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# Nationalism for babies

## Investigating the early transmission of the national habitus to children in the family

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### ABSTRACT

Despite the obsolescence of nation states as 'survival units' (Elias, 2010 [1987]), children seem very early accustomed to the normality of a world divided into nations. This paper aims at discussing how Elias's historical sociology may be used in order to investigate young children's socialisation to what the social psychologist and social scientist Michael Billig (1995) calls 'banal nationalism', referring to Hannah Arendt's 'banality of evil'. While many studies exist on school curricula – and first of all on the teaching of history – few has been about the family. If it proves methodologically more difficult, investigating the family however seems unavoidable when dealing with primary political socialisation.

Elias and Billig have both noted the naturalization and inadequacy of the division of the world into nations. However, Billig considers that banal nationalism is a hegemonic and international ideology that imposed through mechanisms like flagging. Elias is more interested in the rooted character of the national habitus and his texts can contribute to deepening questions that Billig explored little, namely, where does nationalism come from and how 'its magic works'.

In order to explore such questions, the paper first draws on *Studies on the Germans* (Elias, 2013 [1989]), *Changes in the 'We-I' Balance* (2010) and *Involvement and Detachment* (2007). In these texts, patriotism and nationalism are considered the two sides of the same coin. The same position can be found in Billig, who argues that banal nationalism constitutes the ground for extreme nationalism. To help explain how banal nationalism and the national habitus can be transmitted and reproduced in the family, the first among other figurations, a second corpus is used, which focuses on the transformations of the family and the role of emotions. It includes the essays on the 'civilisation of parents' (2008), where Elias puts forward the concept of 'love and learning relationships', through which children learn, among other things, to refer to themselves and their group(s) by situating themselves in relation to a number of other individuals and groups.

This theoretical reflection accompanies an empirical study that aims to understand how nationalism is transmitted within the family. The study is presented next in this paper, based on 90 interviews conducted in the Bordeaux region of France with 30 families with at least one child aged 5-6 years. The enquiry is multidisciplinary but rooted in qualitative-experimental political sociology. Its first steps are invested here as an opportunity to reflect on the tensions between two theoretical and empirical perspectives, which have lost none of their relevance. Ultimately, the authors of this paper aim to develop and test the proposals of Elias and Billig in order to better understand and deconstruct the meaning of national fact, belief and myth, which have lost none of their dangerousness.

**Keywords:** Banal Nationalism. National Habitus. Parents-Child Relations (Family).

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

This paper is about a research project on the transmission of feelings of belonging to young children within their family (hereafter referred to by its French acronym *ETPAF*<sup>2</sup>). This research project aims to understand how children learn, in their familial everyday life, to engage with the politics they are told they belong to, and especially how they are socialised to a nationalised world, that is, a world divided into nations. The research project is based on a qualitative survey undertaken with a sample of 30 families living in the Nouvelle Aquitaine region (France), each comprising at least a five to six-year-old child.

We, the authors of this paper, came to this project carrying different kinds of luggage, regarding both our theoretical and methodological habits. To start with, our theoretical perspectives on the central object of the project – nationalism – are fuelled by our readings of two authors: Norbert Elias and Michael Billig, who were not particularly acquainted with each other's writings themselves. In its first part, this paper is a first attempt to set up the theoretical dialogue that Elias and Billig never really had on nationalism and children in their own writings – pity, we think, because they offer approaches that are mainly compatible and complementary. It then sets out what we have done (and could do, as we have not yet analysed the interviews) with these theoretical contributions, for the *ETPAF* survey, and for subsequent surveys that might be conducted in other national contexts in a comparative perspective.

### 1. When Elias meets Billig

Nationalism, which we could define loosely as both how people assume that they 'belong' to a nation and are socialised to a nationalised world, is a common concern of Elias and Billig and has a special place in their respective works. Both Elias and Billig were personally affected by the horrors conquering nationalisms led to throughout the twentieth century: Elias as a German Jew very directly affected by the two world wars, Billig (born in 1947) coming from a Londoner Jewish family. Thus, they both have an acute sensibility to nationalism's harmful potential, even when looking at its most benign

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<sup>1</sup> A previous version of this text was written in the autumn of 2021 and submitted in February 2022 for publication in the collective edited by Norman Gabriel, *Processes of Learning and Education – an Eliasian Perspective*, to be published in the Norbert Elias Series edited by Tatiana Savoia-Landini at Palgrave. Maylis Ferry, then a post-doctoral fellow in the *ETPAF* project, contributed to the preparation and the first part of this first version, Louisa McDonald to its re-reading, and both to the collection of some data.

<sup>2</sup> *Enquête sur la Transmission Précoce des Appartenances au sein de la Famille* (Survey on the Early Transmission of Belongings within the Family).

forms. Elias undertakes to condemn it quite firmly, which of course does not exclude, on the contrary, explaining and understanding it. It hence requires sharpened analytical tools (historical sociology for him) to understand the phenomenon with some distance, as this is the only way to escape the affects attached to any particular position in any social figuration. As for Billig, he is no specialist of nationalism: when working on how people in England talk of the royal family at the beginning of the 1990s (Billig, 1992), he was struck by how nationalist their discourses were. From there, he developed on nationalism an original perspective. Contrary to most of his works (Billig is a social psychologist), it is not as much a study of how people speak (or don't) nationalism than an analysis of what constantly reminds them, in public discourses and spaces, to be nationalists. This work is also original as it swims against the tide of what was said and written about nationalism in the 1990s, and this is another point of similarity between Billig and Elias.

At a time when social scientists were predominantly announcing the twilight of nationalism and the coming of a globalized world, Billig argues that we are so massively wrapped up in nationalist representations of who we are, individually and collectively, that we are no longer capable of imagining a world without nations. Some time ago, Elias (2010 [1987]) insisted on the tenacity of national habitus and feelings even in a globalised world. Another characteristic that singularises Elias' and Billig's approaches to nationalism from mainstream perspectives of the subject is that they understand nationalism in a broader sense than its violent manifestations. They both stress that soft forms of attachment to one's nation (often referred to as 'belonging' or 'patriotism') are no different by nature from the exclusive ones that nourish wars. More than that, Billig assumes and Elias suggest that it is because patriotism exists, unnoticed and uncondemned, that the exclusive and expansionist nationalism keeps prospering. Their respective arguments, however, are built on different kinds of observation, leading to theoretical propositions that do not completely overlap. In the next session we follow up on how National Habitus approach complements Banal Nationalism thesis.

### **1.1. National Habitus**

For those who want to study nationalism from an Eliasian perspective, 'national habitus' is the core notion. Briefly, national habitus is a particular kind of habitus, one of the several habitus of every socialised individual, a layer of the 'filo pastry' of identities (Mennell, 1994), but which has become a very important one from the nineteenth century in Europe (Delmotte, 2022). Already present in *On the Process of Civilisation* in 1939

(2012a), the notion of national habitus is central in two texts: *Changes in the 'We-I' Balance* (2010 [1987]) and *Studies on the Germans* (2013 [1990]). A main aim of this last book of which Elias authorised the publication before he died, is to understand and explain what happened in Germany that made Nazism, wars and camps possible. That is to say the worst in the horror of nationalism. But it is not first and foremost a condemnation and even less a condemnation of the German people. It is first of all a matter of understanding and explaining national habitus, the German one among other ones, to which the first is historically linked to and compared with. The idea is that 'The fortunes of a nation become crystallised in institutions which are responsible for ensuring that the most different people of a society acquire the same characteristics, possess the same national habitus. The common language is an immediate example. But there are many others' (Elias, 2013: 23). So, institutions must be understood here in the broadest sense. Schools and parliaments are, but there are many other ones, less formal and more intimate.

#### *Democratisation and paradoxes*

In *Changes in the 'We-I' balance* (2010), Elias suggests that national habitus in general would be the one that imposed itself and came to dominate at the modern and contemporary era over the other habitus related to other 'surviving units' people feel belonging or attachment. Why? Because in many contexts and first in Europe states and then nation states progressively replaced tribes, clans, villages, etc. How? First by wars, then by democratising (national democratic integration), although lately and first in certain contexts. The following passage is very significant in this respect:

The emergence of the European states as we-units happened gradually and in stages. [...] Even in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries parts of the population, the peasants in the first place and then above all the industrial proletariat, were still excluded from the citizens' we-identity by the ruling classes, the bourgeoisie and nobility. [...] Only in conjunction with the parliamentary representation of all classes did all members of the state begin to perceive it more as a we-unit and less as a they-group. Only in the course of the two great wars of this century did the populations of more developed industrial states take on the character of nation states. Nation states, one might say, are born in wars and for wars. Here we find the explanation for why, among the various layers of we-identity, the state level of integration today carries special weight and a special emotional charge. (Elias, 2010: 185-186)

By arguing so, Elias does not idealise a kind of 'democratic nationalism' but only affirms that mass nationalism is as recent as (functional and institutional) democratisation (Elias, 2012b). National habitus is therefore polysemic and paradoxical; it refers both to unconscious long installed habits *and* to identity politics and discourse, to tangible political and social dimensions *and* to pure symbols; it is modern *and* archaic at the same

time, partly rationality based (national citizenship conditions rights and voice) *and* very emotional, both collective *and* highly individualistic. Finally, national habitus and nationalism would continue to carry ‘myths’, which is in itself problematic (Elias, 2014: 115). In *The Germans*, Elias (2013: 236) points out the dangers of a nationalism with ‘high fantasy content’ but also that all/any nationalism is a kind of belief, refers to beliefs. From this point of view, Nazism can be seen as an extreme but characteristic form (Elias, 2013: 238).

*National habitus as both changing and resisting*

Another aspect of the habitus is its changing nature... *and* its particular resistance to changing. In *Changes in the We–I Balance*, Elias focuses on the ‘drag’ effect of national habitus in a globalised world: a majority of people continue to feel ‘attached’ to the nation-state to which they ‘belong’, although the latter is no longer the effective survival unit, given, above all, the invention of nuclear weapons and ecological risks that ignore all borders (Elias, 2010: 194-195). Elias explains the resisting against the development a more ‘reality congruent’ habitus, which would be based on a ‘sense of responsibility for imperilled humanity’ (2010: 203), by different arguments that go together. The fact that the world remains divided into nations in a way that has been almost unchanged for centuries – diplomacy and inter-state relations attest to this – is obviously a first element (Elias, 2010: 205). This reality and the discourses and practices that accompany it perpetuate a mode of identification with the political community based on the existence of an enemy or threatening other. Whereas humanity has no enemy but itself, is threatened only by groups that are part of itself (Elias, 2010: 204). In the end, it seems that the sense of belonging to humanity could not fulfil the affective need of individuals as do national belonging and the beliefs that sustain it and are sustained by it, especially in a new age of dangers, a time of great uncertainty. A shift beyond the national level (see Delmotte, 2012), if it should finally occur (for instance at the European or Latin American level) would take time: ‘One has the impression that the solidity, the resistance, the deep-rootedness of the social habitus of individuals in a survival unit is greater the longer and more continuous the chain of generations within which a certain social habitus has been transmitted from parents to children’ (2010: 189). It remains that (national) habitus change or can change, because it has changed. But ‘such changes do not take place overnight. They involve processes that often take many generations’ (Elias, 2010: 204)

*National habitus, singular and plural*

In the same late text (2010), Elias quite implicitly but interestingly addresses both the concept of national habitus as a common feature (in a similar way as Billig's banal nationalism) and the diversity of national habitus. It is obvious in such sentences, putting successively emphasises on the remaining differences between national habitus in plural and on the resisting of the national habitus in general:

A process sociological study, and a familiarity with the investigation of long-term processes, are needed to explain the differences of individual habitus in Latin America or Europe. But if we are looking for examples of the reality-congruence of the concept of habitus, we could hardly find a more cogent example than the persistent way in which the national habitus of the European nation states impedes their closer political union' (Elias, 2010: 188).

A related question is: are some particular national habitus 'worst' or more dangerous than some other ones? Again, on the one hand, all nationalisms share some common features. On the other hand, in *The Germans* (2013, Elias puts that we can partly relate what happens in the middle of the twentieth century in Europe to particular features of a German national habitus. But the point is definitely not there. As pointed by Mennell and Dunning (in Elias, 1990: ix), the concept of (national) habitus is 'not in any way essentialist'; habitus changes over time because 'the fortunes and experiences of a nation (or of its constituting groupings) continue to change and accumulate'.

If the first of the few 'universals of human society', the first 'social constant' is 'humankind's natural changeability' (Elias, 2012b: p. 99 ff.), we are not condemned to nationalism. *Each* national habitus is subject to change, and what is more, the strength and features of national habitus *in general* is subject to change. That does not mean subject to 'progress' but there is no reason that transformations of societies do not affect it at all at the end. National habitus is not first made of discourse. National habitus are not ideologies although nationalist discourses and practices feed them in return. As 'embodied social knowledge' that is actually learned, national habitus singular and plural change(s) although not especially in a desirable direction. It/They may strengthen rather than weaken, radicalise rather than relax, depending both on the context – e.g. 'crises' and the 'moral panic' they entail (Reicher, 2020) – and the long history of each habitus.

## 1.2. Banal nationalism

Michael Billig's perspective is quite different, firstly because his approach is entirely contemporary and focuses on the three great Western powers that are at the heart of his analysis: United Kingdom, France and, above all, the United States (Billig, 1995). As the work of historians who have studied the genesis of nations has shown (Anderson, 1991;

Hobsbawm, 1990), England and France were major contributors to the invention of the national form of governance that is now prevalent throughout the world, and which the United States protects as a major beneficiary of the world order.

Banal nationalism is a thesis that aims to account for the omnipotence of nationalism at the end of the 20th century, even though at the time, already the organization of the world suggests that the international world order is outdated. This theoretical proposition is twofold. First, it postulates that vindictive nationalism and all the 'soft' (or cold) forms of valuing national belonging are one and the same thing: the expression of an international ideology that naturalizes the division of the world into nations. To make his point, Billig uses the image of the flag that hangs from the pediments of public buildings as opposed to the flag that is waved at vindictive gatherings or on the battlefield. They are the same object, but one goes unnoticed while the other is the subject of much comment and, yet not always, depreciation. The first explanation for the omnipotence of nationalism is that we are not aware that we are all, or almost all, nationalists, since the feeling of solidarity with our fellow citizens is not considered as such – even though it is based on the same conviction that it is 'natural' to prefer one's fellow countrymen.

Secondly, to understand why most of us do indeed feel that we belong to our country, to the point of making it a central part of our identity, we need to look around us and see how we are constantly being pointed out to the nation. Everywhere in the public space, in the discourse of politicians and journalists, there are flags or symbols that remind us of it, expressions that lead us back to it. In *Banal Nationalism*, Billig analyses in detail the *deictics*, i.e. the pronouns and adverbs that constantly suggest to us that the country in which we live, the government that rules it, the opinions publicized in the media, what is produced there, the landscapes, etc. are 'ours'. We are unaware of this constant 'flagging' – as he calls it – because it is everywhere, so we don't notice. But it does the work, it makes us believe that being national is a natural condition of human beings; and it legitimises those who rule in the name of 'their' people as well as the international order, however violent and unjust it may be. Billig calls the everyday nationalism that results from this invisible flagging 'banal nationalism' in reference to Hannah Arendt's banality of evil:

It would be wrong to assume that 'banal nationalism' is 'benign' because it seems to possess a reassuring normality, or because it appears to lack the violent passions of the extreme right. As Hannah Arendt (1963) stressed, banality is not synonymous with harmlessness. In the case of Western nation-states, banal nationalism can hardly be innocent: it is reproducing institutions which possess vast armaments. (Billig 1995: 7)



Billig's thesis is quite convincing, not only because of the many publications that have documented how flagging is indeed constant in all considered countries, but also because once we have become aware, we actually see that flags are everywhere. But he does not in the book explain how it works, that is, how we cannot notice flags and still be influenced by them. We believe that Elias's national habitus is really helpful here.

### **1.3. Putting things in perspective: the socialisation of children in the family**

If Elias' and Billig's propositions are complementary, their matching requires some articulating efforts. Driven as he is by questions of long-term processual dynamics, Elias is more sensible to the socio-historical contingencies of specific survival units. Billig's point is more to insist on how the nationalist grammar has conquered the entire world, in the sense that this central repertoire of political imagination has smothered alternative ones. Elias is interested in the social that is incorporated in individuals and in how people identify themselves to the nation.

Billig and Elias also leave us with questions that still need to be addressed. One of them is that of the transmission of nationalism to young children. The issue of children socialisation or 'conditioning' already proved to be an important one in the *Process* (Elias, 2012a [1939]: 134-141; 171-184). Later, in *The Civilising of Parents*, Elias (2008) insists that a society is never composed only of adults, and that adults are never 'finished' but change all their life long. One cannot know and understand one's own society without studying children. This would be even more true in contemporary societies, in which parents–children relations and relations between generations have been democratising, in the sense of a reducing differential of power between groups. Differently from other societies or periods of time ('earlier stages'), children have their own place, more autonomy, more freedom. There are not small adults. They tend to be fully recognised in their identity as children (with their own personality and rights), but they have more responsibility and 'pressure' on their learnings of all kinds. Elias also stresses that in contemporary societies, family is more than ever the main place for socialising of children (although not the only place), and this for more and more long period of their life. Briefly, socialisation and individualisation of children take place at the same time and mostly in the family.

In the family, though, the learning of a large range of 'self-restraints' (potty training, eating properly, to behave correctly, to become polite, 'civil' or 'civilised') operates from the very early childhood through relationships that remain rather unbalanced compared to other

ones. Children are materially and emotionally highly dependent on other members of the family and first of all of their parents – who protect, feed, learn and educate but first and foremost ‘love’. Elias then puts at the forefront the idea of ‘love and learning relationships’ (see Gabriel, 2017), through which children among many other things learn very early to situate themselves and to ‘identify’ themselves by ‘identifying’ (designating) many ‘others’ in many ways in the course of their experiences.

This way, the study of children’s socialisation and individualisation processes in the family (and particularly through parents–children relationships) may be linked to the transgenerational transmission process of national belonging and habitus, and of banal nationalism as a pillar of it. It is a question of studying to what extent, how and why the building of oneself, the building of I-, we-, they-identities, crystallises more or less consciously around what is experienced, described as ‘French’, for example, and which one has learnt to love, hate, reject, respect, tolerate or suffer. Such study is indeed both interested in the way parents want to contribute to building the we-I identity of their children, and in what their educational project and practices reveal about their own identity construction process and nationalism.

As for Billig, he states in his work on repression that childhood is the best empirical observatory for commonplaces that are obviously consensual no one bother speaking them out loud. Indeed, as they are only learning to deem natural the division of the world in national pieces, kids may talk the nation (and the nationalised world) in explicit ways adults would not. However, neither of them proposes general hypotheses on how individuals’ relations to nationalism are articulated to other dimensions of their social life, e.g. their gender, class, race etc. And given the weight such variables have on how people experience life, we cannot just ignore them if we are to understand Elias’ national habitus backlog or Billig’s persistence of nationalism.

## **2. How do parents contribute to the reproduction of nationalism? An inquiry**

The reflections we have just presented on the articulation of the thoughts of Elias and Billig came at the end of the exploratory survey, when we were trying to consolidate the research protocol of our project that started in 2019-20. Of course, Billig and Elias did inspire the ETPAF project from the beginning. Elias is the source of our interest in how a sense of nationhood is transmitted in early childhood (Throssell, 2015), and it is to Billig that we owe our desire to truly understand – the better to combat – the omnipotence of nationalism today (Duchesne et al., 2018).

## **2.1. The test system: principles and procedures**

The ETPAF project is initially driven by political empiricists. We chose to survey families with children aged five or six, who have not yet been much influenced by school. We tried to elaborate a survey design allowing us to reconstruct the way in which parents, helped by the cultural products intended for the little ones, transmit to their child(ren) the belief in the natural character of the division of the world into nations. This design is based on three interviews per family during which two interviewers interview the parents and the child in parallel. It uses projective stimuli, i.e. open-ended forms of questioning, which provide little structure to the answers and give the interviewees the space to express what is important to them.

The first interview focuses on getting to know the family by getting the parents to recount their genealogies and the child's daily life. The data produced provides very detailed information on the social properties of the family but also reveals a lot about how the parents see the world around them. The way in which the interviewer<sup>3</sup> accompanies their discourse and welcomes the parents' emotions is crucial. The quality of the listening allows a relationship to be established that will last throughout the survey and that is anchored in the trust that the parents show towards the interviewer by offering her their family history.

The second interview focuses on the family's cultural practices, particularly those concerning the child, while the third focuses on the objective of the research, namely the parents' relationship to nationalism and its transmission. To conclude the exchanges with the family, the interviewer tries to explain to the parents how banal nationalism works. In the first version, interviews were essentially aimed at measuring parents' and children's interest and knowledge about their country and the rest of the world; the parents and the child met once or twice per interview to watch and comment on different video contents.

We started by validating the feasibility of our scenario (questions and activities, length of each session) with a family of colleagues at the end of the first lockdown (spring-summer 2020). In July 2020, we tested our survey design with three families totally unknown to us. The contact with each of these families was made indirectly, *via* a teacher and a doctoral student. They sent a small advertisement (a flyer mentioning a survey on belongings but not the focus on the nation) and the voluntary families contacted us. The compensation of 200 euros per family aimed at making possible the sociological

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<sup>3</sup> Unsurprisingly for a team working on children and families, our team is made only of women.

representativeness of our sample, as participation in the survey requires the equivalent of a day's work from the family (six hours of meetings and two preparation exercises).

We chose to use projective rather than ethnographic methods to collect our material. Ethnographic methods are difficult to mobilize when working on issues that are obvious, 'natural', 'without alternative', and need an observation time measured in years. In contrast, projective methods aim to bring out poorly controlled discourse in the respondents, by having them react to various stimuli (images, short films, books, vignettes, etc.) (Lavabre, 2002). The general tone of the interviews is not very directive. Interviewing a couple is already a form of collective interview and in this sense, gives the interviewees more power in the evolution of the discussion (Duchesne, 2017; Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 2014). The interviews are recorded from start to finish and the sessions with the parents are transcribed by a professional.

## 2.2. Adjustments

At the end of this exploratory phase, we proceeded to an evaluation of the protocol. Its general economy seemed to us very rich but we have changed some of the proposed activities. We eliminated the activities that created a situation in which the parents explicitly wanted their child to behave towards the interviewers in a way that would, if not honour them, at least respond effectively to what he or she<sup>4</sup> imagined the interviewers expected. While the interviews between the interviewer and the child gave rise to interesting discussions, the parent-child interactions in front of the interviewers were poor. We have kept as video support only the excerpts presented in the third interview, when the interviewer explains to the parents how banal nationalism works. We also replaced the exercises of writing a letter to an imaginary pen pal with a request to watch the film *Moana* (between the first and second interviews) and to read the book *The wolf who wanted to travel the world* (between the second and third interviews), two widely distributed cultural products for children. We wanted to maintain some activity between each interview in order to prolong the presence of the interviewers in the family between visits and to maintain the link. We used the time freed up to extend the 'vignette' activity proposed to the parents, that is a short story that they can comment on. In the new device, we proposed two vignettes in the second interview and two more in the third. They deal with nationalism in sport; with typical national food and what children should know about it; with the preference for national producers; with the use of a national

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<sup>4</sup> The three test families are heteroparental families in which the mother and father participated.

language in the family and at school. Finally, we have kept the discussion conceived in a quasi 'participative' way around the thesis of banal nationalism.

### **3. When Elias and Billig look into the cradle of our investigation: tentative conclusions**

What Elias and Billig have in common is that they do not separate the question of the sense of belonging to the nation from nationalism. For both, nationalism begins with the fact of considering national anchorage as a more or less 'given identity', of making the relationship to the nation, to 'one's' nation, an indisputably primary dimension in one's relationship to others. Belonging is not without a feeling of superiority for one (Elias, 2007: 8), nor without a permanent risk of inflammation for the other. This thesis triggers a great deal of resistance, even within the research team. In this sense, the theoretical support of these two authors is particularly important for us. When parents state that their educational priorities are to inscribe their children in their family and national solidarity while, at the same time, opening them up to the world, we are trying to identify, empirically, how these priorities are articulated and how they implement ways of conceiving the world that prohibit universal, non-particularist, thinking. We are very much aware that this needs to be demonstrated. One hypothesis is that it is around the notion of 'preference' that the tipping point between love of one's own and the feeling that only (or almost only) national destiny counts is played out. By analysing the words used by the parents and by interpreting their hesitations and ambivalences as finely as possible, we can try to show how they are caught up, in spite of themselves, in the injunction to superiority that the national habitus and banal nationalism convey, each in its own way. This is a hypothesis in the qualitative sense of the term. We do not seek to validate or invalidate this proposition: we use it as a reading grid that helps us to order the reading and interpretation of a rich and complex material. In an approach such as ours, the objective is to propose eventually a new formulation of the original hypotheses. Here, the aim is to qualify more precisely Elias and Billig's propositions on the inseparable character of belonging and nationalism by specifying the contexts of enunciation that favour the expression of one and the other and the modalities of coexistence between the two in the collected discourses.

Another aspect in which the eyes of our two authors weigh heavily is the importance of considering together the form and content of nationalism – and what refers, in Elias's terms, to the national habitus in general or to national habitus in particular. In other

words, can we claim, with this survey of nationalism in France, to be dealing with banal nationalism in general? Billig's book, which focuses mainly on the American and British cases, may seem to authorize us to do so, as well as the work of modernist historians who insist on the way in which nations have been constructed mimetically. But in the course of the discussions within the research team, it appeared as underestimating the historicity of the French national habitus, which is itself linked to the specific domination that this country has exercised historically for so long. We therefore proposed to integrate this into our framework of analysis and to understand the banal nationalism studied in this survey both as revealing common feature and as a particular one – in this case, an imperialist and postcolonial one. In doing so, we have also reintroduced a bit of the long view into the approach to banal nationalism, which originally places more emphasis on contemporary processes of reproduction through constant signalling. In other words, we are trying to identify what, in the way parents designate the national 'we' to be transmitted to their children, refers to a generic form, in line with the 'checklist' identified by Anne-Marie Thiesse (2005), and what corresponds to the particular forms that these identity elements take in the French case. The aim is to reflect on how and to what extent the imperialism of the case we are studying weighs on the ways in which nationalism is transmitted.

Neither Elias nor Billig emphasize the sociological diversity of the relationship to the nation. Billig in particular argues for a populated social psychology, as opposed to the cognitive sciences, but little space is given to the diversity of social positions of those affected by flagging. That is why our project aimed to diversify as much as possible the social positions of the parents interviewed in order to reveal the way in which social domination influences the relationship to the nation. We aimed at extending the analysis of the way in which the position vis-à-vis the survival unit participates in the definition of the us and the others (Duchesne, 2013), and of documenting the way in which the variable exposure to national signals according to social backgrounds is translated into nationalism. For this, we had to work hard to ensure the sociological quality of our family sample<sup>5</sup>. The 200 euros fee proves to be largely insufficient to induce families with no familiarity or sympathy for the social sciences to apply. Gender is also a dimension of the relationship to the national that we explore in our interviews. Even in families that are careful to avoid reproducing gendered behaviour, forms of unequal role attribution in the

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<sup>5</sup> In October 2022, the final interviews were conducted. Although they show a relatively good diversity, it has nevertheless been difficult to recruit 1) families with low socio-economic and socio-cultural backgrounds, and even more 2) families who are clearly on the right of the political spectrum.

transmission of belonging are emerging. Sport – incl. competition and pride – seems to be carried by the father while the mother seems to mark the permanence of the link with the family. These are, however, hypotheses (Yuval-Davis, 1997) which we seek to explore in the light of all the interviews conducted as part of this study.

One last issue to which the Elias/Billig dialogue we have begun has drawn our attention is: can we use our investigation to take sides in the debate on the incorporation (Elias) or exteriority (Billig) of the relationship to the nation? If it is impossible to imagine a survey design that would allow us to settle such a question, the moment when, at the end of the last interview, we try to explain to the parents the thesis of banal nationalism opens up interesting. Faced with the revelation of the permanence of the flagging, the parents question in front of us and with us the interiority of their allegiance. Once again, the type of sociology we practice will not provide us with evidence, but it will lead us to reinterpret, with new material, this important debate.

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