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The Geographical Codes of Nationalism: The Mutual Construction of National Identity and Space

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Abstract: The relationship between nationalism and geography plays a critical role in analyzing the spatial foundations of nation-state imaginaries. National identities are not confined to political discourses but are profoundly shaped by geographic practices such as the demarcation of borders, narratives of sacred territories, and the construction of symbolic spaces. While nationalist ideologies instrumentalize geography, geographic elements simultaneously reinforce myths that sustain a sense of national belonging. This reciprocal interaction reveals how collective memory is encoded and reproduced through space. Existing literature on the geographic underpinnings of nationalism has largely remained confined to theoretical debates, with insufficient attention to how discourses and practices intertwine through concrete examples. Aiming to address this gap, this study investigates the strategies through which nationalist discourses naturalize space and the active role of geography in constructing national identity, adopting a comparative perspective. Within this framework, cases selected from diverse geographic and cultural contexts are analyzed through an interdisciplinary lens. The research employs qualitative methods, focusing on case studies from Türkiye, Israel-Palestine, and Hungary. Discourse analysis of official documents and political texts deciphers the spatial representations embedded in nationalist ideologies, while visual geography methods—examining maps, monuments, and symbolic landscapes—expose how these representations resonate within societal perceptions. For instance, border policies emphasizing territorial integrity or historical monuments rendering collective identity visible exemplify the politicized instrumentalization of geography. The study seeks to build an interdisciplinary bridge between critical geography and nationalism studies. Central to this dialogue is the dynamic interplay through which nationalist discourses both produce and derive legitimacy from geography. The transformation of sacred territorial narratives into spatial practices or the use of symbolic spaces as tools of political legitimacy underscores the constructed nature of national identity. These findings demonstrate that space is not a static backdrop but an active component of political struggle. Within the context of globalization and border politics, the transformation of nationalist geographies constitutes a significant area of inquiry. Contemporary examples, such as nation-states' border security policies or historical territorial claims, illustrate how geography is reinterpreted through nationalist imaginaries. This analysis reveals how nationalism's spatial strategies are shaped by both local and global political dynamics. By doing so, the study contributes innovative theoretical and practical insights to the literature, advancing our understanding of the interplay between space, power, and identity in a globalized world.

1. Introduction

The relationship between nationalism and geography constitutes an interdisciplinary field of inquiry that interrogates the epistemological foundations of nation-states' spatial imaginaries. The construction of national identity is shaped not merely by political discourse but also through dynamics such as the geopolitical encoding of borders, the aesthetic and

symbolic (mottopoetic) construction of sacred spaces, and the performative role of symbolic geographies (Smith, 1991). In this process, geography becomes not merely a passive backdrop but a dialectical component that determines the ontology of national belonging (Anderson, 2020). The physical delineation of borders functions less as a political act than as a topographical representation of collective memory, reproducing the national ‘self’ and ‘other’ dichotomy (Paasi, 2003).

This dialectical relationship between geography and national identity extends beyond borders. The construction of sacred spaces materializes national discursive motifs through the spatial inscription of historical narratives (Bilgili and Kocalar, 2023). In this context, monuments and symbolic structures function as ideological tools in the transference of the past into the present, reinforcing the legitimacy of political power at a spatial scale (Azaryahu, 1996,). As Harvey (2002) emphasizes, these practices—developing in parallel with the commodification of space—reveal how nationalism instrumentalizes geography both as a resource and a target. This illustrates how the spatial strategies of nation-states serve the reproduction of power through the manipulation of collective memory.

In the literature, studies on the geographical foundations of nationalism have often remained confined to perspectives from international relations and political science. The sociocultural and symbolic dimensions of space have not been sufficiently explored (Penrose, 2011). Notably, the strategies through which nationalist discourses ‘naturalize’ space deserve attention. The reciprocity between these strategies and the ways in which geographical elements shape national identity lacks a holistic theoretical framework (Kaiser, 2003). This deficiency complicates the understanding of how nationalist practices vary across different geographical contexts and interact with global politics (Agnew, 2017). Therefore, this study seeks to fill the gap in the literature by addressing the political articulation of space through a dialogical relationship between micro and macro scales.

This research, adopting a qualitative methodological framework, aims to examine the local and global dynamics of nationalist geographies through a comparative perspective by focusing on the cases of Türkiye, Israel-Palestine, and Hungary. Although these three cases represent historically distinct experiences of nationalism, they have been selected for their use of similar ideological tools in constructing national identity through geography. Discourse analysis of official documents reveals the rhetorical strategies through which states legitimize their spatial representations (Wodak, 2009). The visual geography method, through the analysis of maps and monuments, illustrates how these representations are internalized in everyday practices (Rose, 2022). The architectural symbolism of Anıtkabir in Türkiye, the intersection of religious and national identity at the Western Wall in Israel, and the role of Heroes' Square in Hungary in reproducing historical myths all expose the multilayered ideological codes of geography.

The theoretical contribution of the study lies in establishing a new dialogue between critical geography and nationalism studies. It aims to demonstrate that nationalist discourses not only reproduce space but also emerge from it, within a paradoxical dynamic. For instance, the transformation of sacred land narratives into cross-border claims—as seen in Israel’s discourse of the “promised land”—or the circulation of historical traumas through spatial monuments—such as Hungary’s myth of the Treaty of Trianon—reflect the performative and mutable nature of national identity (Massey, 2005). These findings support the thesis that space is not merely the stage for political struggle but also a producer of that very struggle itself (Lefebvre, 1991).

In the age of globalization, the transformation of nationalist geographies is of critical importance for understanding how the spatial imaginaries of nation-states are reshaped by

neoliberal policies and anti-immigration discourses. The construction of a security wall along Türkiye's border with Syria or Hungary's anti-refugee border policies are concrete manifestations of how geography is re-coded through nationalist ideologies (Toal, 2016). These policies reinforce not only physical but also symbolic boundaries, redefining national identity through the lens of perceived 'threats' (Skey, 2011). Within this framework, the study aims to contribute a novel perspective to the literature by analyzing how the spatial strategies of nationalism mediate the tensions between global capitalism and local identity politics.

2. The Dialectic of Nationalism and Geography: A Theoretical Framework

The reciprocal construction process between nationalism and geography is examined through theoretical foundations in the context of spatial representations and their impact on national identity construction. Accordingly, central debates in the literature are evaluated to establish the conceptual framework of this research.

2.1. Spatial construction in nation-state imaginaries

Ulus-devlet The spatial foundations of nation-state imaginaries are shaped by the political reproduction of geography. Benedict Anderson's (2020) concept of "imagined communities" gains meaning through the materialization of national identity via maps, borders, and sacred spaces (Balcı and Yıldırım, 2023). The example of Türkiye's Misak-ı Milli borders or Israel's myth of the "promised land" illustrates how geography becomes an ontological component of national belonging. These practices demonstrate that space functions not only as a physical entity but also as a symbolic boundary (Paasi, 2003). Anthony D. Smith (1991) emphasizes that national identity cannot exist without "myths of the land," drawing attention to geography's role in encoding collective memory.

Borders are the most apparent geographic representations of nation-state imaginaries. However, they function not only as political demarcations but also as symbolic tools that reproduce the national 'us' versus 'them' dichotomy. Michael Billig's (2017) concept of "banal nationalism" explains how borders are naturalized through daily practices. For instance, the continual emphasis on territories lost by Hungary after the Treaty of Trianon exemplifies how historical trauma is transformed into a spatial memory device (Newman, 2006). In this sense, borders emerge as dynamic elements that both define national identity and continually remind of its perceived vulnerability.

Sacred land narratives most intensely reflect the dialectical relationship between space and national identity. Azaryahu (1996) analyzes how the sacredness of Jerusalem for both Israeli and Palestinian nationalisms renders space a weapon in political conflicts. Similarly, the sacralization of Anıtkabir in Türkiye with a secular aura embodies national heroism myths in a spatial sanctuary (Çınar, 2001). These practices reveal how geography is woven not only with political, but also religious and cultural codes (Özey Bilgili and Kocalar, 2018).

The construction of symbolic spaces serves as a tool to make the legitimacy of nation-states visible. David Harvey (2002, p. 136) discusses how monuments and public spaces adopt ideological functions in the process of spatial commodification. The statues at Heroes' Square in Hungary transform historical figures into a narrative of national heroism, establishing a link between current power and the past (Foote, 2003). Such spaces not only recall the past but also impose a national vision of the future.

In the era of globalization, spatial imaginaries of nation-states are being reshaped by neoliberal policies and anti-immigration discourses. Gearóid Ó Tuathail (1996, p. 164) analyzes how border security policies serve as instruments of identity formation through the concept of "geopolitical imagination." The wall constructed by Türkiye along the Syrian border or Hungary's anti-refugee wire fences exemplify how geography is being re-coded by nationalist

ideologies (Toal, 2016). These policies reinforce not only physical but also symbolic borders, redefining national identity through a perception of fragility and threat (Skey, 2011).

2.2. Symbolic spaces and the geography of collective memory

Sembolik Symbolic spaces are critical geographic nodes where national identity is encoded into collective memory and the legitimacy of political power is made visible. Pierre Nora's (1989) concept of *lieux de mémoire* explains how such spaces shape national consciousness by carrying the past into the present. In Israel, the Western Wall functions both as a religious symbol and a representation of Zionist nationalism, revealing the multilayered ideological codes of space (Benvenisti, 1996). Similarly, the Çanakkale Martyrs' Memorial in Türkiye fixes a historical victory as a national motif on a spatial scale (Özyürek, 2004). These practices demonstrate that symbolic spaces do not merely recall the past but also impose a vision of the future.

The spatialization of collective memory represents a process that enables the continuous reproduction of national identity. Maurice Halbwachs (2020) emphasizes that memory is confined by social frameworks, and space concretizes these frameworks. The statues of the Árpád Dynasty at Hungary's Heroes' Square transform historical figures into a narrative of national heroism, linking them with the current political discourse (Gyáni, 2013). These sites function as arenas where the past is selectively rewritten and the legitimacy of power is visualized. In contrast, Nakba monuments in Palestine keep alive the memory of loss and resistance under occupation, constructing an alternative national imaginary (Said, 2000).

The performative power of symbolic spaces is reinforced through social rituals and public ceremonies. Paul Connerton (1989) analyzes how bodily practices and repetitive performances materialize memory. Visits to Anıtkabir during November 10 commemorations in Türkiye or Holocaust remembrance ceremonies on Yom HaShoah in Israel reproduce national identity through collective ritual (Handelman, 1998). These practices reveal the dialectical relationship between space and time and the emotional dimension of national belonging. However, when symbolic spaces are monopolized by power, they may exclude critical memory practices. Michel Foucault and Miskowiec's (1986) concept of heterotopia explains how such spaces function as "other" realms controlled by power. In parallel, Hungary's Museum of Communism represents the socialist era as an "other," reinforcing the official historical narrative on a spatial scale (Rev, 2005). Likewise, the renaming of Istanbul's Bosphorus Bridge as the "July 15 Martyrs' Bridge" turns the memory of the coup attempt into a political instrument (Hammond, 2020). These examples demonstrate that symbolic spaces are not only unifying but also exclusionary.

Globalization and digitalization are transforming the function of symbolic spaces. Arjun Appadurai's (1996) concept of "spatial production" discusses how virtual monuments and digital memory platforms either complement or displace traditional spaces. The #SaveSheikhJarrah campaign, which spread through social media, has turned into a digital memory struggle against the occupation of physical space in Palestine (Tawil-Souri, 2021). These examples show that space is now a site of struggle that is physical, digital, and symbolic at once.

2.3. Gaps in the literature and the need for an interdisciplinary approach

Milliyetçilik The existing literature on the relationship between nationalism and geography often remains confined within disciplinary boundaries, approaching the subject in a fragmented manner. While political science and international relations tend to examine nationalism primarily as a state-centered phenomenon (Gellner, 2015), the discipline of geography has struggled to fully integrate the dialectics between the physical and symbolic

dimensions of space (Agnew, 2017). Although Benedict Anderson's (2020) notion of "imagined communities" underscores the role of maps in constructing national identity, it insufficiently engages with the concrete interaction between visual and discursive practices in this process. This shortcoming necessitates an interdisciplinary perspective that bridges critical geography, cultural studies, and social anthropology to better understand the spatial strategies of nationalism (Penrose, 2011).

Another deficiency in the literature is the inadequate theorization of the connection between micro and macro scales. While state border policies are typically analyzed through macro-political dynamics, their spatial implications in everyday life—such as identity performances in border villages—have often been neglected (Jones, 2009). Overcoming this gap requires ethnographic and visual geography methods that reveal how nationalist practices intertwine across both state and street levels (Rose, 2022). The concept of "spatial storytelling" in cultural geography offers a critical tool for analyzing the tensions between official discourse and popular memory (Tuan, 1977).

A further issue in the literature is the limited theorization of how nationalist geographies are transformed in global contexts. Postcolonial theories have often approached non-Western spatial practices of nationalism from a marginalized perspective (Said, 2000), neglecting how these practices articulate with neoliberal globalization. Examples such as the linkage of Türkiye's urban transformation projects with national identity (Hammond, 2020) or the intersection of India's "Smart Cities" initiative with Hindu nationalism (Ghertner, 2015) illustrate the complexity of these dynamics. Saskia Sassen's (2008) concept of the "global city" provides a critical framework to understand how nationalist geographies are reshaped by neoliberal policies.

The significance of an interdisciplinary approach also lies in its methodological plurality. While discourse analysis deciphers the ideological codes embedded in state texts (Wodak, 2009), visual geography reveals how monuments and public art resonate within societal perceptions (Azaryahu, 1996). The architectural design of Israel's Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum demonstrates how historical trauma and Zionist legitimacy are spatially intertwined (Charlesworth, 2017). Such studies transcend the limits of single-disciplinary approaches, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of the spatial practices of nationalism.

Normative assumptions in the literature often hinder a critical interrogation of nationalist geographies. The concept of "sacred land" is frequently accepted as a given reality, without sufficiently analyzing how it is constructed and by whom it is claimed (Benvenisti, 1996). This gap can be addressed through the integration of feminist geography and poststructuralist approaches into nationalism studies. Doreen Massey's (2005) concept of "progressive sense of place" emphasizes the multiple and contested meanings of space, offering a lens to challenge the totalizing narratives of nationalist geographies.

2.4. Methodological perspective: the need for comparative case studies and visual geography approaches

This study adopts a qualitative methodology to analyze the relationship between nationalism and geography from an interdisciplinary perspective. The cases of Türkiye, Israel-Palestine, and Hungary were selected due to their use of similar ideological tools in constructing national identity through geography, despite differing historical experiences of nationalism (Brubaker, 1996). The divergence between secular nationalism in Türkiye and religious nationalism in Israel highlights how geographical practices vary (Öktem, 2011), while Hungary's revisionist historical narratives illustrate the spatial representations of lost territory myths (Kovács, 2016). This comparative approach offers a critical framework for understanding both the universal and localized dynamics of nationalist geographies.

The first phase of the research involves discourse analysis of official documents and political texts. Ruth Wodak's (2009) historical discourse analysis method is employed to decode the discursive strategies through which states legitimize national identity narratives. Emphases such as the "indivisible unity of the nation" in Türkiye's 1982 Constitution, the definition of Israel as a "Jewish state" in its Basic Laws, and Hungary's reference to "Historical Constitutional Identity" in its 2011 Constitution exemplify how nationalist discourses are codified within legal texts (Calliess and Van der Schyff, 2020). This analysis reveals how state discourses shape spatial imaginaries.

The second phase utilizes visual geography methods to analyze the ideological codes of maps, monuments, and symbolic spaces. Gillian Rose's (2022) "critical visual methodology" is employed to understand how these spaces are perceived socially. The dual function of the Western Wall in Israel as both a religious and political symbol, the association of Anıtkabir's modernist architecture with secular nationalism in Türkiye, and the reproduction of historical myths through Turul statues in Hungary all demonstrate the multilayered ideological function of geography (Azaryahu, 1996; Çınar, 2001). These practices reveal that space is not merely a physical entity but an active component in the political instrumentalization of collective unconscious.

Comparative case studies require the systematic correlation of findings from these methods. Charles Tilly's (1984) model of structural comparison is applied to identify the similarities and differences of nationalist practices across contexts. The impact of border security policies on foreign identity in Türkiye, the fragmentation of Palestinian geography through Israeli settler expansion in the West Bank, and the tension generated by Hungary's protective policies toward ethnic Hungarians in neighboring countries all exemplify the global-local interaction of nationalism's spatial strategies (Newman, 2006; Toal, 2016). This analytical framework enables an understanding of how states transform geography into an instrument of both domestic and foreign policy power.

The limitations of this methodology relate particularly to the subjectivity in interpreting visual materials and the accessibility of official documents. The classified nature of some military maps in Israel or the destruction of monuments from the communist era in Hungary may complicate data collection (Foote, 2003). Nevertheless, these limitations are mitigated through alternative readings of oral histories and archival documents (Portelli, 2010). Furthermore, the interdisciplinary approach enhances analytical depth by breaking the constraints of single-method studies. For example, the combination of discourse analysis and visual geography provides an effective tool to uncover how state rhetoric converges or clashes with societal practices (Rose, 2022).

3. A Comparative Analysis of Nationalist Geographies: The Cases of Türkiye, Israel-Palestine, and Hungary

This section of the study adopts a comparative perspective to explore how nationalist geographies take shape in different contexts. Each subheading links case studies to the theoretical framework, examining the interplay between national identity, spatial practices, and global dynamics.

3.1. Türkiye: secular nationalism and the transformation of spatial imaginaries

The spatial construction of national identity in Türkiye has been shaped as a project of secular modernity since the foundation of the Republic. The construction of Anıtkabir, with its modernist architecture and secular nationalist discourse, materialized national memory on a spatial scale (Bozdoğan, 2001). This monument, positioning Atatürk as the founder of the nation, illustrates how the ideology of the Republic was inscribed into space. In the current era,

urban transformation projects are redefining the secular imaginary through a conservative aesthetic. The massive dome of the Çamlıca Mosque has become a religious and national symbol on Istanbul's skyline (Batuman, 2017), while the reconstruction of the Artillery Barracks in Taksim Square reflects a "New Türkiye" vision rooted in Ottoman heritage (Öktem, 2018).

In the context of terrorism, border policies reveal how space is utilized as a political tool. The urban conflicts in Sur, Cizre, and Nusaybin during 2015–2016 have led to the reconstruction of these areas as "secured" geographies (Gambetti and Jongerden, 2015). This process reflects the state's strategy to emphasize national unity in border regions while reinforcing symbolic control over urban space (Hammond, 2020).

National holidays and commemorative ceremonies play a critical role in the performative reproduction of collective memory. November 10 ceremonies continue to reinforce Anıtkabir's connection with secular nationalism (Navaro-Yashin, 2002), while post-July 15 renamings, such as "Democracy and Martyrs' Square," spatialize a new national discursive motif (Yoltay, 2024). These practices demonstrate the dynamic use of space as a means of political legitimacy.

Digital nationalism extends spatial imaginaries into the virtual realm. Social media content shared under the hashtag #SiberVatan ("Cyber Homeland") reproduces digital representations of national borders, reinforcing a sense of belonging among younger generations (Tan and Armutcu, 2020). State-sponsored documentaries with conquest-themed narratives reinterpret the historical codes of space by fusing Ottoman heritage with modern nationalism (Ergin and Karakaya, 2017).

Neoliberal urbanization policies make nationalist-conservative identity visibly present on a spatial scale. Housing projects by TOKİ integrate conservative family values into architectural design (Batuman, 2017), while projects like the Istanbul Financial Center combine a global vision with "local and national" economic discourse (Özışık, 2023). This transformation illustrates how space is adapted to the shifting ideological priorities of political power and how national identity is articulated within global capitalism açıklamaktadır.

3.2. Israel-palestine: the sacred land narrative and the geography of conflict

The foundational narrative of "promised land" in Zionist nationalism functions as a discourse that interweaves the religious and political codes of geography. Benny Morris (2008) highlights that the 1948 Nakba ("Catastrophe"), which entailed the systematic expulsion of Palestinians from their lands, constituted the spatial basis of Israel's founding myth. Settlement policies in the West Bank continue to physically and symbolically fragment Palestinian geography as a contemporary expression of this myth (Buttu, 2007). The declaration of Jerusalem as Israel's "undivided capital" exemplifies the use of sacred spaces as political instruments (Azaryahu, 2020).

The Western Wall and Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem represent the intersection of religious and national identity. Nadia Abu El-Haj (2001) analyzes how Israeli archaeological excavations aim to render Jewish history physically visible, simultaneously erasing the Ottoman and Islamic heritage of Palestinians. These practices show that space is not merely an object of faith but also a battleground of power. Kurt (2020) describes this process as the forced inscription of history onto geography, noting how both sides instrumentalize maps and monuments to legitimize historical claims.

Palestinian resistance constructs an alternative spatial imaginary under occupation. Giant Palestinian flags painted on the West Bank separation wall transform into performances of identity that transcend physical borders (Peteet, 2005), while Nakba monuments keep alive the memory of loss and resistance (Said, 2000). Türkiye's support for restoration projects at Al-

Aqsa Mosque through TİKA serves as a symbolic diplomatic gesture in this conflict (Köse, 2021).

Digital activism extends the spatial struggle of Palestinian resistance into virtual space. The #SaveSheikhJarrah campaign in 2021 raised global awareness through social media, highlighting Israel's displacement policies (Tawil-Souri, 2022). These digital geographies transcend physical spatial limits, capturing the attention of the international community.

3.3. Hungary: historical revisionism and the lost territories motto

Hungarian nationalism is fundamentally rooted in the collective trauma following the Treaty of Trianon (1920). The treaty led to the loss of 72% of Hungary's historical territory, necessitating the construction of national identity through a notion of geographical incompleteness (Sakmyster, 2004). This trauma has been reanimated by the Fidesz government under Viktor Orbán through the motto of "Greater Hungary," aiming for the symbolic restoration of lost lands via maps and monuments (Feischmidt, 2020). For instance, the preamble of the 2011 constitution emphasizes the historical unity of the Hungarian nation, embedding revisionist narratives into legal texts (Vardy, 1997).

Turul statues and symbols of the Árpád Dynasty constitute spatial manifestations of this revisionist discourse. The Turul—a mythological falcon—represents a legend that traces the origin of the Hungarian people to Attila the Hun, thus constructing a prehistoric identity (Varga, 2016). The statues of the Árpád Dynasty at Heroes' Square in Budapest visualize the glory of the medieval Hungarian Kingdom while reflecting the desire to compensate for post-Trianon losses (Székely, 2019). These monuments reinforce the legitimacy of the current regime through a selective rewriting of the past.

The Fidesz government's policies of protecting ethnic Hungarians extend beyond national borders. The Citizenship Act of 2010, which grants easy citizenship to ethnic Hungarians in neighboring countries, transforms the Greater Hungary vision into a demographic project (Waterbury, 2006). The use of Hungarian signage in areas like Székely Land in Romania or Hungarian minority regions in Slovakia reinforces the symbolic claim that these territories belong to Hungary (Oláh, 2015).

Urban space transformation serves as another vehicle for historical revisionism. Budapest's Memorial Park displays statues from the communist era in an open-air museum, "othering" the socialist past (Rev, 2005), while the restoration of the Széchenyi Chain Bridge reinterprets Habsburg heritage through a nationalist aesthetic (László, 2021). These practices manipulate the historical and political codes of space, reducing national identity to a totalizing narrative.

Digital nationalism extends this discourse into the virtual realm. The "Trianon 100" digital mapping project visualizes lost territories on an interactive platform, aiming to instill a revisionist historical consciousness in younger generations (Ablonczy, 2020). Additionally, social media content shared under the hashtag #NemzetiÖsszetartozás (National Belonging) fosters a sense of cross-border ethnic unity among Hungarians (Oláh, 2015).

3.4. Commonalities and differences through visual geography

Visual materials play a critical role in the construction of nationalist geographies, concretizing spatial representations of national identity. Türkiye's Misak-ı Milli maps, Israel's cartographic depictions of the "promised land," and Hungary's revisionist maps of Greater Hungary all reveal that borders are not merely political constructs, but symbolic imaginaries as well (Harley, 2002). These maps legitimize historical claims while integrating national identity with geographical belonging. For instance, Misak-ı Milli maps used in Turkish textbooks

reinforce territorial integrity by encoding Anatolia as the unquestionable homeland of Turks (Üngör, 2012). Similarly, Hungarian maps highlighting post-Trianon lost territories in red visually narrate collective trauma (Feischmidt, 2020).

Monumental architecture demonstrates how nationalist ideologies intertwine with aesthetics. Anıtkabir's modernist design in Türkiye emphasizes secular nationalism (Bozdoğan, 2001); Hungary's Turul statues evoke mythological origins to construct a prehistoric national identity (Varga, 2016); Israel's Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum reinforces Zionist legitimacy through a trauma aesthetic (Charlesworth, 2017). These examples reveal that monuments not only commemorate the past but also project a political vision for the future.

The public use of symbolic spaces reflects the strategies through which nationalist practices infiltrate daily life. The Western Wall in Israel serves as a confluence of religious ceremonies and political celebrations (Azaryahu, 1996); Türkiye's July 15 Martyrs' Bridge preserves the spatial memory of the coup attempt (Hammond, 2020); and Hungary's Heroes' Square hosts mass rituals during national holidays (Székely, 2019). These sites exemplify the performative power of space.

The digital transformation of visual geography expands nationalist discourses globally. Maps shared under Türkiye's #SiberVatan hashtag cultivate a sense of digital belonging among younger generations (Tan and Armutcu, 2020); Hungary's "Trianon 100" project revives lost territories in the virtual realm (Ablonczy, 2020); and Israel's labeling of Palestinian villages as "terrorist hubs" on social media illustrates how geography becomes a digital battlefield (Tawil-Souri, 2022).

Commonalities and differences: all three cases instrumentalize maps and monuments to naturalize national identity. Türkiye emphasizes a secular aesthetic, Hungary draws on mythological origins, and Israel is grounded in religious codes. In all cases, digitalization globalizes nationalist geographies.

3.5. The evolution of nationalist geographies in the context of globalization

The Evolution of Nationalist Geographies in the Context of Globalization repositions and transforms nationalist geographies between local and global dynamics. Neoliberal urbanization policies generate hybrid spaces that merge nationalist architecture with global capital. In Türkiye, the Istanbul Financial Center blends "local and national" economic discourse with the vision of an international financial hub (Enlil, 2011); Hungary's Central European Cultural Forum in Budapest integrates historical revisionism into the global cultural industry (Barlas, 2023, p. 186); and Israel's Smart City projects in Tel Aviv combine technological superiority with a Zionist modernity narrative (Yacobi, 2019). These projects reveal how nationalism reconciles with neoliberal globalization.

Anti-immigration discourses redefine nationalist geographies through border policies. The fences Hungary built along the Serbian border materialize a Christian European identity (Elçi, 2022); Türkiye's policy of confining Syrian refugees in border camps legitimizes national border protection rhetoric (Şahin-Mencütek et al., 2023); Israel's security barrier around Gaza, enhanced by physical and digital surveillance technologies, reduces geography to a zone of control (Weizman, 2024).

Digital nationalism reproduces spatial imaginaries in virtual spaces. In Türkiye, maps shared under the #SiberVatan hashtag nurture digital belonging among youth (Ercan, 2024); Hungary's "Trianon 100" interactive map reanimates lost territories online (Ablonczy, 2020); and Israel's labeling of Palestinian villages as "terrorist nests" on social media exemplifies geography's transformation into a digital arena (Tawil-Souri, 2022). These practices demonstrate that national identity is increasingly defined by virtual as well as physical borders.

Commonalities and paradoxes: all three cases blend global capital and technology with nationalist discourse. Globalization, through digital tools, simultaneously strengthens and undermines nationalist geographies via transnational flows. While Hungary and Türkiye emphasize historical revisionism, Israel draws upon a sacred religious narrative.

4. Conclusion

The relationship between nationalism and geography requires an interdisciplinary perspective to understand the spatial foundations of nation-state imaginaries. This study, by comparing the cases of Türkiye, Israel-Palestine, and Hungary, aims to reveal how nationalist ideologies instrumentalize geographical elements and interact with global dynamics. Although the strategy of presenting space as a natural national heritage is a universal tendency, it is differentiated by local contexts. The Misak-ı Milli maps shaped by secular modernist aesthetics in Türkiye, the “promised land” narrative legitimized by sacred texts in Israel, and the revisionist maps reproducing the collective trauma of the Treaty of Trianon in Hungary all demonstrate the role of geography in solidifying national identity. These practices support Anthony D. Smith’s (1991) concept of “ethno-symbolism” while also exposing the contextual variability of space.

The active use of geography as a political tool shows that nationalist practices are intertwined not only with physical borders but also with symbolic imaginaries. Israel’s settlement policies in the West Bank aim not only to control land but also to erase Palestinian spatial memory (Weizman, 2024); Türkiye’s urban transformation projects fuse Ottoman heritage with conservative nationalism, reinforcing the legitimacy of power; and Hungary’s Turul statues and Heroes’ Square evoke mythological origins to create an illusion of historical continuity. These findings support Doreen Massey’s (2005) thesis on the “multiple meanings” of space but also highlight how nationalist practices reduce this multiplicity into a totalizing narrative.

Globalization and digitalization both transform and reproduce nationalist geographies. Neoliberal urbanization policies, as seen in projects like the Istanbul Financial Center, integrate “local and national” discourse with global capital, while Hungary’s citizenship policies for ethnic Hungarians construct a cross-border demographic imaginary. In the digital sphere, campaigns such as #SaveSheikhJarrah transcend the limits of physical space, turning resistance into a global struggle. This offers insight into how Arjun Appadurai’s (1996) concept of “global cultural flows” can be integrated into nationalism studies. However, this transformation also reveals the paradoxical relationship that nationalist discourses construct between the local and the global.

Although limited to three cases, this study lays important groundwork for future research. Investigating nationalist geographies in Latin America or Asia may allow for testing universal claims. Furthermore, ethnographic analyses of algorithmically produced nationalist discourses on digital platforms or the intersection of gender with spatial practices can help fill gaps in the literature.

Theoretically, this research fosters an interdisciplinary dialogue between critical geography and nationalism studies. The argument that space is not merely the stage of political struggle but also an active component of it necessitates a rethinking of the relationship between power and space. In practice, the study offers an analytical framework for policymakers, from border strategies to urban transformation policies.

Nationalist geographies function both as tools and targets in nation-states’ quests for legitimacy. Understanding how these dynamics are shaped in the global context is critical to deciphering the dialectic between space and power.

The relationship between nationalism and geography emerges as a dynamic process at the core of nation-states' legitimacy strategies. This study, through a comparative perspective, has examined how geographical elements are instrumentalized through borders, sacred spaces, and symbolic monuments, and how these practices manifest in different contexts. Universally, nationalist discourses tend to present space as natural heritage, yet this process is shaped by local historical, cultural, and political conditions (Yıldırım and Bilgili, 2024). Practices ranging from secular modernist aesthetics to religious-sacred narratives, and from mythological origins to revisionist historiography, reveal the flexibility and multilayered nature of national identity's spatial foundations.

The active use of geography as a political tool entails more than physical control—it also fulfills deep ideological functions such as manipulating collective memory, legitimizing power, and guiding social perception. Globalization and digitalization both transform and complicate this process. The articulation of neoliberal policies with nationalist discourses reconciles national identity with global capital, while digital platforms elevate struggles over resistance and domination to a transnational scale. This reveals the paradoxical relationship nationalism establishes between the local and the global—simultaneously reinforcing national belonging and undermining it through transnational dynamics.

Future research may proceed along three main axes. First, studying nationalist practices in different geographies such as Latin America, Africa, or Asia could help test universal claims and elucidate contextual diversity. Second, ethnographic analysis of algorithmically generated nationalist discourse on digital platforms could provide deeper insight into the interaction between technology and national identity formation. Third, intersectional categories such as gender, ethnicity, and class—when examined through the lens of spatial practices and feminist geography—could add a new dimension to the literature.

This study emphasizes the necessity of an interdisciplinary approach to understanding the dialectic between space and power. Analyzing nationalist geographies offers a critical tool not only for understanding historical processes but also for grasping contemporary political and social dynamics. In this context, it is vital for both academic studies and policy makers to adopt a more inclusive and critical perspective that takes into account the multidimensional nature of space.

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