



Nationalism and the Curriculum: Analytical and Methodological Considerations

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Abstract

Historically, nationalism and the curriculum are closely connected. The affirmation of the principle that each state should represent a national collective in the nineteenth century, turned schools into powerful means to legitimate institutional power by disseminating national identities and crafting national collectives. Since then, nationalism has re-shaped the curriculum across the globe. An accurate understanding of this phenomenon is therefore crucial for curriculum scholars.

The understanding of the concept of nation and all its related terms is the object of a dedicated field of research characterized by lively debate. This chapter aims to provide a map for curriculum researchers to identify the most useful concepts, as well as to reflect on their methodological and theoretical consequences, benefits, and risks. Drawing on an extensive literature review, it identifies three approaches to nationalism in curriculum research: the ideal norm approach, the typological approach, and the claim-based approach.

The chapter argues that elite-based approaches building on nationalism as a global norm or ideal type risk over-emphasizing the extent and homogeneity of

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the impact of nationalism on the curriculum. By putting the process of curriculum-making at the center of the analysis, and focusing on its protagonists' own understanding and prioritization of nationalism, claim-based approaches take into account recent critiques of the methodological statism and nationalism advanced in both nationalism and curriculum research. They therefore can significantly advance our theorizing of the relationship between nationalism and the curriculum, and help us to identify how, when, and under which conditions nationalism contributes to shaping the curriculum – and when it does not.

Keywords

Curriculum · Nationalism · Nation-building · Language education · State education

1 Introduction

It is almost a truism to say that nationalism and the curriculum are connected. Luminaries in the field of nationalism studies have called schools nationalism's "most conscious champion" (Hobsbawm, 1962, p.135) and "the nation's institution par excellence" (Schnapper, 1994, p.131). For Gellner (1983, p.33–4), the advent of nationalism meant that, for states, "the monopoly of legitimate education" became "more important, more central than the monopoly of legitimate violence." Thiesse (2006, p.195) attributes the diffusion of national identities to "a gigantic pedagogic work" largely carried out by schools. The relationship is generally considered to be bidirectional. Nationalism is a key determinant of curriculum policy, whereas in turn, curricula contribute to molding nationals and national identities. This makes nationalism a highly relevant phenomenon for curriculum research and theory.

The scholarly study of nationalism emerged in the 1960s. The definition and analytical understanding of nationalism and its related terms has remained contested ever since (Anderson, 1991; Billig, 1995; Gellner, 1996; Smith, 1995; Triandafyllidou, 2021). One of the less contested understandings of nationalism equates it to the principle of national self-determination. In this definition, nationalism is the principle or ideology that contends that states – i.e., the institutions governing a given territory and population – must represent a territorially concentrated people sharing a common "national" identity, i.e., a "nation" (Anderson, 1991; Breuilly, 2013; Hobsbawm, 1990). The principle of national self-determination acquired the status of a global norm during the nineteenth century. As the aforementioned historians recount, the nation state increasingly became the sole form of statehood recognized as legitimate. To settle territorial disputes in their favor and benefit from the protection of the international community, therefore, (emerging) state elites had to demonstrate that they represented more than an assemblage of individuals. They had to prove that they represented a nation.

The criteria for such proof have remained vague. Indeed, no established consensus exists on how to discern nations analytically, or politically, from non-national

collectives of people. Are nations characterized by a common heritage that can be traced back to single families, tribes, or local communities? Must they share a language or specific cultural traits? Or does being a nation simply imply members' will to participate in a shared political project? While the idea that nations are objective entities produced by cultural and geographic circumstances finds few scholarly supporters today, researchers continue to disagree on the extent to which culture and history limit the social construction and (re-)definition of nations (Cederman, 2001; Coakley, 2018; Gellner, 1996).

The question of which collective represents a nation in practice is even more contentious. Indeed, since the principle of national self-determination argues that state borders must mirror national boundaries, its answers come with momentous political implications they determine whether state borders and governments are to be considered legitimate. Consequently, the boundaries between political and analytical arguments are often blurred. The often-quoted definition of nations as "daily plebiscites," united by members' political commitment to the collective, rather than by their shared ethnic or cultural features, was famously advanced by French scholar Ernest Renan who, in 1882, used it to justify the need to return the Alsatian territories conquered by Germany in 1871 to France, despite their largely German-speaking population. Contemporary movements that struggle for autonomy or independence based on the claim that they represent a nation, as in Catalonia or Québec, as well as efforts by existing states to annex territories they claim to be inhabited by fellow nationals, as in Ukraine, provide ample evidence of the high stakes and violent potential involved in the practical definition of nations. Scholars label this process of trying to define and establish national boundaries and identities "nationalism as a project" or "claim," as opposed to the general principle of national self-determination (Calhoun, 2002).

Education systems, whose institutionalization paralleled the ascent of nationalism, constitute a potentially powerful tool to provide (or create) proof of existing or aspiring states' "nationness." Curricula can be used to popularize specific national identities and features across the population, and to marginalize competing identities and features (Benavot et al., 1991; Brubaker, 1992; Hechter, 1975; Weber, 1976). The close and historic relationship between nationalism and schooling has inspired countless studies. Drawing on varying methods and cases, this literature – examples of which are discussed in the following sections – largely confirms the insight of the early luminaries, in that it first, argues that curricula have been a key object of nationalist politics, and second, that the knowledge curricula include has been shaped by both nationalism as a principle and project. Presumably, curricula across the world would look very different, had nationalism not become a key organizing principle of the modern world (Benavot et al., 1991). Indeed curricula looked different, and were much more varied before nationalism took hold (Giudici, 2019; Graff, 1991).

The ostensible consensus on the shaping power of nationalism, however, masks major differences in how scholars conceptualize nationalism and its influence on the curriculum. This variation is not surprising. Nationalism studies are a thriving field characterized by a lively internal debate on the origins, nature, and precise conception of nation-related terms. Depending on the concept we decide to rely on, our

research and findings might end up looking very different. This means that, even if curriculum scholars interested in nationalism might not want to engage with this debate themselves, they must recognize its main cleavages and positions to be able to make informed conceptual choices and reflect on their methodological and theoretical implications.

This is where this chapter steps in. It aims to provide curriculum scholars with a tool to structure nationalism studies. Drawing on an extensive review of scholarship in nationalism and curriculum studies, it distinguishes three approaches to nationalism relevant to curriculum research, which are labeled *ideal norm approach* (Sect. 3), *typological approach* (Sect. 4), and *claim-based approach* (Sect. 5). The chapter identifies the specific assumptions associated with each approach, and discusses their theoretical and methodological implications for curriculum research. As argued in the conclusion, a more informed and precise definition of nationalism in curriculum studies is crucial if we are to develop a theoretically grounded understanding of the relationship between nationalism and curriculum that goes beyond the statement that “nationalism matters” for curriculum-building. Only in this way can we identify and theorize under which circumstances, through which actors and mechanisms, and with which effects, nationalism shapes curriculum politics, policy, and practice – and when it does not.

2 Developments and Debates in the Study of Nationalism

Nationalism, understood as the principle of national self-determination, is a modern political ideology (Breuilly, 2013). Historical and anthropological evidence indicates that individuals identified with ethnically or culturally defined groups before nationalism became an international norm (Barth, 1969; Smith, 1995). The idea that such identification provides legitimacy to state institutions, however, is inherently modern.

Historical studies show that the relationship between political authorities and the populations living on their territories tended to be looser and more varied in the past. Agrarian states not only included diverse populations but also attributed different rights and duties to people depending on their class, culture, or location. This diversity was accepted because state authorities did not feel the need to legitimize their rule based on the alleged similarities between themselves and their subjects. Central authorities often did not even speak the languages of their population, relying on intermediaries to communicate with their publics when needed (Gellner, 1983; de Swaan, 2001).

This situation began to change in the mid-nineteenth century. As highlighted by cultural scholars of nationalism, this period saw an increasing number of intellectuals digging into communities’ history and folklore, trying to delineate their specific cultural and ethnic heritages (Kedourie, 1993). Politicians and activists transferred this cultural logic into the political realm. States such as Italy (1861) and Germany (1871) were founded with the explicit claim of endowing culturally defined nations with a shared independent government. The Treaty of Versailles further globalized

the norm that nations have a principle right to decide over their own fate. As US President Wilson commented in 1919, the breakup of central Europe into “nation-states” would end the practice of empires “dominating alien peoples over whom they had no natural right to rule” (Wilson, 1919). In a nation-state, or at least in its liberal version, individuals deemed part of the nation were supposed to hold equal rights and co-determine their representatives. The international community, scholars, and colonists, later worked to disseminate this model across the world (Benavot et al., 1991; Gellner, 1983).

The affirmation of the principle of national self-determination tied political representation and autonomy to the presence of a nation. Consequently, to be recognized as legitimate, existing state elites wanting to assert their rule over a specific territory as well as movements aiming to establish their own states found themselves needing to prove that they represented a nation (Breuilly, 2013; Gellner, 1983; Germann & Mendez, 2016; Waldron, 1985).

In the past, nations were often considered the result of self-unfolding natural properties. Specific geographical circumstances (e.g., mountains or rivers) and ethnic-cultural traits were considered to translate directly into political identities, which in turn, provided the objective foundation of a nation. In the last few decades, however, scholars have converged towards a constructivist understanding of nation-building. The extent to which nations need “navels” (Gellner, 1996), and the degree to which nation-building might be culturally, anthropologically, or geographically predetermined continues to be the object of intense debate (Cederman, 2001; Coakley, 2018; Gellner, 1996). However, it is generally recognized that national boundaries and identities are at least partially constructed. Nations do not self-unfold. The establishment, popularization, and modification of national boundaries and identities require the presence of dedicated political and cultural activists.

Indeed all over the world, the necessity to provide proof of nationness has motivated attempts by existing and aspiring state elites to draw boundaries for and define the characteristics of the national communities they allege to represent. As shown by historical research, despite the principle of national self-determination often being couched in liberal terms, as a means to grant individuals equality and voice within their national collectives, actual nationalist projects have often led to the violent marginalization of alternative identities within the claimed territories and populations (Hechter, 2000; Wimmer, 2002). Michael Mann famously called this dynamic *The Dark Side of Democracy* (Mann, 2005), as practiced in modern nation-states.

Calhoun (2002) coined the concept of “nationalism as a project” to distinguish concrete nation-building claims and policies from the more general principle of national self-determination. Scholars of politics and conflict largely adopt narrow definitions of nationalist projects. From their perspective, only projects aimed at acquiring or maintaining political self-determination, i.e., efforts to shift state borders and strengthen or weaken political autonomy, should qualify as nationalist (Breuilly, 2013; Hechter, 2000). The curriculum plays no relevant role in this type of politics. Curriculum scholars might therefore prefer a broader definition of nationalist projects that includes all claims and policies aimed at either stabilizing

or modifying an alleged nation's identity or boundaries (Calhoun, 2002; Billig, 1995; Brubaker, 2004) – including curricula designed to this aim (Giudici, 2019). This definition excludes activities targeting other types of “groupness” – e.g., gender, class, race – with the adjective *national* referring to territorially based collective identities (Thompson, 2001). However, it does not preclude the possibility of nationalist projects defining national identities in gendered, racist, or classist terms – which they typically do (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1992).

The distinction between nationalism as a principle and as a project is not always explicit in the literature. However, implicitly, curriculum studies largely build on the latter, aiming to analyze how the curriculum is affected by specific nationalist projects. Still, different understandings of nationalism can be found in the curriculum literature. They can be condensed into three conceptual approaches, each corresponding to a specific theoretical understanding of the logics underlying the legitimation and dissemination of nationalism. I call them the ideal norm approach, the typological approach, and the claim-based approach. As the following sections argue, they come with different implications in terms of the actors involved in nationalist projects, their motives and claims, as well as the mechanisms by which their projects affect the curriculum. They therefore require different types of analysis and data, and involve different theoretical challenges and methodological concerns.

3 The Ideal Norm Approach

The most common approach used to study nationalism in curriculum research is what I call the ideal norm approach. This approach builds on the observation that, while nationalist projects must demonstrate their nation's uniqueness to underscore their political claims, from a comparative perspective, nations tend to show a strong “family resemblance” (Calhoun, 2002, p.5). This apparent paradox, scholars argue, is the result of a logic of appropriateness (March & Olson, 1998). While no clear-cut criteria of nationness exist, the principle of self-determination has established an abstract ideal norm that allows us to discern nations from other types of collective entities such as families, or local communities. If a national project wants its claim to constituting a nation to be recognized as legitimate, and profit from the international protection such recognition entails, its advocates must prove it conforms with this ideal norm – meaning that they will frame it in internationally recognized terms (Benavot et al., 1991; Breuilly, 2013; Calhoun, 2002).

Different definitions of the ideal nation have been advanced in the literature. For Hechter (2000), all nations have a certain size, a territory, and a shared idea of their history. Calhoun's (2002) “features of the rhetoric of a nation” include ten elements: indivisibility, boundaries, direct membership, sovereignty, a government supported by popular will, popular participation in public matters, culture, temporal depth, common descent, and a special historical or sacred relationship to a territory. For Thiesse (2006, p.196), every nation must conform to a “national identity check-list” including features such as a founding ancestor, a national history, national heroes, a language, typical landscapes, or folklore. These definitions are not meant to be used

as tools to discern nations from non-nations. They are analytical roadmaps since, in practice, entities might lack one or the other feature and still be considered legitimate nations, as long as they conform to the general ideal (Calhoun, 2002; Thiesse, 2006).

The ideal norm approach typically understands nationalism as an elite-driven project. From this perspective, it is mainly (aspiring) political elites, who have an instrumental interest in their definition of the nation – and related political claims – being considered norm appropriate (Anderson, 1991; Gellner, 1983). In this line of work, therefore, the analytical focus lies on cultural and political elites' efforts to forge and disseminate their interpretation of the "national identity check-list" among the population. Curriculum research drawing on this approach typically starts by identifying a list of core features characterizing specific national projects as defined by leading politicians or historians. It then examines whether and how these features are portrayed in the written, taught, or tested curriculum (Cuban, 1998). Accordingly, curriculum policy is shaped by nationalism if official documents include (some of) the constitutive features of an ideal nation, or local declinations thereof.

As it comes with a set of national features, whose presence, absence, and variation in the curriculum can be systematically analyzed across time and place, the ideal norm approach has proven particularly useful for comparative curriculum research. Most famously, this is the approach championed by proponents of the world culture theory in education. According to Meyer and Rowan (1977, p.343), nations are defined based on a global norm standing "beyond the discretion of any individual participant or organisation" and including features such as a national language and interpretation of history. They argue that the fact that we can observe an increase in the share of curriculum time dedicated to national languages (Cha, 1991), or a gradual separation of national and world history in textbooks and syllabi (Benavot et al., 1991) serve as evidence that curricula were shaped by universal norms rather than local actors' interests and ideas.

Single-case studies drawing on the ideal norm approach proceed in a similar fashion. However, diving deeper into specific cases, they reveal some interesting inconsistencies between the ideal of the nation and its realization in curriculum policy. The following paragraphs discuss three examples of such studies.

One example is Durrani and Dunne's (2010) study of curriculum policy in Pakistan. The authors draw on Anderson's (1991) definition of the nation as an "imagined community" forged by cultural and political elites, and then popularized through the press and schools. Curricula, Durrani and Dunne argue, are a "key site where states engage in identity-construction work" (Durrani & Dunne, 2010, p.218). Curriculum documents therefore provide an authoritative source for researchers to examine the national project state elites are trying to promote. The authors argue that the emphasis on religion in Pakistan's curriculum is revelatory of the elites' attempt to highlight this particular feature of an ideal nation to unite a linguistically and ethnically diverse population. Using ethnographic methods, they also pinpoint some unintended consequences of this strategy, showing that students sometimes identify with a supranational Muslim community rather than with Pakistan itself.

Furrer (2004) applies the ideal norm approach to a historical study. His analysis of the development of Swiss history curricula builds on the observation that "different

nationalisms, even if they are in competition with each other, show parallels in the sense of common features” (p.23). Furrer draws up a nine-point list of features characterizing the ideal nation, including items varying from wars as catalysts for national unification, to historical myths. He then adapts each list-item for Switzerland based on the narratives produced by the country’s most prominent historians, and then analyzes the items’ presence and presentation in history textbooks. Like most states, Switzerland has a culturally heterogeneous population, and Furrer recognizes that, across constituencies, Swiss history curricula include diverging accounts of some of the items of the ideal nation checklist. Until recently, for instance, Protestant and Catholic textbooks painted a very different picture of the role the Reformation in the formation of the Swiss nation. Still, Furrer interprets the presence of these items as evidence that elites “have squeezed Swiss history into a schema” (Furrer, 2004, p.123) in order to craft a narrative uniting the population.

Similarly, in a multiple case study, Wilschut (2010) interprets the presence of national heroes and accomplishments in historic Dutch, English, and German history curricula as evidence that these countries’ elites aimed to establish a “national spirit” (Wilschut, 2010, p.702). At the same time, Wilschut also finds that the emphasis on national symbols varies across countries and types of schooling. In a comparative perspective, Dutch history curricula include fewer references to the features of an ideal nation, as do the curricula of more elite and academic types of schooling. The prominence of specific features has also changed over time, shifting from narratives highlighting shared cultural and ethnic traits, to more source-based understandings of history in the 1970s, back to more narrative approaches emphasizing multiple cultures and identities in the 1980s.

These and other studies drawing on the ideal norm approach provide powerful evidence of the role of nationalism – as a principle and project – as determinant of curriculum policy. Across the world, geography curricula partition the world into nation-states, focus children’s attention on their own national community, and then present them with images of these communities’ past, achievements, and constitutive features that show striking resemblances.

However, these studies also highlight some interesting incongruities between the singular ideal norm and its plural enactments. How nations are taught not only varies across states, but also over time periods, types of schooling, regions within a given state, as well as between written, taught, and learned curricula. Why do pupils attending elite education tracks receive a less nation-focused curriculum than their peers (Wilschut, 2010)? Why do girls sometimes receive different (or less) instruction in subjects more explicitly dedicated to nation-building such as history or geography (Giudici & Manz, 2018)? Additional variation emerges if we examine the presence of single items of the ideal norm checklist in curricula. Why is it customary to sing the national anthem in schools in Pakistan, but not in Portugal or Italy? Why did national history become a school subject, whereas other items on the “national identity checklist”, such as national gastronomy or folklore (Thiesse, 2006), did not?

The explanation for these and other types of variation might be found in specific adaptations of the ideal norm. It might be the case, as Durrani and Dunne (2010)

argue for the case of Pakistan, that state elites strategically highlight specific ideal features to reinforce curricula's unifying effects. Other determinants might also be at play, however. Researchers of state-led curriculum-making emphasize the multifaceted nature of curriculum politics. Accordingly, curriculum-making takes place at the interface between politics and practice. It can therefore be informed by various political priorities, including for instance the promotion of health or vocational skills, as well as by pedagogical concerns (Connelly & Connelly, 2013; Giudici, 2021; Goodson, 1985; Sivesind & Westbury, 2016). These priorities and concerns are not related to nationalism if they are not intended to reinforce collective boundaries or identities. Still, depending on the context and the actors involved, they might still be considered a priority when drafting curricula.

On its own, the ideal norm approach does not provide the theoretical or methodological means to untangle curriculum variation stemming from curriculum-makers' own interpretation of the ideal norm from variation due to these actors prioritizing other political or educational concerns. Equipped only with a rather static theoretical understanding of the nation, studies drawing on the ideal norm approach alone therefore risk over-emphasizing the role of nationalism in curriculum-making.

4 The Typological Approach

To address the mismatch between the single national ideal and heterogeneous empirics, some scholars have turned to more flexible understandings of the nation. What I call the typological approach assumes that, instead of being oriented towards the same ideal, national projects can draw on multiple models or types of legitimate nations.

The most prominent typology in the field of nationalism is the distinction between ethnic/cultural and political/civic models of nationalism (Brubaker, 1992; Schnapper, 1994). Accordingly, ethnic nationalism is more likely to emerge when stateless communities strive for self-determination. Lacking political institutions, these communities pinpoint their allegedly common ethnic or cultural heritage as proof that they constitute a nation. In the Western world, this type is often associated with Germany and Eastern Europe. In contrast, civic nationalism arises where a community already disposes of political institutions (a state), but wishes to increase the population's commitment to the polity. In these cases, elites tend to emphasize the unifying role of state institutions themselves, thus defining membership of the nation based on people's willingness to participate in a shared political project, rather than on common ethnic or cultural features. France, the USA, and Switzerland are often-quoted examples of this type.

According to proponents of the typological approach, whether a community adheres to the civic or ethnic model matters. This is because national projects based on these two models require different policies. Per definition, in civic nations membership is acquired, whereas in ethnic nations, it is inherited. Therefore, different (educational) policies are needed to socialize individuals into the nation and separate those who belong from those who do not (Brubaker, 1992; Greenfeld, 1992;

Schnapper, 1994). In his landmark comparison of (civic) France and (ethnic) Germany, Brubaker (1992) finds that French elites attribute a more important role to schooling in forging future nationals, since this means conveying to them the skills and mindset to participate in public life. In “*Volk*-centered and differentialist” Germany (Brubaker, 1992, p.13), where membership is inherited rather than taught, more regional curriculum variation has historically been allowed.

In the last few decades, the distinction between ethnic and civic nations has come under criticism within the field of nationalism studies. One main point of concern is that the distinction is often used in normative terms. Renan (1882) coined the typology to argue that civic nations such as his home-state France were superior to German-like ethnic nations. The typology has been used in similar terms ever since (Habermas, 2003). Being associated with the ethnic model has become unattractive for national projects, and there is evidence of actors adapting their rhetoric accordingly (Brubaker, 2004). Some authors argue that this undermines the analytical value of the typology. Typologies are meant to analyze, rather than reflect political arguments. They therefore suggest abandoning the distinction entirely (Brubaker, 2004; Yack, 1996).

Other authors are not as radical. They agree that, in practice, it is difficult to attribute specific national features to one of the two types. Language, for instance, can be seen both as an ethnic marker and as a symbol of people’s will to participate in a shared political project (Anderson, 1991; Brubaker, 2004). These authors also accept that no nation embodies one type alone. However, in their view, this and related typologies can be analytically useful if researchers acknowledge that every national project presents a mixture of civic and ethnic features and understand these as “contextual expressions” (Brubaker, 1992, p.2) of nationalist projects rather than essentialist identities (O. Zimmer, 2003).

The civic-ethnic typology is sometimes mentioned in curriculum studies, but it is seldom used as an explanation for curriculum policy. Considering the aforementioned criticism, a careful handling of this and related distinctions is warranted, especially when applied to political discourses (Hung, 2014; Ozga, 2017). Several studies, however, have relied on variants of the typological approach to interpret curriculum variation across states.

One example is Gardin et al.’s (2015) comparison of language curricula in officially monolingual and multilingual states. According to the authors, multilingual states represent “a different type of nation-state” (Gardin et al., 2015 p.53). Elites in countries such as Luxemburg or Switzerland were not able to rely on traditional monolingual models of nation-building, and therefore crafted an alternative that praised the populations’ multilingualism and commitment to living together despite their linguistic diversity. These two models, the authors argue, are associated with different curriculum policies. Where the state elites highlighted their countries’ linguistic homogeneity, they implemented curricula aimed at forming a monolingual citizenry, whereas multilingual nations introduced their citizens to multiple languages. It must be noted, however, that this typology has little explanatory power. Languages can be introduced in curricula for different reasons (e.g., to facilitate trade), which is why monolingual Norway began teaching multiple languages to a

broader sector of its population earlier than most constituencies in officially multi-lingual Switzerland (Giudici, 2019).

In her comparison of Russian and Finnish curricula, Piattoeva (2009) introduces yet another variant of the civic-ethnic typology. The author distinguishes nation-states, characterized by overlapping cultural and political boundaries, from empire states lacking such congruence. Piattoeva applies this typology in contextual terms. She uses it to typify the contrasting political developments undergone by Russia and Finland since the 1980s, and to analyze these developments' effects on citizenship education. Her study finds that for the nation-state of Finland, joining the supra-national European Union challenged traditional curriculum narratives that linked Finland's political sovereignty to its separateness as a cultural nation. This political shift therefore resulted in a de-coupling of discussions about political institutions and nationhood in Finnish curricula, as well as an embrace of multi-layered conceptions of citizenship. In contrast, when Russia left the supra-national empire of the Soviet Union, this led to the reinforcement of the link between nation and state in the country's official curricula.

Like those relying on the ideal norm approach, studies adopting a typological approach largely subscribe to a rather elitist understanding of the state (Evans, 2006). They assume curricula, and written curricula in particular, to reflect national projects promoted by state elites orienting themselves towards global norms. Piattoeva's (2009) study demonstrates the analytical advantages of such an approach. If typologies are treated as contextual expressions, rather than essentialist identities, and are confronted with empirical data and sources that go beyond elites' political rhetoric, they can serve to identify and interpret, maybe even explain, cross-national curriculum variation. Typologies can also be used to link curriculum reforms to changes in a country's political landscape and elites.

However, recent theoretical developments in nationalism and curriculum studies have challenged some of the core assumptions underlying elitist understandings of the state – and of nationalism. First, authors in both fields have questioned the accuracy of conceptions characterizing the state as a cohesive and collective actor (Binder, 2009; Dale & Robertson, 2009; Rockwell & Vera, 2013). They argue that states are not actors. They are organizations whose policy is driven largely by the individuals, and groups holding positions of power within state institutions. These individuals' and groups' political leanings, interests, and ideas typically vary, meaning that they are likely to pursue different projects within and through state institutions.

A similar view of state institutions has been advanced by scholars of curriculum-making. Several scholars in this field have criticized the tendency to understand curriculum documents as expressions of supposedly homogenous ideologies that “serve the dominant group in a mechanical and unmediated manner” (Wong & Apple, 2002, p.185). This literature argues that the curriculum should be understood as the result of “a series of negotiations and compromises between different interests” (Scott, 2006, p.32), rather than the expression of coherent ideologies and interests. Even in centralized systems, varying parties, departments, and offices representing different views and interests (e.g., administrators or parliamentary

committees) typically intervene in the making of official curricula (Gingrich & Giudici, 2023; Sivesind & Westbury, 2016). If we consider the different curriculum layers, it becomes evident that even more actors are involved. While state authorities might dominate the making of official curricula, the production of textbooks and assessments is often outsourced to private agencies, while teachers have at least some degree of autonomy over the taught curriculum (Cuban, 1998; Ricento & Hornberger, 1996). Each of these actors brings other ideas and interests – and policy is not always crafted top-down (Giudici, 2021).

Actors involved in curriculum-making might also pursue different nationalist projects. Indeed, the assumption that each state has a unified national project and identity has also been criticized as empirically inaccurate. Like states, nations can hardly be described as “internally homogenous, externally bounded groups, even unitary collective actors with common purposes” (Brubaker, 2004, p.8). Firstly, the affirmation of the principle that each state must represent a nation, and the consequent embracing of nationalist projects by state elites, has often led to the marginalization of the individuals and groups who do not identify with dominant nation-building projects. Rather than rejecting nationalism as such, minorities have often themselves started framing their claims for representation and self-determination in nationalist terms (Waldron, 1985). Whose national project state institutions should represent, then, remains contested – as shown by the numerous self-determination conflicts currently raging across the world (Breuilly, 2013; Hechter, 2000; Hutchinson, 2005; Germann & Mendez, 2016).

Secondly, ethnic minorities are typically not the only group pushing for their idea of the nation to be represented in state policy. Within seemingly cohesive majorities who agree that they together constitute a nation, individuals and groups can still hold diverging ideas about the identity and boundaries that should characterize their nation (Brubaker, 2004; O. Zimmer, 2003). Ideologies – like nationalism – are broad ideal constructs, which are compatible with multiple ideas and preferences (Tannenwald, 2005). Therefore, even if the principle of nationalism may have established an abstract norm defining an ideal nation, in practice, this allows for multiple interpretations. The nation imagined by left-wing parties, for instance, might look very different in terms of defining features and identity than the nation imagined by the right. Furthermore, nationalism does not come with an instruction manual. Even if actors did agree on the same idea of the nation, they could still hold competing preferences about how to convey this idea in schools (Kennedy, 1989).

Taken together, the criticism against “methodological statism” and against “methodological nationalism,” highlights that potentially, actors holding different ideas about the nation and its pedagogic dissemination can influence curriculum-making. In specific contexts, it might be warranted to treat nationalism as a unitary project pursued by “the state.” However, authors might want to consider whether, and to what extent this particular choice might overstate the homogeneity and pervasiveness of nationalism on curriculum the curriculum.

5 The Claim-Based Approach

Alternatives to the norm- and type-based approaches to nationalism can be subsumed under the label of claim-based approach. Drawing on the aforementioned criticism of methodological statism and nationalism, this approach emphasizes the need to analytically separate the study of nationalism from the study of state-building. This choice comes with two main implications.

First, it requires abandoning fixed understandings of nations relying on ideal norms or types. As argued by Brubaker (2004), nations are not actual entities that can be objectively defined. Treating them as such risks conflating actors' political arguments with our analytical categories. Rather, nations should be analyzed as claims, as constructs actors use "to change the world, to change the way people see themselves, to mobilize loyalties, kindle energies, and articulate demands" (Brubaker, 2004, p.116). Nations are "practical categories" (Brubaker, 2004, p.12), shaped and used by actors, either unconsciously (Billig, 1995) or to achieve particular goals (Brubaker, 2004; Calhoun, 2002; Thompson, 2001; Waldron, 1985). Actors' definitions of their nation, even if they are referring to the same group of people, might be very different, depending on the ideas, political goals, or interests they are pursuing. The definition of national identities and boundaries therefore becomes "a contest in which various players at different levels of society participate" (O. Zimmer, 2003, p.14).

Second, if we accept that nationalist projects or claims can be advanced by different actors, it becomes necessary to "put people back into nations" (Thompson, 2001). Our analytical focus should shift from central cultural and political elites to the actors involved in curriculum-making. This approach suggests focusing on the nationalist (or other) projects pursued by those actually drafting (curriculum) policy, since their views and interests potentially differ from those of the grand national historians and heads of states whose narratives of the nation are often taken as starting points by the typological and ideal norm approaches.

The claim-based approach, therefore, suggests putting national projects, as well as their relationship with the curriculum, under empirical scrutiny. Analysis should focus on identifying the definition of the nation invoked by actors drafting the curriculum, on understanding whether and how this definition informs their policy preferences, and on tracing how these preferences shape curriculum-making (Giudici, 2019). As the studies discussed in the following paragraphs show, this agenda promises a more accurate theorization of the impact of nationalism on the curriculum. In particular, it allows us to analyse, how different understandings of the nation can inform curriculum-making. It also enables us to capture when these understandings interact with, and may be considered less important than other concerns, and therefore to recognize that nationalist rhetoric is not always the result of nationalist intentions.

Studies building on variants of the claim-based approach provide powerful evidence of the contentiousness of nationalism in curriculum-making. One example is Hofman's (2007) study of the Israeli curriculum. Through detailed historical analysis, Hofman shows that the individuals tasked with drafting the official Israeli

history curriculum between 1956 and 1995 embraced different understandings of the Israeli nation and of the role history lessons should play in delivering it. These understandings are reflected in curriculum regulations, which show a changing balance between pedagogical and nationalist concerns, and repeatedly re-define the latter. For instance, while most regulations highlight religion as a core feature of the nation, in the 1990s they leaned into an almost “anti-Jewish orientation” (Hofman, 2007, p.455) that reflected the particular views of the more secular camp in an increasingly religiously polarized society. Hofman shows that these re-definitions were accompanied by heated debates and contrasting decisions by different representatives of official curriculum policy – culminating in parliament forbidding the use of a specific schoolbook in 2001, because of its depiction of Zionist settlements.

Such disagreements are not specific to Israel. Moreau’s (2003) study shows how representatives of different communities in the USA, from German immigrants to Catholics to the South, have worked to inscribe their vision of the US nation into history curricula – sometimes successfully. Moreau contends that these debates are revealing, as “articulating one idea of the nation has generally meant subordinating or rejecting another” (Moreau, 2003, p.18; see also Nash, 2009).

Similarly, my analysis of Swiss language curricula shows that the meaning of Switzerland’s official multilingualism for the country’s national identity has often been disputed (Giudici, 2019). Swiss voters officially recognized three languages as “national languages” in the 1848 constitution. A fourth national language, Romansh, was added to the list in 1938. Against the background of World War I, which increased existing divisions between the official language groups, German-speaking intellectuals and liberal politicians intensified their calls for a more integrated understanding of the Swiss nation as a “nationally mixed state” (Huber, 1916, p.25). Especially schools, they argued, should contribute to Switzerland becoming a unified nation by integrating its diverse cultural components and forging an original and inclusive identity for the country. This meant, for instance, that they must teach citizens multiple languages. As argued by a contemporary author, “the teaching of the three national languages is the real foundation on which the sentiment of a confederate community of culture can be awakened” (Falke, 1914, p.23).

However, the idea of a nationally mixed Switzerland was not shared by conservative activists and intellectuals associated with language protection groups. For them, the idea that the state should foster the mixing of cultures, languages, and people, was outright appalling. From their perspective, what characterized the Swiss nation was the willingness to accept and protect the diversity of cultures and languages existing on the Swiss territory. Thus schools should not teach children multiple languages, because the ideal citizen was “a Swiss citizen of one language, of *one’s own* language and not a sort of hybrid individual” (de Reynold, 1927, p.110). To reinforce its national community, Switzerland therefore needed curricula to foster local identities and languages – not to undermine them.

Actors might also attribute different priorities to national projects vis-à-vis other concerns at various stages of curriculum-making. For instance, Nash’s (2009) study of curriculum-making in the early US Republic finds that, despite the elites’ militant rhetoric about schools’ obligation to contribute to unifying the nation, curricula

varied from constituency to constituency, and often “did not emphasize Americanism, nationalism, or American authors” (Nash, 2009, p.425). Nash argues that this shows that, while nation-building represented a priority for national elites, actual curriculum-makers prioritized pragmatic and pedagogic concerns.

In her analysis of southern German curricula, Kennedy (1989) reaches a similar conclusion. Kennedy’s finding of the continued prominence of regional topics in curricula after the 1871 unification casts doubt on the widely held assumption that German schools “had as their aim an uniform manipulation of attitudes” (Kennedy, 1989, p.11). The author argues that the presence of regional issues reflects both different understandings of nationalism and varying pedagogical ideas about what could be conveyed to young pupils. For instance, at the turn to the twentieth century, many experts involved in curriculum-making embraced child-centered pedagogies. They adapted curriculum regulations accordingly, replacing German history and geography with activities allowing children to discover local events and places. These activities were also meant to strengthen pupils’ attachment to the national collective, with the expectation being that children would automatically transfer their love for the home and region to the nation. Curricula therefore varied, because local curriculum-makers held different understandings of the nation, as well as of whether and how it should be conveyed to pupils than those articulated by central authorities.

The heated dispute on Swiss language teaching mentioned earlier did not translate into direct curriculum change either. Despite their political dominance in the mid-twentieth century, liberal politicians’ calls for increasing the role of language teaching in curricula found their most determined (and influential) opponent in teacher organizations and local administrators, both of whom rejected the idea of adding a new costly subject many considered too difficult for young children (and were themselves unable to teach) to the curriculum. Patriotism, they argued, could be fostered by less invasive and more child-friendly means (Giudici, 2019).

One Swiss constituency, Italian-speaking Ticino, did introduce a mandatory second national language into the curriculum in this period. The analysis of the process behind this decision shows that it preceded the debate on the nationalist value of Swiss multilingualism, and was dominated by economic concerns. With cross-regional mobility increasing, in 1905, Ticino politicians and experts introduced, at first experimentally, a new type of secondary schools tailored towards increasing pupils’ employability. Along with mathematics and manual skills, these schools’ curriculum included foreign languages, without which, the authorities argued, an Italian-speaking Swiss pupil would “never be a highly valued worker” and would always be defeated in “the inevitable fight with their comrades from constituencies on the other side of the Alps” (Dipartimento della Pubblica Educazione Ticino, 1902, p.24). The reform was then extended to all schools in the 1920s. While politicians, in hindsight, often framed this reform as proof of Ticino’s nationalist spirit, its story highlights how important it is to methodologically separate rhetoric and post-hoc legitimations from the reasons behind decision-making (Giudici, 2019).

Finally, studies drawing on the claim-based approach reveal the different motives that can inform nationalist projects. Nationalism scholarship has connected

nationalism to different social processes. Gellner (1983) describes nationalism as a by-product of economic dynamics, whereas Tilly (1992) famously cast it as the result of states engaging in permanent warfare, and needing committed soldiers. Laitin (1998) and de Swaan (2001) connect nationalism to political actors' self-interest, showing that central elites advanced nationalist projects to disempower regional elites whose leverage resided in their exclusive knowledge of existing localized identities and languages. This logic can also apply to the curriculum, as shown by Hasko Zimmer's (1990) detailed historical analysis of German curricula. The author finds that nineteenth-century German-teachers in Germany used nationalist arguments strategically, in order to improve their status and payroll. By linking their subject to the establishment of a unified and committed German nation, they (rightly) hoped to increase its importance and status in the curriculum, and consequently, their own importance and status.

6 Conclusion

Nationalism has re-shaped the modern world, including the modern curriculum. Therefore, theorizing how this happened, and to what effect lies at the heart of curriculum-research. This chapter divides research connecting nationalism to the curriculum based on whether its authors analyze nationalism as general norm, typology, or claim. Each of these categorizations comes with a series of benefits and drawbacks. Offering a more static understanding of nationalism, norm- and typology-based approaches lend themselves particularly well to comparative research. They allow researchers to focus on a fixed set of features, and to study how their presentation and prominence changed over time, or varied across places. In contrast, these approaches risk over-emphasizing the role of nationalism as pushed by central-elites. As shown by research drawing on claim-based approaches, actors involved in curriculum-making might or might not share central elites' nationalist projects. Sometimes they might use national rhetoric to pursue their own agenda, as in the case of Germany's German-teachers, and sometimes they might prioritize economic or pedagogic concerns over nationalist projects when drafting curricula.

While methodologically challenging, claim-based approaches therefore promise to shed light on several currently under-theorized issues in the relationship between nationalism and the curriculum. We know that nationalism matters for curriculum-making. However, we still know little about the mechanisms through which this impact unfolds, their consequences, or the conditions facilitating or hindering nationalist projects from shaping curricula. Does the inclusion of specific actors (e.g., policy-makers or historians) in curriculum-making tend to produce curricula with stronger nationalist content? How does actors' thinking about stages of development, gender, or student abilities influence their consideration of nationalism as an educational goal, and how they might implement it in practice? Are there specific external conditions or shocks, such as wars or economic crises, that increase the perceived priority of nationalism vis-à-vis other educational goals? How does

teachers' and pupils' appropriation and reinterpretation of nationalist content on the ground affect the impact of curricula, and do they perhaps trigger feedback loops that reshape the official curriculum (Giudici, 2021; Ricento & Hornberger, 1996)?

By embracing a research agenda that pays closer attention to people's actual understandings of nationalism and how they set priorities in light of such understandings when engaged in curriculum-making, we can improve our theorization of the relationship between nationalism and the curriculum. Not only does this approach allow us to learn more about *how* and *when* nationalism affects the curriculum, but also *how* and *when* it does not. This brings us a step closer to identifying the "incongruities, conflicts, and contradictions between education development and the project of state building" (Wong & Apple, 2002, p.183) – and, we might add, of nation building.

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