

# Exploring Everyday Nationalism and Methodological Nationalism through Migration Research in Early Childhood and Early Childhood Education

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**Abstract:** This paper considers the intersections of migration research in early childhood/education with issues of nationalism. Based on four articles which address migration and inclusion in four Nordic states, first, we demonstrate how migration research can serve as a fertile source for studying everyday nationalism and exploring its operation in teaching and learning settings. Second, applying a critical lens to this type of migration research opens up a reflective space for evaluating the inherent methodological nationalism of some migration research approaches. Our explorations in the article establish the need to rethink the categorizations of migration research in early childhood / education. The set of questioning we develop aid in identifying on the one hand, everyday nationalism and its operation in early childhood / education and on the other hand, methodological nationalism. Without reflexivity on methodological nationalism, migration researchers will keep falling into the trap of reifying everyday nationalism through the analytical and practical categories they draw on for their research.

**Keywords:** Nationalism, methodological nationalism, migration, early childhood, early childhood education

**Titel:** Alltäglicher und methodologischer Nationalismus in der Migrationsforschung zu früher Kindheit und frühkindlicher Bildung

**Zusammenfassung:** Dieser Beitrag beschäftigt sich mit der Verbindung von Migrationsforschung zur frühen Kindheit / frühkindlichen Bildung und Fragen des Nationalismus. Basierend auf vier Artikeln, die sich mit Migration und Inklusion in vier nordischen Ländern befassen, wird erstens demonstriert, inwiefern Migrationsforschung eine ergiebige Quelle für die Untersuchung von alltäglichem Nationalismus und seiner Funktionsweise in Lehr- und Lernsettings darstellt. Zweitens wird gezeigt, dass die Verwendung einer kritischen Perspektive auf diese Art von Migrationsforschung einen Reflexionsraum für die Untersuchung des Migrationsforschungsansätzen inhärenten methodologischen Nationalismus eröffnet. Unsere Ausführungen verweisen auf die Notwendigkeit, etablierte Kategorisierungen der Migrationsforschung zur frühen Kindheit / frühkindlichen Bildung zu überdenken. Die von uns entwickelten Fragen helfen dabei, einerseits alltäglichen Nationalismus und seine Funktionsweise in der frühen Kindheit / der frühkindlichen Bildung und andererseits methodologischen Nationalismus zu identifizieren. Ohne Reflexivität über den methodologischen Nationalismus werden Migrationsforschende weiterhin in die Falle tappen, alltäglichen Nationalismus durch die analytische und praktische Verwendung von Kategorien in ihrer Forschung, zu reifizieren.

**Schlüsselwörter:** Nationalismus, methodologischer Nationalismus, Migration, frühe Kindheit, frühkindliche Bildung

## 1 Introduction

Exclusive nationalist ideologies have a growing prominence in national and international politics all around the world. In Europe, nationalist claims of right-wing populists call for more support for a ‘national’ way of life and greater opposition to multiculturalism, internationalism, and the European Union. Contemporary eco-fascist movements promote nativism and preservation of a ‘blood-and-soil’ agenda, leading them to regularly blame migrants for ecological degradation, due to their perceived high fertility rate and their ‘poor environmentalist culture’ (Kulin/ Johansson Sevä/Dunlap 2021). East-Central European nations have regenerated their traditional mythic pasts in the post-Cold War period to form alliances and resist challenges of EU membership and globalization. While some are in support of EU environmental policies, local eco-movements also position themselves as cherishing ‘authentic village life’ by reinvigorating pre-modern ethnic traditions. With returning to a ‘glorious past’ tradition attached to rural lifestyle, they reject wasteful over-consumption and neoliberal global capitalism. This is one way to reject ‘external influence’ and make any kind of ecological activity into actions that are framed by national borders.

Right-wing nationalist political parties are also becoming more likely coalition partners in many countries throughout Europe and impact other parties’ programs. This means that right-wing nationalists, including the far-right, have an increasing influence on how national educational agendas unfold (Guidici 2021; Miller-Idriss 2017). Right-wing nationalist parties have a strong agenda on education, as education in their view has a central role in shaping society. For this kind of agenda, “they frame education as a salient grievance, pinpointing misguided education policies as main causes for the dire state of the present” (Guidici 2021: 129 f.). Right-wing nationalists of this kind typically narrow complex education reforms and questions to a highly contentious claim and target mainly the history curriculum and language aspects of education (see for example, Knoll (2022) about the introduction of high German in Swiss kindergartens). In conjunction with this mainstream media can place a question mark on inclusive institutional cultures, initiatives, pedagogies and curricula promoting a multicultural, transnational, and global world, global citizenship and respect for diversity for children. The prevalence of these influences, from far-right and/or nationalist political parties in educational institutions necessitates a renewed interest in studies that explore policy formation and national sentiments prevalent in child institutions, in the family, preschools and other care settings (Zembylas 2021a; Millei 2019).

Despite this growing influence, there is little attention paid in education and early childhood education on exclusionary nationalism expressed in xenophobic rhetoric and anti-immigration policies and the monistic view of the nation (homogeneous nation with one ethnic group) (Tröhler 2020; Giudici 2021; Zembylas 2021a,b; Miller-Idriss 2017; Miller-Idriss/Pilkington 2017). It is at least partially because we are talking about legitimately elected political representatives in the European Union rather than the more amorphous social movements that might be separately developing in the EU. As such it can already make it difficult to develop a critical stance as these nationalist political parties already carry the weight of political legitimacy into parliaments and a large variety of policy-making bodies. Nationalism, if explored in early childhood / education, is viewed from the perspectives of policies and curriculum, as a top-down socializing force, and interpreted as legitimate patriotism or a part of nation-building processes that seek to form a national citizenry (Thöler