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Not so banal binationalism: the organisational reproduction of nationalism in a cross-border company

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ABSTRACT

While the reproduction of nationalism has received considerable attention in the social sciences at both the macro and micro levels, it has been largely overlooked at the meso-organisational level. Nationalism is often difficult to discern, as we tend to distance ourselves from it by focusing on its most extreme forms, thereby overlooking its banal and everyday manifestations. Drawing on the case of a French-Italian company involved in the construction of a transnational megaproject, this article examines the organisational cultural dynamics that contribute to the everyday reproduction of nationalism within organisations. In doing so, the article makes a twofold contribution: first, it outlines the cultural processes through which nationalism is reproduced at the meso-organisational level; second, it empirically shows the relevance of ideological elements for the analysis of organisational culture.

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Introduction

Nationalism has become a central issue in contemporary debate. Phenomena like the rise to power of several populist leaders in different parts of the world (e.g. Trump in the US, Orbán in Hungary, Meloni in Italy, etc.), Brexit, the US–China trade war, the Russo-Ukrainian War and Zionism rest upon the centrality of the nation-state as a source of identity and political interest. If intended as a collective belief system according to which the world is 'naturally' divided into nations-states, however, nationalism has been around for some time now and still represents a dominant ideological, political and organisational force of our time (Billig 1995). In geopolitically heated times its flame just shines more vividly.

Building on different methodological traditions, social scientists have mainly addressed nationalism as a macro-historical force or as a micro-sociological phenomenon (Hearn and Antonsich 2018; Mylonas and Tudor 2021). In the first case, researchers have resorted to historical comparative methods to inquire about the origins and core characteristics of the nation-state (e.g. Gellner 1983; Smith 1998); in the second case, through ethnographic and micro-sociological methods, scholars have focused on micro, 'everyday' acts through which the nation is reproduced, revealing a more pervasive and ideological aspect of nationalism (e.g. Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008). In the divide between macro and micro analysis of what a nation is and how it gets reproduced, however, a myriad of social organisational contexts influences the ways in which individuals enact nationhood

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(Hearn and Antonsich 2018). Moreover, 'nationalism as social action may be in key respects an emergent property of complexly organised behaviour that cannot be disaggregated to more micro levels of analysis' (Hearn and Antonsich 2018, 597). However, scholars focusing on the meso-organisational level of analysis, that is the structural features and the social processes that define organisations and their constituent parts (Scott and Davis 2007), have mainly taken for granted the idea of a world neatly divided into nation-states. This lack of attention can be attributed to two primary reasons. The first pertains to the ideological dimension of nationalism itself and its transparency. In *Banal Nationalism*, Billig (1995) addressed this issue by noting how most social scientists tend to dissociate themselves from nationalism, either taking it for granted – e.g. by treating nation-states and their associated societies as natural units of data collection and analysis, as in the case of methodological nationalism (Beck 2008) – or focusing on its more extreme manifestations and not seeing it for what it is – that is, the main ideology at the basis of the organisation of our society. The second reason, that can be at least partly intended as a consequence of the first, is that when dealing with nationalism at the organisational level, scholars have mainly focused on its influence on individual, group and organisational behaviour (Koveshnikov et al. 2025), most of the time treating it as an implicit force, and leaving unaddressed the issue of its reproduction.

To fill this gap, the article aims to answer the following research question: How is nationalism reproduced at the meso-organisational level? To address this question, our analysis focuses on the organisation itself – a social actor recognised practically and linguistically by both individuals and wider institutions (e.g. the state; King, Felin, and Whetten 2010). In particular, we adopt a symbolic-interpretive perspective (Hatch 2018) to examine the way nationalism as an ideology influences and is reproduced by organisational culture, that is a system of basic assumptions, values, artifacts and symbols that we consider as a root metaphor for the organisation itself[1] (Alvesson 2013; Smircich 1983). Empirically, the article relies on the case of a binational company equally owned by France and Italy and engaged in the construction of a cross-border megaproject, the Lyon-Turin railway, comprising a 57,5 km tunnel underneath the Alps. Differently from the way cross-border projects are usually organised, that is adopting separate regulatory and operational frameworks on the two sides of the border (e.g. the Channel Tunnel, see Winch and Clifton 1997), this company operates in a unified way on both sides of the French-Italian border, that is applying the same procedures and regulatory framework in both countries. This case made it possible to identify some elements that contribute to the reproduction of nationalism in, and through, organisations. Theoretically, these elements are framed within Hatch's (1993) cultural dynamics model, adapted to incorporate ideological aspects into organisational cultural processes. In this way, the article makes two main contributions: first, it makes explicit the cultural process through which nationalism is reproduced at the meso-organisational level; second, it argues for the inclusion of ideological dimensions in the analysis of organisational culture.

The rest of this article is structured as follows: it first provides an overview of how nationalism has been addressed as a macro-historical and micro-sociological phenomenon; then it looks at how nationalism has been implicitly addressed at the meso-organisational level. The theoretical section ends by introducing Hatch's (1993) model of cultural dynamics and its adaptation to the study of nationalism as an ideology. The article proceeds by presenting the methodology and then the findings, which are subsequently discussed in the discussion section. In the concluding section, the main findings are connected to some proposals for future research.

Perspectives on nationalism

The scholarship on nationalism is as vast and varied as the concept itself. Social sciences have conceptualised and analysed it from multiple angles, giving prominence to its historical, political, sociological and cultural dimensions. As we argue below, these analyses have mainly dealt with the macro-historical and micro-sociological dynamics of nationalism, while leaving its reproduction at the meso-organisational level partially unscrutinised (Hearn and Antonsich 2018; Malešević 2013).

Macro-historical perspectives: the origin and definition of the nation-state

Historians and political science scholars have largely debated on the origins and definitions of the nation-state. At first, a series of scholars labelled as *primordialist*, claimed that nation-states have always existed: recurring themes at the basis of this thesis are the antiquity of the nation, its past 'golden age' and the periods of decline and decadence from which it is destined to recover thanks to a specific national culture and the decisive intervention of a 'national hero' (Kedourie, 1917; cited in Özkırımlı 2010). According to this conception of the nation, nationality becomes an essential attribute of individuals: 'everyone must have a nationality, just as they must have a nose and two ears' (Gellner 1983, 6). Since the '80, however, a group of authors labelled as *modernist* have framed nationalism as an intrinsically historical phenomenon. The nation-state, from this perspective, must be seen as the outcome of the interaction of several, relatively recent processes, that let emerge the nation-state as the dominant principle of social organisation of contemporary societies (Anderson 2006; Gellner 1983). To quote from Benedict Anderson's (2006, 42–43) *Imagined Communities*: 'What, in a positive sense, made the new (national) communities imaginable was a half-fortuitous, but explosive, interaction between a system of production and productive relations (capitalism), a technology of communications (print), and the fatality of human linguistic diversity'. Beyond socio-economic and technological contingencies, authors such as Breuilly (1993), have focused on the political aspect of nationalism, showing how nationalist movements build upon a variety of interests often in contrast with those of the modern state. From this point of view, nationalism does not emerge from a sense of cultural identity; rather, it is a means of creating a sense of identity. This perspective is overturned by *ethno-symbolist* authors, such as Smith (1998), who prioritise the ethnic component of nationalism and argue that nation-states emerged gradually from antecedent ethnic units.

Micro-sociological perspectives: everyday nationalism

While, towards the end of the 1980s, the modernist stream established itself as the reference theoretical framework, new theories proposing the end of nation-states and their replacement by other political forms at a universal or continental level emerged (e.g. Reich 1991). However, several scholars (e.g. Billig 1995; Calhoun 2007) noted that significant and persistent nationalism and nation-states continued to exist in contemporary society, and started to move the centre of the debate about nationalism from macro-historical questions about 'what' and 'when' nations are, to micro-sociological questions about 'how' nations are reproduced in everyday interactions (Antonsich and Skey 2017; Malešević 2019b).

A good deal of this shift can be attributed to Michael Billig (1995) and his theory of *banal nationalism*. At the basis of Billig's theory there was dissatisfaction with how social scientists had dealt with nationalism, treating it as an irrational and peripheral force to be associated with extremist movements, rather than with ourselves, our ways of thinking and the everyday reproduction of nation-states. According to Billig, nationalism is the dominant ideology of our time, but it tends to be noticed only in its extreme and 'hot' manifestations, rather than in its routinary and taken for granted character, symbolised, in its famous example, by a national flag hanging unnoticed on a public building. Hence, in order to achieve a more encompassing understanding of contemporary nationalism in established democracies, Billig developed the notion of banal nationalism, according to which established nation-states and national identities are constantly reproduced through a continuous 'flagging' of nationhood which goes largely unnoticed. In explaining flagging – that is, the daily reminding of nationhood – Billig focused on political discourses and the media. By means of *deixis*, a linguistic phenomenon whereby small words such as 'we', 'this' and 'here' are implicitly contextualised with respect to the subject, politicians and newspapers continuously refer to the nation-state as the natural basis for social identity. It is this routine and mindless character, this banality, that makes nationalism ideological, so that 'the world of nations has come to seem the natural world – as if there could not possibly be a world without nations' (Billig 1995, 37).

What does not emerge from Billig's perspective, however, is people's agency in understanding and mobilising the nation in their everyday lives. Other scholars have explicitly considered this aspect, looking at 'those instances in which people 'talk" about and with the nation, "choose" the nation, "perform" it or "consume" it' (Antonsich 2020, 1233). This strand of studies goes under the label of *everyday nationhood,* and deals with the 'practices through which ordinary people engage and enact (and ignore and deflect) nationhood and nationalism in the varied contexts of their everyday lives' (Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008, 537). As a simple example of everyday nationhood, Antonsich (2020, 1230) points out the very British menu served at the reception hosted by Boris Johnson the day after Brexit: English sparkling wine, Shropshire blue cheese, and roast beef served with Yorkshire pudding.

Meso-organisational perspectives: nationalism as an organisational phenomenon

According to Malešević (2019b), scholars of everyday nationalism not only 'largely ignore the historical dynamics of nation-formation', but also 'tend to take the organisations that reproduce the nation-centric habitus for granted' (116). In his theory of grounded nationalism, he conceptualises nationalism as an ideological, micro-interactional, and organisational phenomenon (Malešević 2013; 2019a, 2019b). That is, nationalism is neither an ancient sentiment nor just the outcome of modern historical contingencies, but rather a historical process grounded in concrete organisational structures that allowed its ideological reproduction, understood as its capacity to mobilise emotions, identities, and sense of belonging. Malešević (2019a) focuses on three processes in particular: centrifugal ideologisation, the cumulative bureaucratisation of coercion, and the envelopment of micro-solidarity. Centrifugal ideologisation refers to the long-term, systematic outward transmission of nationalism from core state institutions through bureaucratic channels (e.g. schools, the military, and the media) to outer layers of society. By cumulative bureaucratisation of coercion, Malešević means the historical process by which coercive power becomes increasingly centralised, rationalised, and bureaucratically organised within state institutions, enabling systematic, population-wide mobilisation and control. Finally, the envelopment of micro-solidarity refers to the process by which the macro value system of nationalism becomes aligned with small-group social bonds, which get 'enveloped' in nationalist narratives. While providing compelling arguments for the importance of organisational processes in the establishment and reproduction of nationalism, Malešević maintains a sociological 'long-run' perspective (2019a) that approaches organisations historically as bureaucratic apparatuses. In this view, organisations operate as coercive infrastructures and as vectors for the diffusion and reproduction of nationalist ideology. What remains largely outside this account, however, is an engagement with the everyday social processes that constitute organisations and their component parts – namely, the intra-organisational processes through which the organisational capacity of nationalism is enacted in practice. This analytical space is typically addressed by organisation and management scholarship. In such research, however, nationalism is either *implicitly* invoked – either through references to the nation, in terms of national culture and identity (Halsall 2008; Romani et al. 2018), or to the state, as in the case of state-owned enterprises (Bruton et al. 2015) – or considered for its *impact* on organisations and individuals and groups therein.

Finally, in all these studies, it is worth mentioning the valuable attempt by Koveshnikov et al. (2025) to bring together different levels of analysis in order to offer a more comprehensive view of the phenomenon. In their review, the authors identify six distinct approaches to studying the impact of nationalism on contemporary organisations. At the individual and group level, nationalism manifests in (1) individuals' cultural (dis)association with one or several nations – reflected in ethnocentric, cosmopolitan, or multicultural orientations – and (2) identity construction and identity work, where individuals and groups engage in 'us' versus 'them' distinctions drawing on national identity as a resource. At the intra-organisational and inter-organisational level, nationalism operates through (3) organisational practices and norms, functioning as an institutional force or imprint

that shapes HR practices, organisational culture, and internal processes, and (4) inter-organisational relations and strategies, where nationalism acts as a strategic consideration influencing decisions about cross-border collaborations, acquisitions, and market entry. At a more macro level, nationalism appears in (5) economic policies and structures, encompassing protectionism, techno-nationalism, and policies promoting national interests or security, and (6) political rhetoric and media discourses, where nationalism serves as a political ideology dividing societies into opposing groups (e.g. 'pure' vs. 'corrupt', 'West' vs. 'East') and affecting organisations through populist movements and media representations. In these studies, however, nationalism tends to be reified and treated as an independent, exogenous variable that determines individual and organisational behaviour. Moreover, none of the studies included in the review consider explicitly either the role of organisational dynamics in reproducing nationalism as an ideology, nor the relationship between nationalism and organisational culture (for a partial exception, see Moore 2011).

In light of this review, our aim is to analyse the mechanism through which organisations contribute to the reproduction of the ideological system of nationalism through the lens of organisational culture. In particular, our analysis draws on Hatch's (1993) cultural dynamics model – which is adapted here to incorporate an ideological conceptualisation of nationalism, as outlined in the following sections.

A conceptual model of organisational culture

Conceptual models of organisational culture have been variously criticised for oversimplifying an intrinsically elusive phenomenon (Alvesson 2013). Yet, in the open debate on organisational culture(s) and its (in)coherence (e.g. Martin 2002; Letiche 2024), Mary Jo Hatch's (1993) effort to systematise it as a series of circular processes involving basic assumptions, values, artifacts and symbols, still provides an opportunity to handle such a complex concept in a fairly intelligible way and, therefore, to produce contributions that go beyond recognition of its ambiguity and fragmentation.

Hatch's model develops from Schein's (1985) conceptualisation of organisational culture as consisting of basic assumptions, values and artifacts: 'Assumptions represent taken-for granted beliefs about reality and human nature. Values are social principles, philosophies, goals, and standards considered to have intrinsic worth. Artifacts are the visible, tangible, and audible results of activity grounded in values and assumptions' (Hatch 1993, 659). Drawing on a symbolic-interpretive approach, Hatch integrates Schein's model with a new element – symbols – and theorises a series of cultural processes occurring among these four elements (see Figure 1). Assumptions and values are linked by *manifestation* processes that, by giving advantage to certain ways of seeing, feeling, and knowing, permit the conversion of 'intangible assumptions into recognizable values' (Hatch 1993, 662). Values and artifacts are related by *realisation* processes whereby values are made 'real' through the transformation of 'expectations into social or material reality and by maintaining or altering existing values through the production of artifacts' (Hatch 1993, 666). Artifacts become symbols through *symbolisation* processes; symbols are representations of a 'conscious or an unconscious association with some wider, usually more abstract, concept or meaning' (Hatch 1993, 669). Symbolisation processes endow artifacts with a surplus of meaning that gives extra significance to the literal meaning associated with their objective form. Finally, symbols are linked to basic assumptions by *interpretation* processes, seen as hermeneutic circles whereby the meaning conveyed by symbols is contextualised within broader cultural frames and thus interpreted in relation to some already-established knowledge. The cultural dynamics model operates both clockwise and counter-clockwise, and the same applies to the four processes that compose it, which function both forwards and backwards. In other words, each element of the model can confirm or challenge the other elements, giving a certain degree of both stability and change to organisational culture. In this light, organisational culture always involves ambiguity, multiplicity of meanings, and ongoing interpretation (Hatch 2018).

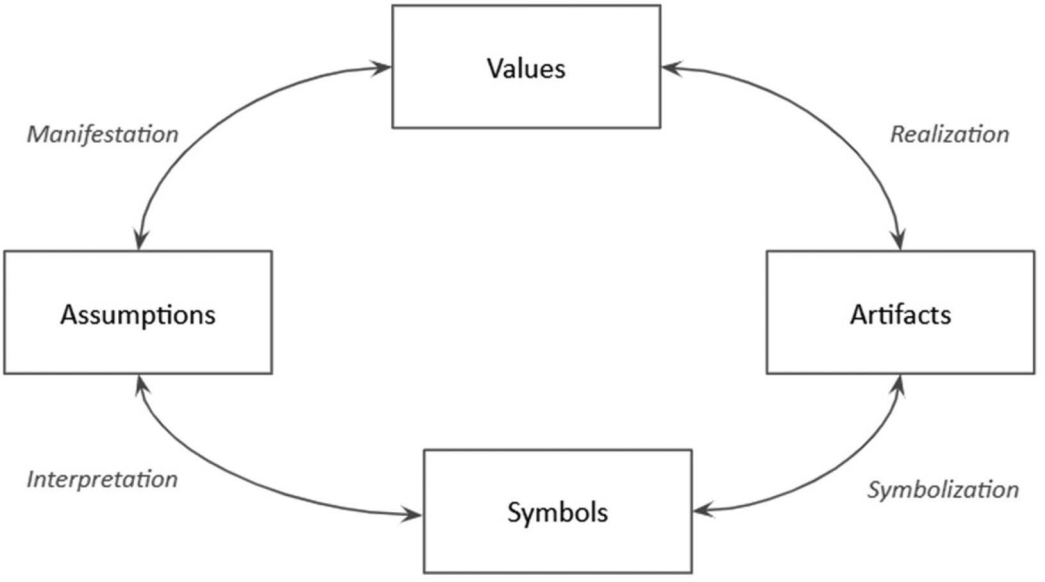

Figure 1. The Dynamics of Organisational Culture model (Hatch 1993).

While Hatch's model is inherently symbolic-interpretative, it also calls attention to materiality and discourse-power dynamics. Materiality is implicit in the manifestation and realisation processes whereby taken for granted assumptions serve as the basis for values connected to visible artifacts. Discourse and power must instead be taken into account as long as values, symbols and meanings are, on the one hand, unstable and continuously negotiated within the cultural process and, on the other, are rooted in taken for granted basic assumptions. From this perspective, organisational cultures are necessarily fragmented and power-laden (Martin 2002).

Incorporating ideology and performativity in organisational culture

For the purposes of this article, Hatch's model has been adapted in two ways. First, rather than approaching organisational culture in its entirety, the analysis focuses on a relatively delimited dimension of it – nationalism – which is situated within a broader societal context (Alvesson 1987) and is treated here as an ideology. The notion of ideology remains one of the vaguest and most contested concepts of the social sciences. It is often used in a derogatory sense to describe someone else's false consciousness – that is, a distorted representation of reality (Hawkes 2003). Since a comprehensive discussion of this topic would exceed the scope of this article, we rely on van Dijk's (2013) definition of ideology as a general belief system shared by members of a society – fundamental and axiomatic in nature – and, as such, influential in both interpreting social facts and shaping social practices. In line with Hatch's terminology, ideology has been considered a general 'basic assumption' attributable to society as a whole, which therefore stands above the organisation and its culture.

The second amendment to the cultural dynamics model is the integration of a specific category of artifacts, which have been named 'performative artifacts', derived from the notion of performativity. Performativity is based on the idea that some artifacts[2] (language, images, practices) have the power to create social facts or 'do something in the world' (Austin 1962; Butler 1990); they do not just reflect reality but help create it. From this perspective, nationhood is not something we have, but something we enact, repeatedly, through performative artifacts (Billig 1995; Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008). This integration is needed in order to account for those artifacts that cannot be directly linked to

a specific organisational culture, as long as their interpretation is derived from a broader societal context and relatively 'fixed'. The extension of Hatch's cultural dynamics model will then be discussed in light of the findings. The next section is dedicated to describing the methodology and research setting.

Methodology

Research setting

A qualitative revelatory (Yin 2013)" single-case study was designed in order to enrich the emerging theory (Eisenhardt 1989). The research strategy was to study one relatively unexplored case in-depth by identifying an organisation that could potentially serve as a unique and exemplary source of insights into the topic under study (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Yin 2013). The chosen case, TELT – an acronym for *Tunnel Euralpin Lyon Turin* – appeared uniquely suited to the study's objective in that the company has to operate binationally by mandate, i.e. by statute, and this enables the investigation of nationalism and its related issues in a unique manner. Further, not only is TELT equally owned by two nation-states, but it explicitly aims at managing its cross-border operations jointly. This constitutes a one-of-a-kind case since cross-border projects are usually carried out independently on each side of the border by 'national' work units coordinated by a centralised binational administrative body but which operate according to their own national laws and procedures. A well-known example of a cross-border project carried out quite independently by national project organisations is the Channel Tunnel between England and France (Winch and Clifton 1997). By contrast, and herein lies the uniqueness of the case, TELT's particular setting forced the organisation to question matters that are usually taken for granted and tend to pass unnoticed, such as the choice of which national law to apply or which language to use for formal communications. Notably, the initial aim of the research was to inductively explore TELT's binationalism, while the theme of nationalism as an ideology emerged as relevant in the early stages of data analysis. In other words, nationalism was not explicitly mentioned in the interviews, nor were specific questions asked about it; rather, it emerged already from the initial analyses of the interviews and ethnographic data, as will be explained in the sections devoted to data collection, coding and analysis.

Case description

The international agreement between France and Italy signed in 2012 in Rome, and ratified by the two governments in 2015 in Paris, states that TELT is the public, binational promoter responsible for the construction and operation of the cross-border section of the Lyon-Turin railway line, including the 57.5-km-long tunnel under Mont Cenis. The cost of the cross-border section amounts to 8.6 billion Euros; 40% of which sum is to be financed by the EU, 35% by Italy, and 25% by France. TELT is a French law company owned 50% by the French State (via the Ministry of the Economy and Finance) and 50% by the Italian State (via the *Ferrovie dello Stato Italiane* group).

By statute, TELT's legal headquarters are in Chambéry, France, where at least half of its employees must reside, whereas its operational headquarters are in Turin, Italy; two further representative offices are located in Paris and Rome. The company is headed by a President, who is appointed by the French State, and represents the company before the stakeholders, and by an Executive Director, appointed by the Italian State, who directs the company operationally. Both are part of the board of directors, alongside eight other members appointed by each State in equal proportions, and a non-voting member appointed by the EU. The statute also institutes two control bodies, the Commission of Contracts and the Permanent Control Service: they are equally composed of French and Italians, but they are both chaired by a French President, whose vote is decisive if no majority is obtained. Also, by statute, the Legal Director (i.e. the Chief Legal Officer) is appointed by France, while the Financial Director (i.e. the Chief Financial Officer) is appointed by Italy. The fact that

TELT is a French law company entails that the Procurement Code used to contract out work is based on French law, even though it also applies in Italian territory. However, after a certain pressure by the Italians, the Procurement Code has been integrated with the Italian Anti-mafia Code, which for the first time is applied outside Italy.

At present, TELT employs over 200 people, almost equally divided by gender and nationality. The company is structured into staff units called 'Directions', and an operational unit called 'Technical Division', responsible for the engineering and the management of the construction sites. All Directions, as well as the Technical Division, are binational: that is, they operate on both sides of the border, employing, in different proportions, nationally mixed teams. The only exceptions are the 'Directions of Procedures, Agreements and Concertation', which are in charge of land expropriations and local conciliations and must operate according to local regulations. Two such units, identical in purpose, therefore exist, one operating in France, the other in Italy. The shareholding and the carefully balanced governance system of TELT create, both symbolically and normatively, a strong binational framework for the organisation.

Data collection

Data were collected between January 2020 and May 2022 from multiple sources: in-depth interviews, participant observation, and internal and external document analysis. As part of a broader strategy of public engagement related to the infrastructure project it is responsible for, TELT maintains collaborations with universities and research institutions. In this context, the organisation contacted us to explore aspects of its organisational culture, particularly in relation to its binational character. This collaboration enabled access to senior-level actors and facilitated the recruitment of interviewees: 47 individuals have been interviewed, including all the top management and most of the middle management, for a total of 50 interviews (the Executive Director, the HR Director and another middle manager from the HR function were interviewed twice) and 6 *ad hoc* meetings have been arranged (interviewees profiles can be found in the supplementary material). Interviews lasted between 90 and 120 min, and meetings around 180 min each. The interviews were carried out in presence whenever possible, or online when not possible due to the pandemic, while meetings were all in presence. During the in-person interviews and ad hoc meetings, it was possible to observe and collect ethnographic notes – as well as photographs – of workspaces and artifacts. These observations were conducted at the company's Italian headquarters and offices, during a visit to an operational construction site, during a visit to an internal corporate museum, in common areas (break areas, shared kitchen), and during online events organised by the company in a dedicated virtual space. This meant that, alongside more formal encounters, it was also possible to interact with management in informal contexts and occasions. Accordingly, two ethnographic diaries were kept separately by the authors, who took notes on impressions, specific working situations, and surrounding elements impossible to gather by means of interviews alone. The interview guide was organised around themes (e.g. organisational functioning, binationalism in practice, and the organisation's culture and core values), rather than predefined questions, consistent with an open-ended format (e.g. Rapley 2001). Moreover, in accordance with typical inductive approaches (Pratt, Lepisto, and Erik 2019), as well as the iterative nature of the case study design (Yin 2013), during the data collection process the way in which themes were formulated was modified in order to align the research question more closely with the ongoing data-gathering. However, every interview always began with participants being asked to recount how they had entered the organisation and what they typically did in their working day, so as to develop an initial understanding of how each organisational function operated in concrete. Then the interview explored what working binationally implied in practice from the interviewee's perspective, with a particular interest in how the interviewees conceptualised binationalism, what they considered important, and how they experienced, interpreted, accounted for, and managed binationalism. Moreover, the respondents were asked to give some pertinent examples of concrete binational situations. A definition

of binationalism was not deliberately proposed, so that the participants could choose what they considered important according to their own idea of binationalism. Moreover, aware that nationally framed questions tend to elicit nationally framed answers (see, e.g. Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008), we avoided imposing the nation as an analytical category in our interview protocol, and instead sought to observe the emergence of the nation as an interpretive frame rather than taking it for granted.

We acknowledge that research is produced from situated positions and therefore briefly outline aspects of the authors' backgrounds that may have informed the data collection and analysis. We are two white researchers, one woman and one man, born in Italy, with academic training in sociology and organisation studies, and currently working in academic institutions located in the Global North. Our first language is Italian; we also speak French at different levels of proficiency; we are not activists. In light of this background, to conduct the French interviews and to support the data coding process, we involved a woman who is a native French speaker born and raised in France, with a similar background but not embedded in academia. After each interview, we engaged in dialogue with her in English, which served as a linguistically neutral space for the project, in order to share impressions and identify issues of interest.

All the encounters, except the meetings with the management and one interview (not recorded at the behest of the interviewee), were recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analysed with an inductive interpretive approach. Because the interviews were often very rich in content and therefore lengthy, in some cases the researchers had to interview the same person twice (as happened, for example, with the Executive Director).

Data coding and analysis

Data were subjected to an iterative deductive and inductive template analysis, a pragmatic technique that can be applied across a range of qualitative research approaches (King 1998; Brooks and King 2014). This technique is sufficiently flexible to accommodate different philosophical perspectives (King, Brooks, and Tabari 2017). The deductive analysis started from the literature and our expectations: a priori themes expected to be relevant to the analysis were set. In particular, we initially applied concepts from Hatch's cultural dynamics model to analyse TELT's binationalism, which we framed as a value through which nationalism manifests, and examined it in relation to a series of organisational artifacts resulting from a balanced combination of French and Italian elements. As we read through the data, fragments of text related to the *a priori* themes were coded and, at the same time, new themes (inductive analysis) were defined according to recurrent items in the transcripts. Here, we identified a relationship between binationalism and a series of organisational artifacts resulting from a balanced combination of French and Italian elements, which we named 'binational artifacts'. In this phase, we drew an analytical distinction between artifacts that underwent a process of symbolisation and those that performatively reproduced national identities. Finally, we focused on the interpretation of national symbols and identified a series of inconsistencies, or ambiguities, related to the organisation's binational identity. These ambiguities were then connected to nationalism as an ideology. This constituted a deconstructive move: nationalism was not explicitly addressed during data collection and did not emerge as a theme in the interviews, but served instead as an analytical tool to uncover the hidden assumption of a world neatly divided into nation-states. In this way, a final template (see supplementary material) was developed and applied to the entire data set. The collection and analysis of our empirical material involved a great deal of subjectivity. As researchers we gave priority to concepts and categories we were familiar with, and used them to interpret and progressively enact an organisational reality we were partly co-creating. As Billig (1995) puts it: 'such is the spread of banal nationalism, the analysis requires a confessional tone. Traces of nationalism and flag-waving are not merely to be found in others. Analysts, too, should confess' (125). Binationalism was relevant in TELT *also* because of our research. Nevertheless, the research process was guided by a pragmatic approach (Simpson 2019), favouring

concepts, methods and interpretations that were progressively adjusted to build plausible explanations of what we were observing. In line with this approach, as well as with Hatch's theorising style (2018), we implicitly relied on different ontological/epistemological assumptions: 'realist-positivist', when dealing with visible artifacts; 'symbolic-interpretative', when dealing with their socially constructed symbolic dimension; and 'postmodern', when deconstructing their meaning vis-à-vis a taken for granted ideology. The interplay of these perspectives (Romani, Primecz, and Topçu 2011; Schultz and Hatch 1996) allowed us to build a plausible representation of how nationalism and organisational culture can interact: this representation is necessarily a social, partial and situated accomplishment.

Findings

This section shows how nationalism as an ideology is manifested, realised and interpreted at the organisational level through binationalism. To do so, it first presents binationalism in TELT as a value through which nationalism gets manifested; then it looks at the resulting production of binational artifacts that, in turn, generate symbols of France and Italy; it finally provides some examples of how different interpretations of binationalism can challenge the image of a world neatly divided into nation-states.

Binationalism as a value

Values are 'principles, philosophies, goals and standards considered to have intrinsic worth' (Hatch 1993, 659), that guide organisational members' behaviours by setting their priorities and helping them to assess what is right and what is wrong. They are the visible manifestation of intangible basic assumptions – that is, taken for granted beliefs about reality and human nature. In the context of TELT's organisational culture, we consider binationalism as a value through which the assumption of a reality ordered into nation-states – understood as political entities with their own identities and interests – is manifested.

Although binationalism assumes different meanings for different people in TELT, it can be conceived as a central value for the organisation, and for several reasons. Firstly, binationalism is seen a requirement imposed by the financing countries and the EU, in light of the several legal sources – international agreements, national and regional laws that accommodate the dictates of the agreements and, finally, the company statute – that are the result of a long political process whereby organisational power and resources have been carefully balanced between France and Italy.

> So, let's say that there is a first aspect, that is the obligations, that force us to be binational, like it or not, we must be binational: the board of directors is half Italian, half French, the President is French and the Executive Director is Italian; the French government appoints the Legal Director, the Italian government appoints the Financial Director … that is, there's this balancing by default, that imposes to be, there's a minimum threshold, to be binational. And here the obligations end. Then subjectivity begins, that is, how we feel as binational, how we decide to live binationality[3] – as a burden, as an obligation, as a pain in the neck, or as potential. So, we made this choice, to consider it as potential. (Top manager[4])

As such, binationalism represents the standard to be always taken into account when assessing matters in the organisation. In this company, things must be done 'binationally', even if that implies contradictions and operational issues, mostly related to the application of foreign laws in different countries and to the continuous cognitive effort devoted to constantly counterbalancing different national interests in the organisation. In spite of the inconveniences and the extra effort it requires, binationalism in TELT seems to possess an intrinsic positive value derived from the encounter between two different national cultures and producing effects at different levels. Especially in the rhetoric of the top management, at the organisational level binationalism can be framed as an opportunity to 'extrapolate the best' from two different national cultures. For example, in a video on the adoption of the Italian 'Antimafia Code' also on French territory, the

Executive Director framed it as a transnational application of 'the best of Italian experience'. This way of working, in turn, represented a way to serve the EU, being TELT an 'experiment' that would prove useful in the future when other transnational projects might be carried out in a similar way. As a long-time HR manager said: 'they call us an *atelier européen*, we are also a European laboratory'.

> I am a committed Europeist, I have Italian and French blood, I like Europe, then I support this discourse about binationality and I want to develop it. (External relations middle manager)

This perception was reinforced by the possibility that the EU might increase its contribution to the Lyon-Turin project by 5% to reward TELT's effort to do things 'binationally'.

> Europe is undoubtedly a … a promoter of binationality and also a … a legitimisation for binationality as we do it. And our General Director very often makes reference to it when he says: 'We have to be even more binational, Europe will grant us additional funding'. (Top manager)

Also at the individual level, for some employees the opportunity to work in a binational environment was a pull factor to join the organisation:

> So there was binationality, it was really something that I was really interested in experiencing on a daily basis, and then the project itself, which I find beautiful and in which I had an interest right away. But it's true that … well, binationality precisely in relation to … your subject … It was a central issue in my decision to come and work at LTF and then at TELT. (Administration clerk)

As a value, binationalism is ultimately both a standard and a goal for TELT's members: if, as a standard to be maintained, it entailed a series of difficulties and rigidities, for many it was also an inherently positive personal, organisational and societal objective worth striving for. In any case, binationalism as a value is a manifestation of the assumption of a reality made of nation-states. As we show in the next section, valorising binationalism in TELT implies the realisation of specific types of artifacts.

Binational artifacts and their symbolisation

TELT's expectation to operate in a perfectly binational way is made 'real' and maintained through the production of binational artifacts: that is, social arrangements and material objects that are the visible results of its binationalism. These artifacts can be directly or indirectly related to nationalism according to how their components are symbolically linked to nationhood. In this regard, we draw a distinction between, on the one hand, performative artifacts through which nationhood is performed and, as such, function as symbolic resources readily available to the organisation, and on the other, organisational artifacts, whose meaning has to be symbolically charged, or 'flagged', to represent French and Italian national identities and interests and, thus, binationalism.

Performative artifacts are visible items whose repetition and enactment produce and maintain nationhood. In order to become organisational artifacts that realise binationalism in TELT, these items must be combined in a way that is as balanced as possible. In this vein, three main performative artifacts can be identified in TELT – language, laws, and flags – whose combination resulted in the creation of binational artifacts.

For formal communication all documents have to be presented in both French and Italian, with special attention devoted to the quality of translation ('there are people that if a slide is badly translated, get up and leave [a meeting]', one of the top managers of the Technical Division told us) and formatting. During meetings, the rule is that everybody speaks his/her own language, being able to understand that of the others, while English is not an option. Language courses are mandatory for everybody (although several sources, both French and Italian, have reported that French employees are less prone to learning and speaking the other language).

Jurisdiction – that is, the exercise of legal power within a certain territory through the application of norms – may be the most 'banal' performance of nationhood: most of the norms followed by people and organisations are embedded in national legislations or are the result of international

agreements between nation-states, while the space where these laws are enforced defines, in fact, national territories. The case of TELT is particularly revelatory in this respect, because the decision to apply the same norms in different national contexts has generated discomfort and some scepticism within the organisation, especially among the Italian employees, who have to apply a foreign legislation with which they are not familiar on Italian territory. To counterbalance what could be perceived as a 'French invasion' of Italian territory, however, for TELT's contracts the French Procurement Code has been integrated with the Italian Anti-mafia Code, which for the first time is applied outside Italy. As regards language, the application of and respect for national law can be understood as a routine activity through which nationhood is performed, rather than as a representation of it. The combination of French and Italian laws produces a visible binational organisational artifact.

There are visual artifacts that, more than others, remind everyone of TELT's organisational nationhood: flags. Along with national anthems, in recent centuries flags have become the quintessential signifiers of national territory, universal signs of particularity that positions the nation 'as a nation among nations' (Billig 1995, 86). In TELT, French and Italian Tricolours discreetly mark almost all physical and virtual spaces of the organisation, and they are always displayed either side by side or with a starred European flag between them (see Figure 2). In some cases, tricolours are not presented in the form of rectangular flags, but are projected through lights or used to colour written messages. The juxtaposition of the two national flags represents the perfect binational artifact, also because of their structural equality (three vertical stripes, only one of which is differently coloured). Indeed, when participants were asked to provide the most representative image of TELT's binationalism, most of them mentioned the two national flags.

The creation of organisational binational artifacts, however, also comes about through the symbolisation of items that are not directly relatable to nationhood and nationalism. These items first need to be 'flagged': that is, infused with a surplus of meaning that extends beyond their objective form and provides them with a national identity. Once flagged, these items can be balanced to form binational artifacts, as in the case of performative elements. Given the primacy of binationalism as a

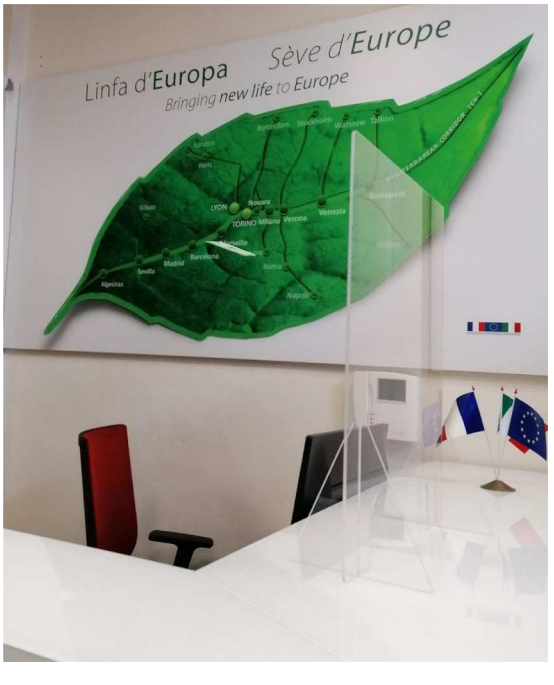

Figure 2. TELT's reception at the Turin headquarters.

value in TELT, potentially any organisational object, expression and activity can undergo this symbolisation process. By statute, the organisation has two headquarters, one located in France and the other in Italy; the workforce must be equally composed of French and Italians; and so forth. The processes of realisation and symbolisation of binational artifacts are well exemplified by the formal structures of the organisation: organisational units represent nationhood because they symbolise the control of either France or Italy over specific sets of organisational activities (e.g. the Financial Director has to be Italian and the Legal Director has to be French). In some cases, the creation and symbolisation of binational artifacts become more creative. For example, the Geographic Information System (GIS) that TELT has developed to harmonise the different systems used in the two countries works with coordinates that differ from those used both in Italy and France, but consist of the algebraic sum of the two. Another example concerns environmental projects: the company has financed a project in France to protect the natural environment of the natterjack toad (*Epidalea calamita*). To counterbalance this initiative, on the other side of the border a parallel project has been developed to create and protect an ecological corridor for the southern festoon (*Zerynthia polyxena*), a protected species of butterfly, to foster its proliferation in the areas surrounding the construction sites. In this case, we can say that a French toad is worth an Italian butterfly.

In sum, through symbolisation TELT's artifacts that cannot be directly related to nationalism, such as organisational structures, roles and activities, become 'flagged' (i.e. assigned a national identity) and balanced to create binational artifacts. In certain circumstances, however, the process operates in reverse, and the focus of organisational actors shifts back towards the literal meaning of artifacts and the actual contribution to the value that generated them (Table 1).

The ambiguous interpretation of (bi)nationalism

The previous sections showed how binationalism as a value manifests the presence of nation-states through a constant search for balance between national interests; and, then, how this value is expressed through a combination of 'flagged' artifacts that symbolise a balanced union between France and Italy. As with any organisational culture, TELT's also involves an interpretative process through which symbols are contextualised within broader cultural frames that can be both confirmed and contested, giving rise to ambiguity. The present section shows how, in spite of the valorisation of binationalism, the interpretation of its symbols in TELT can produce a series of contradictions related to the image of a world neatly divided into nation-states. These contradictions become particularly evident with respect to TELT's organisational identity and its operative functioning.

When values are retroactively set in relation with basic assumptions, they contribute to creating identity: that is, 'a sense of self and organisations as coherent entities' (Hatch 1993, 685). In this respect, binationalism in TELT can be seen as intrinsically paradoxical as long as it relies on the parallel construction of a unitary organisational identity by keeping visible, and distinguishable, two different national identities. In other words, a conflict of interests arises between the operational need of a common organisational identity and the political need of recognising two national identities as a sign of national loyalty.

Table 1. Types of binational artifacts in TELT.

Type of artifact	Examples
Performative: Artifacts enacting nationhood beyond any specific organisational culture	Flags Documents Spoken language during meetings Normative framework
Symbolised: Artifacts symbolically linked to nationhood within a specific organisational culture	TELT organisational structure GIS system Environmental initiatives for protected species

> [Being binational] means that we have to be able to respect a diplomatic equilibrium, by publishing all the documents in the two languages and making sure that [during] all the official meetings, everybody speaks their own language while being translated. We have to do this but, at the same time, it is necessary that when the staff meet, or have coffee together, we don't have the French on one side of the table and the Italians on the other side. (Top manager)

Some interviewees found a remedy to this tension in Europe, for it offers an all-encompassing alternative that somehow reconciles organisational and national interests ('I'd like to say that TELT is neither Italian nor French, I'd like to say that TELT has the ambition to be European', an HR manager said). However, for some other interviewees, Europe and the European Union represented a third party, something other than the organisation. In this regard, the EU was variously labelled a 'financer', a 'controller', or an 'ally' and perceived as far from the operational level ('Europe, that's for the bosses!' as a construction manager said).

The interpretation of binational symbols can be a source of contradiction as well. To explain the interpretation process ongoing between symbols and basic assumptions, Hatch (1993) draws on the hermeneutic circle concept, whereby symbols are contextualised within broader cultural frames that provide the background knowledge structures required to construct an acceptable meaning. But the interpretation of symbols can challenge or confirm the cultural frames in which they are embedded, generating a new understanding of them. In this way, their meaning is revised again and the circle continues. TELT's symbols of binationalism are grounded in an underlying nationalist ideology because they incorporate and reproduce two national interests; however, when these symbols are confronted with the idea of a world divided into nation-states, inconsistencies emerge.

The attempt to apply the same set of regulations to the project, for instance, can spur different interpretations. On the one hand, this choice openly challenges the idea of national borders; but, on the other, in order to be implemented it must rely on (a combination of) national regulations. In this way, binationalism both confirms and challenges nationalism. The situation becomes even more blurred in the underground context, where the national border completely disappears; in this scenario, then, it is difficult to tell which national regulation applies.

> Then you understand that when we're underground, the border is quite free-floating at some point underground, since we are … we have 2000 … we have almost 2000 metres of coverage above the tunnel at the level of the border. […] We don't yet have a unification of the rules allowing us to have binational controllers who cross the border etc., since in any case, afterwards, in terms of criminal law there apply systems that are 100% national … there is no … there is no accident at work that will be adjudicated by a … by a European court eh […] we're not not there at all. (Construction middle manager)

This quote again shows how TELT's aspiration to operate under a single set of regulations is frustrated by the fragmentation of national laws. As regards identity, Europe is evoked as a potential *deus ex machina*, a super-partisan figure able to overcome national differences and resolve underlying tensions. At the same time, the quote clearly reveals the elusiveness of national borders: the closer one gets and tries to grasp them, the more they vanish, leaving a sense of lostness.

In the next section, these findings are integrated into the proposed elaboration of Hatch's cultural dynamics model, followed by reflections on nationalism and ideology at the meso-organisational level.

Discussion

This article attempts to create an explicit connection between nationalism as an ideology and its reproduction at the meso-organisational level, using organisational culture as a point of access to examine the relationship between a macro-societal level ideology and organisational internal socio-symbolic processes.

The findings present how nationalism is manifested through binationalism in a French-Italian company, TELT, where binationalism must be intended as a value of its organisational culture prescribing the search for a perfect diplomatic equilibrium between two national interests. As shown

in Figure 3, through binationalism, nationalism is then realised and reproduced in TELT by organisational artifacts that symbolise the national interests of France and Italy.

Hatch's (1993) model of cultural dynamics made it possible to identify and systematise some of the dynamics through which nationalism reproduces at the meso-organisational level; however, the model has been adapted by broadening the concept of basic assumptions and by incorporating the idea of ideology as a fundamental and axiomatic belief system shared by a society (van Dijk 2013). Since ideologies reside in society at large, they also rely upon symbolic repertoires that extend beyond the organisational culture (Alvesson 1987). As regards nationalism, part of this repertoire consists of artifacts that are independent from symbolisation and interpretation processes at the meso-organisational level, and whose literal and symbolic meanings coincide: these artifacts have been named 'performative' in order to emphasise their taken for grantedness as well as their power to normatively create an identity category, i.e. nationality. In TELT, as elsewhere, performative elements such as language, national regulations and flags directly define and maintain national identities (Lavi 2013). While these elements operate also beyond the meso-organisational level, they can be integrated into an organisational culture once they have been attuned to its values. In the presented model, this process was labelled 'composition' in order to indicate how these artifacts cannot be either symbolised or interpreted at the meso-organisational level, but can be selected and combined in such a way that they become organisational artifacts that, in turn, can be symbolised and interpreted within the organisational culture. In TELT, performative artifacts need to be combined in a as balanced as possible way to become organisational artifacts; these binational artifacts can then be symbolised to express the diplomatic equilibrium that the company is constantly pursuing.

Binational artifacts, however, are not limited to elements performatively linked to nationalism. In TELT virtually every organisational artifact can be 'flagged': that is, infused with a surplus of meaning that refers to a specific national identity. Organisational roles, activities and tools can become national symbols that, as in the case of performative artifacts, must be combined in a balanced manner.

Although Malešević (2019a) well explained the importance of organisational capacity for the affirmation of the nation-state as the primary principle of social organisation, as well as the capacity of nationalist narratives to 'envelop' networks of microsolidarity, his grounded nationalism remains primarily a macro-historical and institutional account. More in general, studies on nationalism have

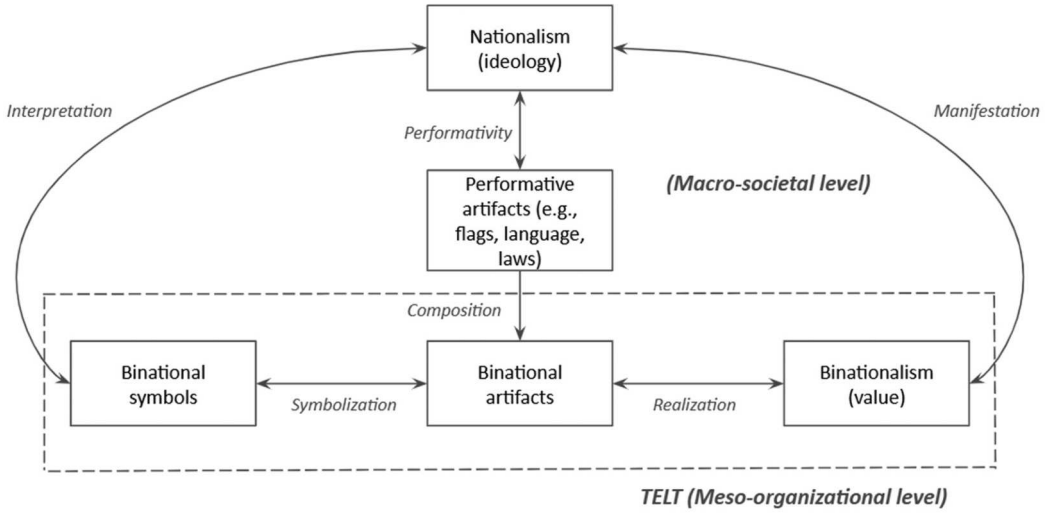

Figure 3. The cultural dynamics of binationalism in TELT (elaboration from Hatch 1993). The dotted box indicates TELT's porous organisational boundary.

yet to integrate a meso-organisational perspective that focuses specific organisational social processes through which nationalist meanings are manifested and interpreted, reproduced and contested. For their part, organisation and management studies have so far treated nationalism as an exogenous variable that impacts the behaviour of organisations, and of groups and individuals therein (Koveshnikov et al. 2025), taking for granted the role organisations play in its reproduction. However, the findings of this research show how organisational processes can be vectors of nationhood: on the one hand, performative artifacts such as flags, national regulations, and language resonate with Billig's (1995) notion of banal nationalism, insofar as their meaning is taken for granted and they tend to pass unnoticed and to reproduce a symbolic order that lies beyond the organisation and is imposed upon it. On the other hand, the proposed theorisation of the symbolisation processes through which organisational artifacts become symbols of national interests connects to the more recent strand of studies focusing on the 'everyday' and agential aspects of nationalism (Antonsich and Skey 2017; Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008). Rather than an individual practice, however, symbolisation is an interindividual, social process involving the constant negotiation of a surplus of meaning within the organisation. Large amounts of creativity and diplomacy are employed in TELT to produce complex artifacts incorporating national interests, and to organise work in a way that guarantees a diplomatic balance between France and Italy.

As our findings empirically show, ideological elements can be closely connected to organisational culture. This relationship, however, is far less coherent than our model might suggest at a first glance. As any organisational culture, also TELT's implies a certain degree of ambiguity, due to continuous cycles of action and meaning-making that operate both prospectively and retrospectively (Hatch 1993). Focusing on retroactive manifestation and interpretation processes that in TELT connect nationalism to binationalism and binational symbols, two major contradictions whereby binationalism both challenges and confirms nationalism can be in fact identified. The first contradiction concerns a constant tension between a unitarian organisational identity and two distinct national identities that, on the one hand, are downplayed to enhance cooperation and efficiency in the organisation but, on the other, are reinforced in order to guarantee the diplomatic equilibrium at the basis of binationalism. The second contradiction has to do with the aspiration of doing things according to a unitary set of rules and procedures irrespectively of the national border – a concept that becomes lost in the indistinct space of the underground – while looking at national regulations as sources of law. However, even if nationalism is both confirmed and challenged by binationalism, its ideological scope entails a continuous effort to either reconcile or endure the contradictions that emerge from a reality framed in terms of nation-state. For example, some organisational actors seem to have found a solution for both these contradictions by looking at the EU as a source of both identity and law. From a political theory perspective, however, the evocation of common identity and regulation ascribed to a superior entity comprising both France and Italy would simply imply the creation of a wider nation-state where the identitarian unit (the nation) is congruent with the political one (the state; see Shore 2006).

To summarise, for TELT nationalism represents an inescapable organisational principle but, at the same time, an elusive identitarian and cultural source. Despite the uniqueness of this case, these considerations can be applied to the vast majority of contemporary organisations, including those operating in different national contexts, such as multinational corporations and international NGOs. These organisations tend, in fact, to structure themselves more or less explicitly in accordance with national borders. For example, multinational organisations still maintain a primary national identity that can be related to cultural artifacts like the main language spoken within the company, the nationality of the management, the place of its foundation, its legal and fiscal domicile and other elements (Reckendrees, Gehlen, and Marx 2022). Therefore, as our findings show, also those organisational efforts that clearly aim to cross borders and foster international cooperation remain grounded in nationalist assumptions, confirming Billig's (2017, 308) intuition that 'the world of nation-states has historically been an international world, for internationalism rests upon nationalism and vice versa', and questioning theories of a post-national age, such as those of

'post-national constellation' (Habermas 2001) and 'banal cosmopolitanism' (Beck and Willms 2003; see also Skovgaard-Smith and Poulfelt 2018). To simplify, it challenges the reader not to find a national identity associated with the organisations, both multinational and domestic, that s/he deals with daily. If s/he struggles to do so, it is because most organisations relentlessly perform nationalism through a series of artifacts that continuously remind us of their nationality.

At the same time, organisational national identity always maintains a certain degree of ambiguity and porosity (Gehlen, Marx, and Reckendrees 2020; see also Kreiner and Schultz 1995). From a performative point of view (Austin 1962; Butler 1990), it could be argued that the perfect (organisational) national performance does not exist insofar as nationhood lacks an ontological origin (Lavi 2013). Therefore, rather than being a product of nationalism, the language spoken within an organisation, the place of its foundation, its legal headquarters, and so on, are cultural artifacts that contribute to recreating nationality as an identitarian attribute to be taken for granted. These elements are not always congruent with each other, and their incongruence calls for the creation of new 'flagged' symbols, especially in those organisational contexts, like TELT, where national interest is particularly valued.

Conclusion

This article attempted to direct attention to the cultural processes through which nationalism is reproduced at the meso-organisational level in its 'banal' and everyday component. As a corollary it also invites to take into consideration ideological aspects in the current analysis of organisational culture.

Our contribution could be largely extended, because different organisations may engage with nationalism in different ways. In this regard, of interest are all those organisational contexts whose culture could be characterised by patriotism as a value; that is, by a willingness to make sacrifices for the national interest (e.g. the army, national sports teams, state-owned enterprises, etc.).

Another major research question, both theoretical and empirical, would be whether an organisation could exist outside nationalism. In this regard, it would be worth studying the cultural dynamics of digital communities, such as Anonymous, and determine the extent to which they are actually beyond the nation and nationhood.

With respect to the consideration of ideological aspects in relation to organisational culture, the extension of Hatch's cultural dynamics model could be suitable for the study of other ideologies at the organisational level, chief among which are patriarchy and capitalism. The model could be especially useful for understanding how these ideologies incorporate into organisational cultures values that are apparently in contrast with them, as in the case of nationalism and binationalism. For example, it would be interesting to understand how companies combine within their cultures the growth of capital and ever-faster cycles of production and consumption (capitalism as ideology) with fighting pollution and climate change (sustainability as a value). Another possible avenue of inquiry could relate to the ways organisations deal with the contradictions emerging from the interpretation and manifestation of ideological assumptions vis-à-vis their cultures.

In conclusion, since ideologies, including nationalism, are essential elements of organising, and therefore surviving both physically and socially in our world, we maintain that more reflexive efforts to understand their reproduction are of key importance for better evaluating their enabling and constraining power and, as far as possible, preventing their degeneration into forms of exclusion and violence.

Notes

1. In contrast with the functionalist approach, which treats culture as something the organization 'has' – that is, a manageable variable or organizational asset that can be measured, controlled, and manipulated by management –, we look at culture as something the organization 'is' – that is, a system of shared meanings and symbolic constructions (Alvesson 2013; Smircich 1983).

2. In literature, the attribute 'performative' is not typically associated with the term 'artifact', but rather with various other concepts such as 'act', 'practice' or 'symbol'. To avoid ambiguity and remain consistent with Hatch's terminology, in this article we rely on the term 'artifact' in its broadest sense, i.e. any visible aspect of a culture.
3. In most of the interviews, the terms 'binationalism' and 'binationality' were used interchangeably by interviewees. To make a conceptual distinction, however, in this paper we use 'binationalism' to indicate a mode of organizing and its political assumptions, while with the term 'binationality' we refer to the identitarian aspects related to this mode of organizing.
4. For anonymity, quotes are referenced as 'top manager' when the interviewee coincides with, or directly reports to, the President and the Executive Director; as 'manager' when the interviewee is two managerial levels below the Executive Director; and as 'clerk' when the interviewee is three managerial levels below the Executive Director.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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