkest skin colour among all the children, despite not being that dark, according to Maria. Finding the neighbourhood they had chosen too homogeneous, Maria explained that ‘we take trips to the eastside so that he [her son] will get to see other people, other types of people’. Maria and her husband hold commonplace diversity as an ideal for their son in the future (Wessendorf, 2013, 2014), as the trips to the eastside indicate. But embracing this ideal cannot come at the expense of his feeling and being perceived as Norwegian, a concern that informed their choice of neighbourhood in Oslo. Maria may be unsure whether she and her son are being perceived as Norwegian, and in a way, she may be rejecting her own background in order to be perceived as such. However, she simultaneously (re)produces a conceptualisation of the nation in the future that accommodates diversity by moving into the neighbourhood she has. In so doing, she is asserting her right to be considered as belonging within the neighbours’ imagined community, whether it is the neighbourhood, the nation or something else.

Andreas and Maria both reflect on their choice of neighbourhood from the perspective of balancing their own and/or their children’s positionality regarding national belonging and hegemonic powers in place, where issues of skin colour – not being white – and of having an immigrant background might be considered as not Norwegian. In contrast, Katrine, Sindre, Kaja

and Helge speak from the perspective of perceiving themselves, as well as being perceived by others, as Norwegian. These different perspectives matter, in particular with respect to the questions of relationality of belonging and choosing the best neighbourhood for one's children. There are, of course, potential inconsistencies between what individuals say and what they do, a caveat which also applies to attitudes towards the nation (reference removed for peer-review), and thus a particular perspective cannot be consistently paired with a particular choice of neighbourhood. Therefore, the socio-spatial preferences expressed in these six examples are not necessarily homogeneity.

## Conclusion

Returning to the title, this article contends that parents' reflections on choice of neighbourhood – caused by the hypothetical disruption of one's spatial and social frame of everyday life – hold promise of a transformative potential for future conceptualisations of the nation (Hearn and Antonsich, 2018). Indeed, rather than demonstrating how the nation is restored to a condition of 'normality' (Fox, 2017), it unveils how the very idea of normality changes over time as exemplified by how the different generations in this dataset conceive of how nation and diversity coexist (Antonsich, 2014; Antonsich & Matejskova, 2015). In this article, the transformative potential comes to the fore through the longstanding tensions between nation and diversity as much as between nation and neighbourhood (the local).

These parents' reflections help make explicit their own agency in creating the spatial and social frame in which their children will be socialised – of which socialisation into the nation is one element. Indeed, they help to underscore how the national and the local are intertwined and

considered by these parents to be lived and experienced differently in the various city districts and neighbourhoods of Oslo. Drawing upon dominant place myths, where population composition is considered essential, the parents reflect on the various neighbourhoods and the people who live within them, unveiling their notions of who belongs where, including themselves. In their socio-spatial preferences, they balance ideals and values both for their children and for themselves. Albeit, not just in the present but also for the future. Hence, the analysis shows how the parents do not only include the ‘here and now’ in their considerations (Smith, 2008; Fox & Miller-Idriss 2008b). And what might be perceived as an imagined future for parents with children of young age, may be experienced as the present for those with older children. Hence, the ‘here and now’ of the everyday nationhood consists of multiple temporalities.

In virtue of these insights, this article maintains that how nation and diversity coexist changes with time. A change which helps make space for new conceptualisations of the nation, where diversity is envisioned as an *integral part*; as both contradictory *and* intertwined. For this does not hold promise of a smooth (re)production of the nation in everyday life – or a frictionless conviviality (Hearn & Antonsich, 2018). Rather, it is an acknowledgement that everyday life provides space for difference and disagreement (Amin, 2012), for conflicting ordinary voices (Hearn & Antonsich, 2018), and for different conceptualisations of the nation (reference removed for peer-review) beyond the salient identity markers of migration-related diversity. In conclusion, whereas the narrative of nation and diversity as mutually exclusive is upheld within both scholarly and public debate – both in Europe and beyond – research on everyday life reveals how such a division is misguided at best.

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<sup>i</sup> Hereafter (re)produced, indicating the interplay of production and reproduction

<sup>ii</sup> Left parties include Labour Party, Red Party and Socialist Left Party. Centre include Centre Party, Christian Democratic Party, Liberal Party and Green Party. Right include Conservative Party and Progress Party.

<sup>iii</sup> To ensure anonymity, the children's ages at the time of the interview (2015) in age-brackets: 0-5, 6-16 (compulsory school-age in Norway) and >16.

<sup>iv</sup> 'Blenda' is the label of a detergent. The expression 'Blenda white' is a colloquial term by some used to describe an 'all white' population.

<sup>v</sup> A Folk High School is a boarding school often attended by youth right after graduating from upper-secondary high school as a year-off before continuing with studies at University or otherwise.