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CONTEMPORARY ART AND THE CRITIQUE OF EVERYDAY NATIONALISM

Erdem ÇOLAK[1]

Abstract

In discussions of everyday nationalism, bottom-up readings of nationalism that take into account human activities have brought a remarkable dynamism to the study of both nationalism and everyday life. However, since most of the studies on everyday nationalism focus on how ordinary people construct their national identities in everyday life, they do not sufficiently address the relations of production and distribution of critiques of nationalism produced in everyday life. This paper will discuss some artworks created by different artists from different countries around the world by intervening in national symbols and the critical perspectives they bring to national identity, national history, and national policies of states. I argue that artworks produced in this way disrupt the rhythm of everyday life and make controversial interventions into ethical, aesthetic, legal, and political spheres.

Keywords: National Symbols, Contemporary Art, Everyday Nationalism, Rhythmanalysis

[1] **Erdem ÇOLAK,** ercolak@metu.edu.tr, 0000-0001-8278-2058

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ÇAĞDAŞ SANAT VE GÜNDELİK MİLLİYETÇİLİĞİN ELEŞTİRİSİ

Öz

Gündelik milliyetçilik tartışmalarında, insan faaliyetlerini dikkate alan aşağıdan yukarıya milliyetçilik okumaları hem milliyetçilik hem de gündelik hayat çalışmalarına kayda değer bir dinamizm getirmiştir. Ancak gündelik milliyetçilik üzerine yapılan çalışmaların çoğu, sıradan insanların gündelik hayatta ulusal kimliklerini nasıl inşa ettiklerine odaklandığından, gündelik hayatta üretilen milliyetçilik eleştirilerinin üretim ve dağıtım ilişkilerini yeterince ele almamaktadır. Bu makale, dünyanın farklı ülkelerinden farklı sanatçıların ulusal sembollere müdahale ederek ürettikleri bazı sanat eserlerini ve bunların ulusal kimlik, ulusal tarih ve devletlerin ulusal politikalarına getirdikleri eleştirel bakış açılarını tartışacaktır. Bu şekilde üretilen sanat eserlerinin gündelik hayatın ritmini bozduğunu ve etik, estetik, hukuki ve siyasi alanlara tartışmalı müdahalelerde bulunduğunu savunuyorum.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ulusal semboller, çağdaş sanat, gündelik milliyetçilik, ritimanaliz

Introduction: Everyday Life as a Field of Production and Consumption of Nationalism

How national symbols and practices in everyday life shape the public and private spheres and how nationalist ideology reproduces itself through everyday life still occupy a small part of the literature on nationalism and the sociology of everyday life. Although studies on the intersection of these two fields, which are so vital for their survival, gained momentum with Michael Billig's (1995) famous work *Banal Nationalism*, the number of academic studies analyzing the interdependent relationship between these two fields and the series of interventions and struggles that deconstruct this relationship does not seem to have reached a sufficient level today. In this study, I will examine a series of contemporary artworks from different parts of the world that problematize this relationship by looking at the intersection of everyday life and nationalism. The focus of this study will be on how the official narrative and official nationalism embodied in state iconography are shifted in meaning by artists and how this disrupts everyday nationalism.

The concept of everyday life is a concept difficult to define due to its wide scope and has been discussed for many years not only by authors such as De Certeau and Lefebvre but also by Heidegger, Lukacs, Habermas, Goffman, Heller, and others (Felski, 1999). In the 19th century, capitalist production fueled by industrialization

increased urban agglomeration, which paved the way for modernist transformations in cities and resulted in a complete transformation of everyday practices. This transformation of the everyday, which led many writers from Baudelaire to Simmel, Benjamin to Kracauer to think and write about it seriously, has been theorized thanks to the works of Henri Lefebvre (1971; 1991 [1947]; 2002 [1961]; 2005 [1981]), Gaston Bachelard (1994), Edgar Morin (2005), Michel De Certeau (1984), Alf Lüdtke (1995), Erving Goffman (1959) and Dorothy Smith (1987) (Harootunian, 2002).[2]

The study of nationalism in the academic literature, on the other hand, has gained momentum since the 1970s. Ernest Gellner (1964; 1983; 1997), Eric Hobsbawm (1990), Miroslav Hroch (1985), John Hutchison (1994; 2005), John Alexander Armstrong (1982), Benedict Anderson (1991), and Antony D. Smith (1983; 1986), among others, have done invaluable works that constitute the backbone of this field and have tried to reveal the emergence, development lines and characteristics of nations, nationalism and national identities. The modernist approaches of authors such as Ernest Gellner (1983; 1997), Benedict Anderson (1991), and Eric Hobsbawm (1983; 1990) who argue that nationalism preceded nations against the primordialist approach of authors such as Edward Shils (1957) and Clifford Geertz (2010), who claim that nations preceded nationalism, have determined the main axes of debate in nationalism studies for many years. The ethnosymbolist approach, in which John Armstrong (2001), Anthony D. Smith (1986; 2008; 2009) and John Hutchinson (2005; Hutchinson and Monserrat 2004) point to the continuity of forms of social cohesion between premodern and modern without neglecting the changes brought about by modernity, can be read as a 'midway' between primordialist and modernist approaches (Özkırımlı, 2000, p. 168).

As Balibar (1991, p. 93) succinctly states, "a social formation only reproduces itself as a nation to the extent that, through a network of apparatuses and daily practices, the individual is instituted as *homo nationalis* from cradle to grave, at the same time as he or she is instituted as *homo œconomicus, politicus, religiosus*...". However, it is only recently that the literatures on everyday life and nationalism have crossed paths and systematic production of knowledge has begun. Although Hobsbawn (1993) pointed out that nationalism studies have mostly focused on the forms of nationalism constructed by elites from the top down and argued that nationalism can only be better understood with a view from below, it is only since the mid-1990s that the relationship between nationalism studies and the everyday has attracted more attention (Eriksen, 1993; Billig, 1995; Edensor, 2002). One of the characteristic features of these studies is to claim that mainstream nationalism studies neglect human agency. Alternatively, they interpret people as active subjects who reproduce nationalism rather than as passive recipients of nationalism in everyday life practices (Thompson, 2001; Fox and Miller-Idriss, 2008). People talk about the nation, make choices based on nationality, 'perform' the nation through symbols and rituals, and consider the nation in their consumption habits (Fox and

[2] For the historical development of everyday life sociology studies, see (Adler, Adler, and Fontana, 1987).

Miller-Idriss, 2008). This perspective underlines that the intersection of nationalism with the everyday can vary not only from society to society but even from person to person (Antonsich, 2016). For this very reason, I believe that studies in the field of everyday nationalism will contribute greatly to our understanding of the current conditions of reproduction and articulations of nationalism and will not be outdated for a long time.

In this paper, departing from the delivery of the official narrative to ordinary people through national symbols, which corresponds to the third of Fox and Miller-Idriss' (2008) analytical classification, I will focus on the production and circulation of the critique of everyday nationalism, a topic that Fox and Miller-Idriss (and many other scholars working on everyday nationalism) have neglected for long. I will argue that the critique of nationalism or anti-nationalist practices in everyday life also has (re)production and distribution mechanisms in itself, which occupies a space within everyday nationalism discussions. In order to support this claim, I will start with the forms of relationship that people have with national symbols and discuss how some contemporary artists in different countries use national symbols as art materials to present a critical perspective on nationalism. Therefore, before analyzing the contemporary artworks to be discussed, I need to examine how the national symbols that nations produce while creating their official narratives are perceived and reproduced in society.

Everyday Nationalism and State Iconography

Every community needs symbols to distinguish itself from other communities. The meaning attached to these symbols should also be read as functional tools that enable the community to reproduce itself in a meaningful way. However, in order to keep the consciousness of the community alive, community symbols need to be manipulated and reused (Cohen, 1985). The visualization of the state, which has always been an important issue for empires, has become even more serious since the emergence of nation-states. As Michael Walzer (1967, p. 194) suggests, "the state is invisible; it must be personified before it can be seen, symbolized before it can be loved, imagined before it can be conceived". In this framework, state iconography and an official narrative symbolized by it are created as an effective means for nation-states to both differentiate their identities from other identities on the international level and to create a more consolidated nation through the national identity format produced by the ruling elites within the country.

Among these symbols, flags are the most standardized and widespread ones. Flags, which Durkheim (1995 [1912]) defines as modernized versions of the totems of ancient societies, relate to society through rituals that require public participation such as public holidays, commemorations, and national days (Elgenius, 2011; Connerton, 1989; Shanafelt, 2008), as well as through unwaved flags that are hung in front of public buildings, on the balconies of houses, at the entrance of restaurants, or even on cakes (Billig, 1995). Although the unconscious engagement with nationalist symbols in everyday life, conceptualized as banal nationalism

through the metaphor of an unwaved flag, has been criticized by those who use the concept of everyday nationalism for not taking into account human activity (Knott, 2015) and for ignoring the complex structure of daily life sustained on the axis of nationalism (Skey, 2009), it has made it easier to understand how nationalism penetrates daily life through symbols, how it transforms social relations, and how it turns people into *homo nationalis*.

All nation-states construct an official conception of nationalism through the flag, statues of founding figures, Independence Days, commemorations declared national for various reasons, banknotes and coins, postage stamps, medals, coats of arms, military uniforms, and a number of folkloric symbols that are assumed to convey their national culture. In many countries, individuals' encounters with symbols and official nationalism are transmitted as a state policy from childhood through flag ceremonies, the content of textbooks, and various rituals (Bora, 2004; Butz, 2009; Finell, 2019).

National symbols, just like the official narrative, are not homogenously constructed and presented to the public by the elites. As Brass (1991) and Smith (1998) emphasize, multiple national symbols and narratives can encompass the approaches to the nationalism of different political elite groups. The long-standing debates in Turkey over the Student Oath and its eventual abolition are an important example of this complexity. Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that over time a set of national symbols start to be used interchangeably and refer to each other so that the symbols in this set point to slightly different narratives of nationality that are not mutually exclusive.

At this point, it would be useful to go back to Durkheim's definition of the flag and underline a point. Since most national symbols are embedded in mythic stories, they are soon, like totems, surrounded by a sacred or semi-sacred halo. Even at a very young age one learns that it is a very bad thing to damage a national symbol (Helwig and Prencipe, 1999). In addition, many nation-states enact laws protecting national symbols, paving the way for legal punishment for any violation. Any disrespect to a national symbol is a disrespect to not only the *people* who are emotionally united under these symbols but also the *citizens* who have formed a political unity under these symbols. In this way, national symbols take on an armor of protection that is both sacred and legal.

Disenchanting the Official Narrative: Deconstructing State Iconography in Contemporary Art

What happens when contemporary artists use national symbols, which are both sacred within society, legally protected, and often accelerate the circulation of official discourse in everyday life, as artistic materials? What are the consequences when national symbols are manipulated through artistic means and used for a

critique of nationalism or a revelation of a problem perpetrated by the nation-state, rather than as a mouthpiece for the official narrative? How can all these inversions expand debates on everyday nationalism?

Before seeking answers to these questions, it is necessary to clarify a few points about the semiotics of national symbols. Many national symbols refer reflexively to a multiplicable but limited set of meanings. For example, the American national flag refers directly or indirectly to the independence and freedom of the United States of America, to those who died for the country, to the American national interest, to American democracy, to heroism, or to patriotism. This set of meanings can be multiplied, but it is not unlimited. Meanings attributed to the flag symbol also apply, with some differences, to the American national anthem, The Star-Spangled Banner. Although not all individuals acquire the same meanings from these national symbols at the same time, the reproduction and circulation of these meanings through symbols in everyday life is one of the key points of forming a national identity. However, it should not be forgotten that while every nation-state tries to create an official historical narrative within itself, alternative historical narratives, sometimes by elites but more often by lower segments of the population, emerge simultaneously or diachronically. Therefore, the extent to which the official historical narrative of national symbols becomes dominant and enduring depends on the extent to which the symbols are actively engaged with the public and frequently used in daily life.

Second, these symbols differ in each country, time, and context. In almost every country, the flag symbolizes national independence and patriotism, but in countries like Saudi Arabia and Israel, for example, it also signifies religious unity. The same Turkish flag refers to a set of meanings when it is in the hands of Ogün Samast, the murderer of journalist Hrant Dink, and to a different set of meanings when it is on the barricades during the Gezi Park protests. While the use of American national symbols as part of consumer products and their circulation in everyday life independently of their official forms increased from the 1970s onwards, the same kind of use was the subject of lawsuits in Turkey until the mid-2000s (see Sevinç, 2007). It is possible to multiply such examples, but in the last instance, all of them make it clear that national symbols cannot be perceived outside of time and space and are influenced by rising/falling ideological approaches.

With these two points in mind, we can move on to the analysis of a number of artworks produced by intervening in national symbols. To date, hundreds of artists from different parts of the world have used nation-state symbols as materials to open up debates on national identity and state formations. "Patriotic pop" works (Boime, 1990, p. 3) gained momentum, especially after Jasper Johns's painting of the American flag with rough brush strokes on newspaper clippings in 1954-55. The reason why I chose works produced by different artists in different periods with the national symbols of different countries as a sample is to show the capacity of such artworks to criticize a contemporary problem and to mark how a national symbol is deconstructed through art, regardless of the country. In this way, I argue that official historical narratives

cannot be re-established by criminalizing an artist or making one nation-state seem more oppressive than others and that a critical perspective on nationalism can be developed whenever such artworks are viewed.

One of the common points in these works is that they suspend for a while certain nationalist images and values that are automatically perceived in everyday life and create interruptions in the perception of time of the everyday. At this point, Lefebvre and Régulier's writings on the rhythm of everyday life can be pioneering. In fact, everyday life is critical for understanding post-industrial societies as well as pre-industrial societies. However, according to Lefebvre and Régulier (1999), the perception of time in which pre-industrial societies organize their daily lives is cyclical, while the perception of time in post-industrial societies is direct. In the rhythm of cyclical time, repetition always comes with a difference, but the repetition of linear time is tiresome and exhausting (1999, p. 6). Since the daily life of post-industrial societies is organized according to the requirements of capitalism, perception and use of the time that optimizes these requirements also regulate the way society is governed. Thus, the tediously repetitive rhythm of the everyday, namely the everydayness, rather than the singular differences that daily life contains, emerges as an important point that will help us understand how capitalism reproduces itself in society (Zayani, 1999, p. 3).

According to Lefebvre (2004, p. 68-9), “political power knows how to utilize and manipulate time, dates, time-tables. It combines the unfurling of those that it employs (individuals, groups, entire societies), and rhythms them”. Thus, the reception and reproduction of official nationalist codes within the capitalist monotonous life do not disturb but strengthen the daily rhythm of the capitalist lifestyle. However, artfully manipulated artifacts break the repetition of everyday nationalism, causing citizens to rethink their nationalist ties to the nation and to each other, and to do so repeatedly in a new context each time the artifact comes up. Given that many national symbols are also legally protected, such productions by artists question the boundaries of both ethical, legal and political realms. These artworks, taking from Rancière's (2015) perspective, develop a dissensual relationship with the given political and artistic standpoint, and it is precisely for this reason that they interrupt the flow of everyday life, unveil the ultra-nationalist/racist practices, and thus incur the wrath of political and artistic authorities. But to the extent that they manipulate people's nationalist sentiments, they also trigger uncontrolled debates. Thus, as the literature on everyday nationalism often underlines, people become active subjects of nationalism, but with a difference: This time they are active not to reproduce the official nationalist understanding, but to criticize it.

↓

Sample Artworks Produced from National Symbols

Zoulikha Bouabdellah, Dansons (2003)

Born in Moscow to Algerian parents, Zoulikha Bouabdellah lived in Algeria until the age of 16 and immigrated to France with her family in 1993 due to the civil war in Algeria. Her 2003 video *Dansons* (Let's Dance) is a striking work that questions national identity through the national anthem. In this work, in which the camera is fixed on the artist's bare waist, the artist first wraps a blue shawl with bells around her waist, then does the same with white and red shawls with bells. In this way, she creates the color combination evoking the French flag on her waist. She then belly dances to the French national anthem *La Marseillaise* (Figure 1).

At first glance, this work may appear as a performance based on simple displacement and orientalist stereotypes, but when evaluated together with its symbolic meanings, it invites the viewer to a multi-layered discussion. The French-Algerian artist's belly dance accompanied by *La Marsellaise* can be read as a critique of the unidirectional/assimilationist approach of French nationalism, which is based on the Francization of its colonies. Bouabdellah, who ironically changes *Marchons!* (Let's Walk!) in the refrain of *La Marsellaise* to *Dansons* (Let's Dance) and salutes the far-famed motto *If I can't dance, then it's not my revolution* which is frequently attributed to Emma Goldman, draws attention to the fact that the official historical narrative and collective memory given through national symbols are not passively received by the public, especially by the 'other' French people from colonized regions. According to Shilton (2008), this work reveals the persistence of neo-colonial exoticisms, while reconnecting stereotypes and pointing to the potential for Arab and French identities to interact with each other.

The second point to emphasize about the work is the challenge to the patriarchal characterization of the nation. For many nation-states, the contact of the female body with national symbols is considered a humiliation of the nation, because in the patriarchal equation the female body is coded as incapable, weak, and dirty. For example, in Turkey, model Merve İldeniz waved a flag in 1996 while wearing a bikini, the flag got tangled in the wind and she was sentenced to 6 months in prison. Bouabdellah, on the other hand, covers her bare waist with the symbol of the nation, combining the sanctity of the flag with the female body, secularizing it and distancing it from the patriarchal plane. Moreover, as Shilton (2008) points out, Bouabdellah, as a French-Algerian woman, puts herself in the place of Marianne in Delacroix's famous painting *La Liberté guidant le Peuple* (1830) and draws attention to the participation of (women) immigrants in the formation of French identity.

Figure 1 - Zoulikha Bouabdellah, Dansons, 2003, 1-channel video installation, color, sound, 5 min. Image Source: https://www.mumok.at/en/dansons

Sara Rahbar, Flags (2005 -)

Sara Rahbar's flag works are a series of works based on the American flag with various interventions and create a long-standing series. Rahbar, who defected to the United States with her family at a very young age after the Islamic revolution in Iran, has worked with many different materials on the real American flag, the first of which she made in 2005. Rugs, pieces of fabric, flasks, military ammunition, religious symbols, and epaulets are common components of Rahbar's flags. These flags, which she rearranges without interfering with the part consisting of stars of the American flag, sometimes reveal the militarist and imperialist character of America, sometimes the hybrid culture and life in America, and sometimes the traces of the artist's personal memory (Figure 2) that set the American flag as both a metaphorical and literal background for her. Although she was born into a family of Iranian origin, America, where she lived from a very young age, is the place she lives her life. The national and religious symbols she encounters in everyday life constitute the narratives that fill this space:

Living in America, you see the flag and various symbols of Christianity everywhere. Jesus Christ, for me, is more about surrendering, guilt and shame. It has all these layers, it's heavy with time and history. I was constantly seeing the flag and the cross, and eventually, it found its way into my work. It wasn't so much about Christianity or the American flag, as it was about the emotions and conversations that are associated with these symbols. The weight and meaning that we give them (Sara Rahbar, 2020).

Rahbar, like Bouabdellah, works with the symbol of the nation in order to present her narrative and critique, suggesting that the relationship of the 'other' with the flag is not a passive one, that contradictory political and religious elements coexist within the nation, and that militarism is inherent in America.

Figure 2 - Sara Rahbar, I Don't Trust You Anymore, Flag 59, Mixed Media, 78 x 49 inches, 2019. Image Source: https://www.sararahbar.com/flags?lightbox=dataItem-jv2xcomd

David Hammons, African American Flag (1990)

In his highly acclaimed work, David Hammons replaces the colors of the American flag with red, black, and green, the colors of the Pan-African Universal Negro Improvement Association, which has a pan-African perspective (Figure 3). This symbolic gesture quietly but very effectively draws attention to the plight of black people in America, who have long been ignored, denied equal citizenship by the state, and systematically

mistreated. Hammons' displacement underscores not only the existence of African Americans but also the impossibility of imagining an American nation (and its symbols) without them.

Describing himself as an "art gangster" and a "volunteer ambassador for the African American community" (as cited in Bernier, 2008, p. 198), the pan-African reference of Hammons' flag extends the scope of the work beyond the identity of Africans living in America. The colors red, black, and green, which symbolize the collective memory of black communities that have struggled for independence, freedom, and civil rights in different parts of the world in the last century, when combined with the American flag, bring all this history into the American context. Thus, in this new form, the American flag becomes part of black everyday life (and everyday nationalism), albeit symbolically.

Figure 3 - David Hammons, Africa American Flag, 1990, dyed cotton. Image Source: https://www.moma.org/collection/works/222169

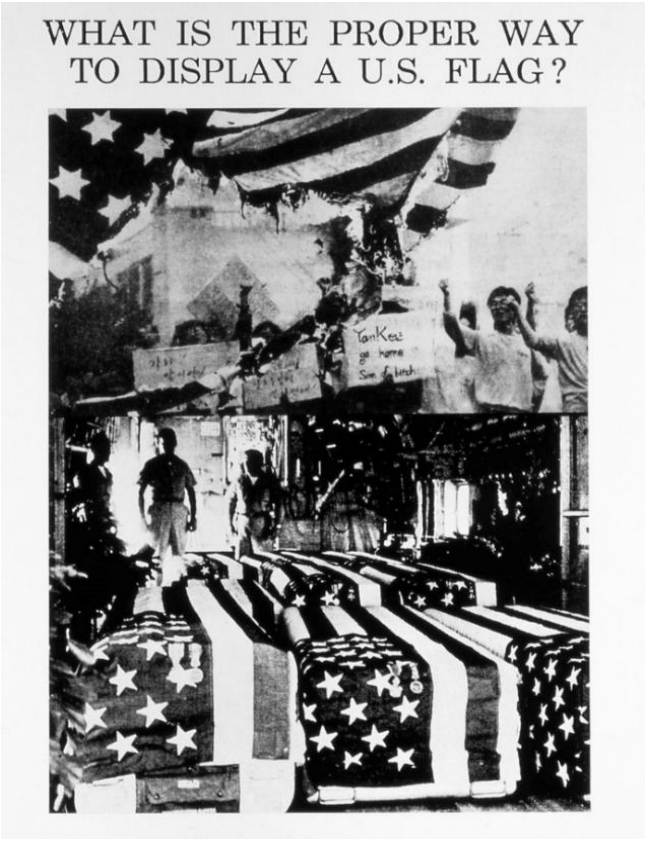
In time, Hammond's flag becomes an important symbol that is recalled in incidents of discrimination and violence against black people. For example, in the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd and other Black Americans in 2020, the curators of The Broad Museum in Los Angeles organized the exhibition titled *This Is Not America's Flag* (2022), which explored how the American flag was deformed by artists (Becker, 2022). Among others, Hammond's flag was back in the spotlight as a work that emphasized the existence and importance of Black Americans.

Dread Scott, What is the Proper Way to Display a US Flag? (1989)

Dread Scott's installation continues to be one of the most important examples of the relationship between popular nationalism and art, as much for the controversy surrounding it as for the work itself. This installation, which Scott made during his student years and exhibited at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, consists of three pieces. On the wall, above a collage of photographs of the burning American flag, "Yankee Go Home" banners, and flags draped over the coffins of American soldiers, is the text *What is the*

Right Way to Display a US Flag? Below this image is a notebook for viewers to write their comments. But in order to write in the notebook, viewers must step on the American flag on the floor (Figures 4 and 5).

This avant-garde work caused great reactions. A failed attempt by war veterans to smuggle the flag out of the gallery was followed by a protest of a group of 7,000 people and statements by then-President George H. W. Bush personally condemning Scott. The matter went to court, where a judge ruled that neither state nor federal flag desecration laws had been violated, but flag laws were revised in many states after the incident (Welch, Sassi, and McDonough, 2002, p. 2).



Figures 4 and 5 – Dread Scott, What is the Right Way to Display a US Flag?, installation view, 1989. Image Source: https://www.dreadscott.net/portfolio_page/what-is-the-proper-way-to-display-a-us-flag/

Scott's installation is an interesting example of participatory art practices. The interesting notes written in the notebook clearly show the confusion the work creates among the viewers. Let's quote a few of them directly:

↓

In Russia you would be shot, and your family would have to pay for the bullets. But once again what do you expect from a nigger named "Dread Scott"?

_____

Dear Dread,

Like someone who viewed the exhibit, I began reading other people's comments standing next to the flag, but gradually moved to standing on it. As someone raised to be iconoclastic (at least I thought I was) it was an interesting moment of self-awareness, which (I think) is the whole purpose of the display. Perhaps when human life and liberty is really valued above property (and symbols) in America we will all have more allegiance to the principles of "liberty" and "justice" for all. Congratulations on your courage in getting arrested to test this crazy law.

P.S. Kudos to the gallery for their courage. Why is it OK to "Knowingly maintain on the ground homeless people but not the flag"???

_____

As a veteran defending the flag I personally would never defend your stupid ass! You should be shot!
—U.S. Navy Seal Team

_____

This flag I'm standing on stands for everything oppressive in this system—The murder of the Indians and all the oppresses around the world, including my brother, who was shot by a pig who kicked over his body to "make sure the nigger was dead." the pig was wearing the flag. Thank you, Dread Scott, for this opportunity. (Dread Scott, n.d.)

For Scott, a supporter of the US Revolutionary Communist Party at the time, the targeting and torching of the US flag was proletarian internationalism (Boime, 1990, p. 24). But the significance of the work goes far beyond Scott's political perspective. The power of this participatory art practice lies in the controversy it generates and the way it embodies the moral panic about flag desecration in the notebook (Welch, Sassi and McDonough, 2002, p. 3). Summarizing the complexity of everyday nationalism, this work suggests that presenting citizens symbols outside their official and legal uses allows them to reveal their hybrid processes of identification within their inner worlds.[3]

[3] The exhibition *Old Glory: The American Flag in Contemporary Art*, which opened in Phoenix, Arizona in 1996, included 80 pieces made from the American flag, including this work by Dread Scott. For an analysis of the questionnaires that gauged audience reactions during the exhibition and the notebooks in which opinions about the exhibition were collected, see (Culmer, 1998).

Mounir Fatmi, The Lost Springs (2017)

Mounir Fatmi's wall installation The Lost Springs consists of the flags of 22 Arab League countries and 3 brooms. Fatmi places a broom under three of the 22 flags (Algeria, Egypt, and Libya), which he hangs in line on the wall (Figure 6). This small gesture, when read in conjunction with the title of the work, distinguishes between Arab countries that have and have not experienced a change of government as a result of the protests that began in the early 2010s and are often referred to as the Arab Spring. By juxtaposing the official flags of Algeria, Egypt, and Libya, Fatmi shows that despite the "cleansing" in Algeria, Egypt and Libya, the remaining 19 Arab countries retain their existing governments. The arrangement of the flags is also important for Fatmi, who updated his first edition in 2011, in which only Algeria and Egypt were attached to the end of the broomstick, by adding Libya to the broomsticks. Right next to the Libyan flag, Fatmi placed the flag of Syria, the country most likely to change its government at the time, while at the end of the long line of flags he placed Saudi Arabia, the country least likely to change.

The Lost Springs, the first version of which was censored at the Dubai International Art Fair in 2011, follows a different path from other examples. The flags of the countries where change is demanded and the countries where the change occurred remain in the same form. The flag is the same, and the people represented by the flag are the same. However, the semantic structure of the flag has changed after the "cleansing". A dirty broom, which under normal circumstances would not be in keeping with the sanctity of the flag, becomes its main pillar. The flag is now, albeit symbolically, the flag of the will of the people, not of some political dictators and elites.

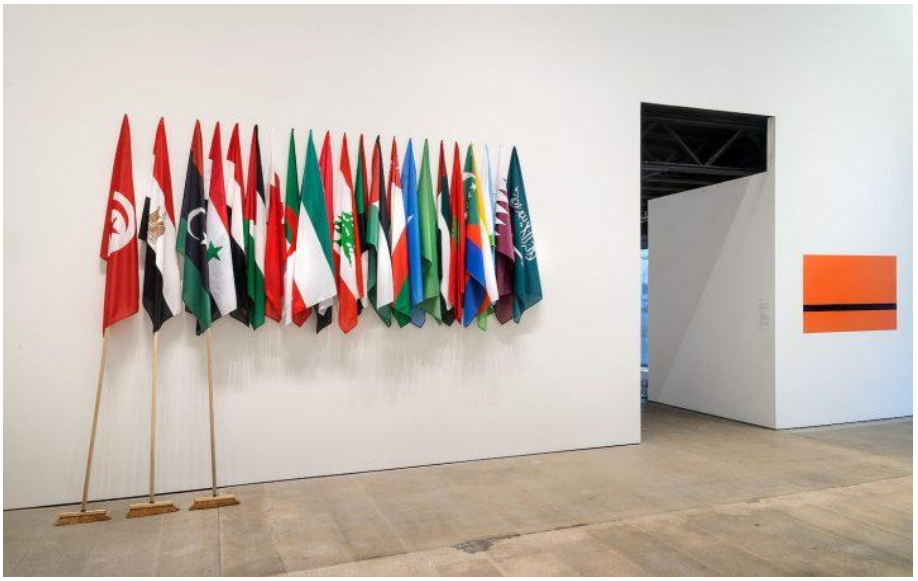


Figure 6 - Mounir Fatmi, The Lost Springs, 22 Flags and 3 Broom, 2017. Image Source: https://hyperallergic.com/366009/a-fanfare-of-flags-unwoven-repurposed-quilted-and-performed/

Esra Ersen, Untitled (1993)

Esra Ersen's installation is a striking work that uses national symbols to criticize both the oppressive and militaristic political climate in Turkey and more specifically Kenan Evren, the architect of the military coup of September 12, 1980. When Evren, who "devoted himself to art" after retiring from the presidency in 1989[4], announced in 1993 that he would hold an exhibition of his paintings at Aksanat (Akbank Art Center), a Sabancı Holding affiliate, a group of artists protesting this announcement organized an exhibition called "Atsanat" at the BM Contemporary Art Center, curated by Beral Madra and led by the painter Komet. The title of the exhibition was a parody of the horse (in Turkish: at) theme often seen in Evren's paintings.

Figure 7 - Esra Ersen, Untitled, Horse Headdress, 1993. Image Source: (Kosova, 2011, p. 29).

Ersen's contribution to the exhibition consists of hanging on the wall a ready-made horse headdress she bought from the market, but this horse headdress captures a very strong connotation in the context of the exhibition. The eye part of the bridle contains yellow stripes and a crescent and a star, just like military epaulettes (Figure 7). In this context, the oppressive, controlling, obedience-based relationship between the horse and its rider is extrapolated to the military's approach to the social and civilian spheres (Kosova, 2011, p. 29). At first glance, the rider can be thought to be Kenan Evren, but the work also reveals how the official view of the state, independent of the rulers, narrows the living spaces of people, as it narrows the field of vision of the horse with the symbols of the nation-state (both the moon star and the military epaulettes).

[4] Evren's "passion for painting" grew rapidly with the support of his intricate relations with the business world of the period, making him "the most expensive living Turkish painter" in 1998. In 1998, the price paid for his Atatürk painting was 422,000 US dollars and his collectors included the Sabancı and Koç families, Halis Toprak, Ali Balkaner and Muharrem Eskiyapan (Keskin, 2015). As Ali Artun (2015) aptly observes, the Kenan Evren incident is not an accident, but "on the contrary, it marks the transition to an era in which the market decides what is art and what is not".

Vahit Tuna, Anthony Hopkins (2011)

While Michael Billig builds his famous work on the metaphor of the waving and non-waving flag, he does not specifically mention public monuments, busts, or statues of people considered important for the nation-state; however, these national symbols, just like the non- based relationship between the horse and its rider is shifted into the Turkish military's approach to waving flag, are important tools that determine the relations that individuals establish with their daily lives. As Jeffrey (1980) underlines, the passive approval of the people that the state needs for its actions is only possible by 'giving an image' to the state, and in the case of Turkey, the image of the state is embodied in Atatürk statues (see Tekiner, 2014). These statues are often placed in spaces such as parks, squares, museums, and streets, which are envisioned as public gathering spaces (Yasa Yaman, 2011, p. 71), and thus public relations in these spaces are reorganized. Schools are one of the most important of these spaces. It is mandatory to have a bust of Atatürk in every schoolyard. Vahit Tuna's Anthony Hopkins targets precisely these everyday practices (Figure 8).

When the viewers of Tuna's exhibition "We Were Always Spectators..." at Depo Istanbul in 2011 saw the bust on a pedestal in the courtyard outside the space, they did not hesitate to recognize it as a bust of Atatürk, just like other people educated in Turkey. However, the (limited number of) viewers who got closer to the work realized that this bust, which does not resemble a depiction of Atatürk, has the inscription "Anthony Hopkins" on its pedestal. The work, which reveals how much we are "bystanders" to the nationalist symbols that we take for granted in everyday life, may look like a bust, but it actually derives its power from the relationship between distance and proximity, that is, from the viewer's participation. In this artwork, distance itself is the key element that determines the relationship between art and public space, and between art and non-art (Kuryel, 2016, p. 214).

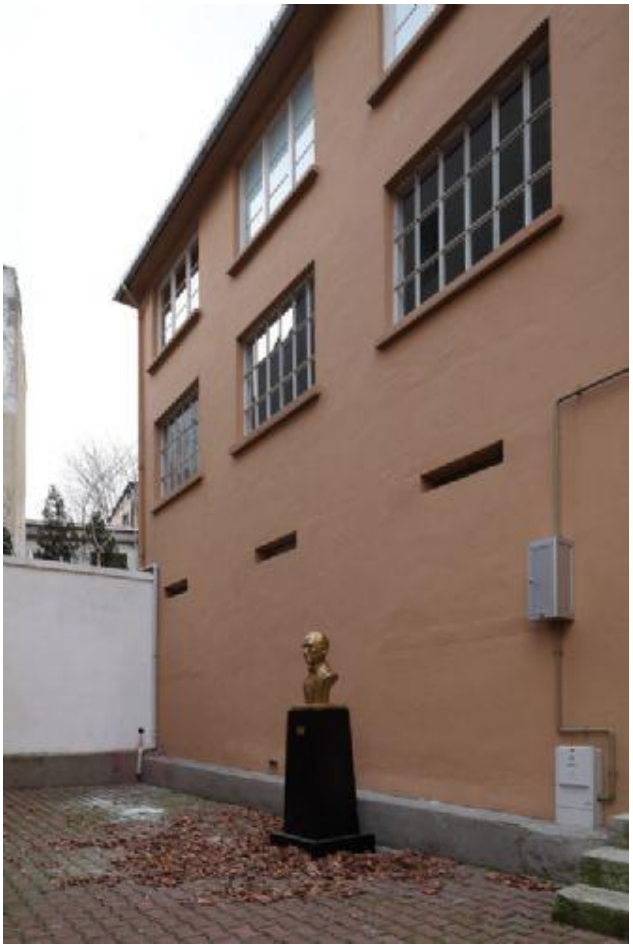


Figure 8 - Vahit Tuna, Anthony Hopkins, Bust and Pedestal, 2011. Image Source: https://www.depoistanbul.net/event/ hep-seyirciyiz-zaten/

Another striking point of the work is that through the image of Atatürk, it erodes the feeling that citizens are monitored and disciplined by the state. Anthony Hopkins, who was chosen for the work, is an actor who changes his image, attitude, and ideas in every

art project due to his profession. In this context, Hopkins' message is the exact opposite of the official historical narrative that is intended to be conveyed to citizens through the image of Atatürk. This irony reminds the viewer of the exhibition, to paraphrase Tuna's title of the exhibition, that one should not be a bystander to everyday nationalist elements.

Sanja Iveković, Lady Rosa of Luxembourg (2001)

Another work that questions the impact of public sculptures and monuments on everyday nationalism is Lady Rosa of Luxembourg by Croatian artist Sanja Iveković, created in 2001 as part of the exhibition Luxembourg et les Luxembourgeois, based on Luxembourg's national monument to the victims of war, known as Gëlle Fra (Golden Lady). The work, which triggered many debates from the moment it appeared in the public sphere, is based on a replica of Gëlle Fra with some of her features altered and placed on a similar pedestal not far from the original (Figures 9 and 10).

Gëlle Fra was erected in 1923 in memory of Luxembourg men who volunteered for the First World War. This sculpture, made according to the neo-classical artistic style, is designed as Nike, the goddess of victory that was often seen at that time. Although the Catholic conservative bourgeoisie of the time reacted against the positioning of the "naked woman" in front of the holy church (Schöllhammer, 2001) due to the tight clothing that covered the figure's body, Gëlle Fra took its place in public life as a national symbol in 1923. In 1940, due to the Nazi threat, she was taken down and hidden by Luxembourg workers. The Gëlle Fra was kept in storage until 1985 when it was reinstalled in the public sphere and has since become one of Luxembourg's most important national symbols.

Figure 9 and 10 - Sanja Iveković, Lady Rosa of Luxembourg, Public Monument Installation View, 2001. Images Source: https://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2011/sanjaivekovic/#lady-rosa-of-luxembourg

There are three main differences in Iveković's Gëlle Fra: The female figure is pregnant, the title has been changed to Lady Rosa of Luxembourg in reference to the famous Marxist revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg, and the names of the deceased engraved on the base of the work are covered by three large posters. The posters

read in French *le résistance*, *la justice*, *la liberté*, *la indépendance* (resistance, justice, freedom, independence), in German *Kitsch*, *Kultur*, *Kapital*, *Kunst* (Kitsch, Culture, Capital, Art), and in English *whore*, *bitch*, *Madonna*, *virgin*.

Iveković's manipulation primarily points to the fact that the female figures represented in the sculptures as the "mother of the nation" are in fact always made by a masculine eye, for a masculine eye, and with meanings imbued with masculine values. Traditional female statues in the style of Gëlle Fra actually honor generals, historically important statesmen, and monarchs, that is, men in power (Pejić, 2005). Iveković's pregnant Gëlle Fra is precisely a move to break this gaze. Iveković shifts the social gaze to the invisible contributions of women during and after wartime. In doing so, she salutes the famous revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg, her anti-war efforts, and the life she lost in the cause, one of the hearts of capitalism. The contradictory words in the monument's inscription mark the ambivalent attributes and positions that women are given in society. Iveković summarizes this situation as follows:

> *(...) the French revolution was also pictured as a woman, made immortal by Delacroix in his painting "Liberty Guiding the People". But although many women took part in the French Revolution, after the revolution they were declared "witches" and either removed from the political scene or even killed. I would like to remind you now that Rosa Luxemburg was killed because of her radical political ideas. It is also important to remember that women who don't fit into the patriarchal order are commonly addressed as "bitches", "witches" and "whores" (Iveković, 2001).*

Reactions to Iveković were swift after the work was exhibited in public. The reactions of war veterans were followed by right-wing nationalists protesting Lady Rosa as a "communist conspiracy". Feminist organizations organized demonstrations in support of Lady Rosa. More than 700 pages of newspaper clippings were published on the subject (see Ilić and Kršić, 2002; Pejić, 2005). As Ilić and Kršić (2002) point out, Rosa Luxemburg's words "Today we can seriously set about destroying capitalism once and for all" are precisely the words that should not have been heard in Luxembourg. Moreover, Iveković is an "easterner" (Croatian) who questions the national values of the "west" (Luxembourg) and at the same time a feminist artist who intervenes in the history of the revolution from a post-socialist position (Kašić, 2004). When all these points overlap, it is not surprising that Lady Rosa has triggered many debates ranging from nationalist values to the position of women in society and history. Where these debates have led is also important in terms of everyday nationalist debates: In 2001, the Luxembourg Parliament passed a new law legally granting Gëlle Fra the status of a national monument, thus legally preventing future artistic interventions.

Conclusion

The bottom-up readings of nationalism that take into account human activity in everyday nationalism debates have brought a remarkable dynamism to both nationalism and everyday life studies. Since the dynamics of the intersection of these two fields differ across time/space, it has paved the way for very interesting fieldwork in the last two decades. Although the classification proposed by Fox and Miller-Idriss (2008) is very useful in many respects, it does not offer anything about how nationalism is (re)produced and distributed in everyday life from an alternative/critical perspective. However, the criticism of official nationalism by citizens in everyday life is also an aspect, a form of everyday nationalism.

In this study, I have tried to examine how national identity, the official historical narrative, and certain crimes and discrimination perpetrated by the state are brought up for discussion through a few artworks produced using national symbols. In fact, artists have played an important role in the visualization of the nation in the formation processes of nation-states and in this way in making the official historical narrative dominant. It should not be forgotten that sculptors sculpted the public monuments, composers composed the anthems, and painters illustrated the public buildings of each country. However, especially from the 1960s onwards, the official narratives of nation-states also began to bear the brunt of contemporary art's critique of social issues. The issues that artists try to question through patriotic images and objects become public through exhibitions and pave the way for public debates.

The works I have mentioned in the text are a small sample of the ethical, aesthetic, legal, and political consequences of many works produced on this subject around the world. By suspending the rhythm of capitalist everyday life for a while, these works create moments in which citizens can truly confront their national identity, national past, and contemporary state formation. Precisely because of this suspension, the order of everyday life is replaced by fierce debates, protests, urgent legislative measures, and even trials.

The advantage of contemporary artworks that in one way or another explore national identity and the politics of nation-states is that they have the potential to reignite debates every time they come into the spotlight (through an exhibition or the sharing of the images of these artworks on social media). An unwaved flag of the United States might not attract the attention of the average person after a while, but an unwaved African American Flag by David Hammons will attract attention in any case. Zoulikha Bouabdellah's video deconstructs the French flag and national anthem every time it is viewed. Thus, the time and place where these works disrupt the rhythm of life cannot be precisely predicted in the flow of daily life.

Perhaps the best contemporary example is the frequently shared symbolic visual of the protests organized for Mahsa Amini, a twenty-two-year-old woman who was killed by the Iranian morality police for violating the

Iranian veiling law. This image contains a waving hair-flag on a stick. This hair-flag, created by Belgian artist Edith Dekyndt for a video she produced in 2014, was made from the hair left behind among the rocks on Diamant coast after the sinking of a ship carrying 100 African slaves in Martinique in 1830. This image soon became a symbol of anti-hijab protests in Iran, in a completely different context. The power of artworks made from national symbols derives precisely from this transitional nature. National symbols, inverted through art, effectively bring to the fore the historical problems not only of a single nation but of the nation-state model in general.

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