

# Final Honours Proposal

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## Research Question

In this research project, I will be looking at the question: how was Canadian nationalism reproduced over Twitter during the Sochi 2014 Olympics?

## Topic

The Olympics are expanding digitally, with viewers watching the Games on multiple viewing platforms, such as their laptops and smartphones, and using social media to discuss the events as they are happening (Tang & Cooper, 2013). The Sochi 2014 Olympics saw an increase in the amount of viewers who watched the event, as well as an increase in the number of followers on the official Olympic social media accounts (Facts and Figures, 2014). Special events such as the Olympics are likely to be collectively remembered by societies as a historic event (Dayan & Katz, 1992). These events are said to privilege the home, and in doing so, they provide a space where members of the community can deliberate and celebrate together (Dayan & Katz, 1992). Along with the overall grandeur of the Olympics and the event's ability to pause the routine of everyday life, these considerations are what make the Olympics significant to study. My research will further explore the ways in which Canadians deliberate and celebrate the Olympics by relying on the discourse of Canadian nationalism.

It is important to examine nationalism in the context of the Olympics, because the International Olympic Committee assumes the concept of the nation, rather than questioning it. This can be seen in the Olympic Charter, where nations are alluded to many times when discussing National Olympic Committees, but are never defined (International Olympic Committee, 2013). The

reader is assumed to already have the knowledge of what constitutes as a nation. With so many individuals watching the Olympics and discussing them on social media, it can be presumed that, like the International Olympic Committee, these individuals are taking the concept of the nation for granted. However, the obvious aspects of nationalism must be questioned in order for the concept to be seen as a valid ideology which affects members of society (Billig, 1995). By questioning nationalism in the context of the Olympics, we may be able to see how nationalism is reproduced, as well as whether or not the concept is at all challenged and re-defined by individuals.

Canadian nationalism is particularly interesting to look at, for Canada is an established country, and as such, we do not often question the concept of the nation. We do not distance ourselves from what we accept as natural, and instead take Canada as a nation for granted. Also, Canada is considered to be a multicultural country. It is significant to look at the role, and the complexities of nationalism in a country which is said to value the “other”, when the idea of nationalism itself is said to value “us”. This discussion evokes the question: do Canadians use nationalism to include or exclude? In order to better understand this part of ourselves, we must take a step back and acknowledge that nations as a concept are not “natural”, rather that there are processes of reproduction which have to happen in order for a nation to continue to exist (Billig, 1995).

It is interesting to look at nationalism in the context of social media, for these websites connect individuals globally. If social media aides in connecting individuals around the world, this raises the question: how does social media aide in connecting individuals within a nation? Looking at nationalism on Twitter may aide in answering this question and determine how nationalism fits into the equation in a globalized world.

## Theory

In its most basic form, nationalism is a political principle which holds that the political and national unit should be congruent (Gellner, 1983). However, on a daily basis, nationalism can be seen as ideological habits which reproduce established nations (Billig, 1995). Ideological habits can be defined as a system of ideas which are accustom to us. For example, on any given day, a newscaster may refer to the viewer as a member of the nation. This is likely not to stand out, and the viewer is likely accept this idea and continue watching, rather than to linger over whether or not they are, indeed, a member of the aforementioned nation. The concept of the nation can therefore be seen as being reproduced by daily habits such as this. Reproduction is important when discussing these ideological habits, for nationalism suggests that there are already ties between members of a nation, but instead, these ties are forged when collectively thinking that these ties are already existent (Billig, 1995). Michael Billig's discussion of banal nationalism argues that banal does not imply 'benign', but is in fact an important mechanism through which the nation is "created" or "constructed" in everyday life (Billig, 1995). The nation is not a historic fact, but is instead a political project that is sustained by people's internalization of it in everyday life (Billig, 1995).

Banal nationalism works on the belief that in established nations, there is a constant flagging of nationhood (Billig, 1995). Not only are nations collectively remembered through this flagging, but there is also collective forgetting which goes along with banal nationalism (Billig, 1995).

While watching the Olympics, for example, members of a nation may collectively remember their nationhood when viewing a Canadian athlete win a gold medal, but they simultaneously may forget that not every member of their nation is watching this happen, as they may have to go

to work, may speak very little English, or may have dual citizenship, which may complicate how they view Olympic events (Skey, 2009).

Theories of nationalism are broken into two schools of thought; primordialism and constructivism (Vörös, 2006). Primordialists believe that nationalism has existed since the beginning of the formation of a nation (Vörös, 2006). They see the nation as a historical fact, as something that exists by virtue of the ethnic ties between people (Vörös, 2006). Constructivists take both nations and ethnicity as phenomena that are born as a result of people starting to think of themselves as members of a nation or ethnicity (Vörös, 2006). They see nations as being a result of ongoing processes of reproduction (Vörös, 2006). In this sense, the nation is seen as a social construct.

Banal nationalism therefore falls under the constructivist school of thought, for the theory works under the belief that the nation has not existed since the beginning of time, and instead is collectively reproduced on a daily basis (Vörös, 2006; Billig, 1995). Billig does not assume that the nation is an objective reality, but instead looks at the idea of the nation in a more critical sense (Billig, 1995).

This thesis will use Billig's discussion of banal nationalism in order to think critically about the very idea of the nation and nationalism. By adopting a constructivist perspective while looking at these concepts, I may be able to better see how the processes which reproduce nationalism operate, and in turn answer my research question.

## **Method**

The project consists of a content analysis of Twitter use during the Sochi 2014 Olympics. The corpus of tweets I will select will be taken from the three hashtags used the most in Canada

during the Sochi Olympics. The hashtags are: #Sochi2014, #WeAreWinter and #GoCanadaGo. These were determined by using the website Treninalia (2014). On this website, you can search any date and country, and receive a list of the hashtags which were trending on Twitter for that day. The website even gives the time in which the hashtag started trending. For the seventeen days of the Olympics, I went through and took a tally of which hashtags having to do with the Sochi Olympics were trending in Canada. I tallied these all up and found the mean number of hashtags used, selecting the top three to use for my thesis.

I will search the hashtags in the 'advanced search' function of Twitter. In this search function, you are able to see tweets which were published on specific dates, such as February 7-23, 2014, the duration of the Sochi Olympics. This search function is useful to me as a researcher, for tweets published a few months ago are not accessible using the standard search function on Twitter.

The search function gives the option of searching for the most popular tweets, or all the tweets under a certain hashtag during a set number of dates. I will likely be selecting that the search function retrieves all tweets using the predetermined hashtag, as this will likely give a better, more random set of data to work with. From there, I will transfer the tweets to a document where I will perform a content analysis on them in order to determine whether or not a tweet can be classified as a reproduction of nationalism. I will search for the use of plural pronouns such as “us” and “them”, as well as words and phrases which relate to Canadian identity, and words and phrases which suggest the presence of an “imagined community” (Anderson, 1983).

Due to the sheer number of tweets which were likely tweeted using these three hashtags, I will not perform a content analysis on every tweet, but instead will determine an appropriate sample

size once I have determined the scale of tweets which have been tweeted during the specific timeframe of the Sochi Olympics. For example, if I determine there are thousands of tweets, I will perform a content analysis on every hundredth, or two hundredth tweet. I will use the same approach for each of the three hashtags.

## Outline of Thesis

### Introduction

- Introduce research question and its significance (why is it important to study everyday reproductions of nationalism?)
- Outline thesis
- Introduce key concepts and define them
- Introduce the case: Twitter use during the Olympics
  - Brief introduction of the case and Twitter use during the Olympics
  - The hashtags that will be used to collect data and why
  - The time frame for the data (what dates will you use to search for hashtags, how will you search and save the tweets?)
  - Preliminary method of analysis: what specific linguistic features will you look for in analyzing the tweets?

### Theory/Literature Review

- Describe main concepts used in thesis
  - Nationalism
    - Two theories of nationalism: primordial and constructivist, starting with primordial.
  - Nations
  - National identity
- Draw on Banal Nationalism
  - Idea of reproduction
  - Banal aspects of nationalism
- Draw on texts which look at Banal Nationalism and media or special events
- Draw on Michael Skey's look at Banal Nationalism

## Methodology

- Explain what I've done to determine the hashtags used
- Explain why I've selected the time frame I have
- Explain the significance of the Olympics to the reproduction of nationalism
- Explain the significance of Twitter
  - Good environment, certain users, reconcile Billig's notion of banal nationalism in the context of a special event (remains unconscious, follows the same routine, however people may be more prompted to tweet about nationalism/Canada).
- Limitations: Don't know how accurate website is, don't know if Twitter has retrieved all the tweets which include these hashtags, some citizens have privacy settings which keeps those who don't follow them from seeing their tweets, etc.

## Data Analysis

- Describe what I was looking for when categorizing a tweet as reproducing nationalism
- Describe what has been seen

## Discussion/Conclusion

- Describe the importance of what has been seen
- Sum up what has been done in this research project

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