

**TIKTOK AFFORDANCES AND EVERYDAY NATIONAL-
ISM: AN EXPLORATION OF #EXPAT**

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<p>Abstract</p> <p>Although we often speak of a highly interconnected and globalized world, imagining the world as being comprised of nations is a pervasive and often more commonplace than we tend to notice in our everyday lives. Nationalism is often associated with political unrest, but indeed, constructing the world as naturally being composed of nations can be conceptualized as its own form of nationalism: this is what Michael Billig refers to as 'banal nationalism.' Identifying this discourse and understanding how it is constructed is important, as it allows us to not only recognize this idea of a world of nations, but to look past it to examine what it may be obscuring in the process.</p> <p>In this research, I choose TikTok as a site for investigating constructions of banal nationalism under #expat. Today, social media is an important site for the co-creation of everyday discourse, and a place where it is possible to observe the evolution of popular narratives over time. In 2023, TikTok currently occupies a place as one of the most popular sites for user generated content, and the platform's array of affordances make video content creation accessible to a wide audience. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the interplay between platform affordances, construction of narratives, and their relationship with banal nationalism.</p> <p>Drawing on Michael Billig's theory of banal nationalism and more recent reworkings of the concept, I employ methods from Alexandra Georgakopoulou's small stories research on social media and adapt them to TikTok. This research aims to understand how everyday nationalism is constructed on Tiktok, how Tiktok's affordances contribute to how it is constructed, and finally, how the identities of creators are constructed in this media, by exploring #expat. In collecting 100 of the most popular videos under #expat, I explore common narrative frameworks in order to create a typology and illustrate the ways in which the nation is indexed within these frameworks. My analysis is qualitative and draws from narrative analysis, visual analysis and multimodal discourse analysis.</p> <p>The results of this demonstrate that several common narrative frameworks can be found under #expat, and that storytelling devices common to small stories on social media, including narrative-stancetaking and the construction of identity not only as the principal storyteller, but as a member of a particular nationality, regularly reinforce the idea of a world of nations. Furthermore, the identities constructed under this hashtag, along with the common narrative subjects, tend to center around highly positive appraisals of the destination country, with very few visible critical stances. This research has limitations and would benefit from further exploration of content on TikTok, an investigation of popular creators, and more in-depth analysis of the ideologies that are present in the content.</p>	
<p>Keywords</p> <p>banal nationalism, everyday nationalism, tiktok, social media, small stories, narrative analysis, multimodality</p>	
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1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines the ways in which online creators navigate the affordances of TikTok under #expat. In particular, I investigate the ways in which everyday nationalism is constructed within this space by employing methods based which draw from narrative analysis. By taking a holistic view and considering the affordances of the TikTok platform in the construction of media for the platform, I attempt to show how a world of nations is constructed on TikTok. I also examine the construction of national and cosmopolitan identities in this space. Constructions of everyday nationalism and cosmopolitanism online have been examined by researchers (Szulc, 2016; Dlaske, 2017; Vico, 2022), however, the intersection between everyday nationalism, cosmopolitanism and TikTok has yet to be explored in detail and within this framework. I attempt to do so by examining popular content under the hashtag '#expat.' I collected the top results underneath the hashtag in order to gain an understanding of what viral depictions of the transnational experience look like, and attempt to demonstrate that creators on TikTok make use of the platform's affordances in certain, identifiable ways. After spending significant time with the data, I devised a typology of videos and focused on examples in order to illustrate how popular formats construct everyday nationalism and cosmopolitan identity.

I argue that an examination of TikTok is necessary as the media landscape continually evolves. Video content is more popular than ever, and the position of different platforms in everyday life is subject to sudden upheaval: Elon Musk's purchase of Twitter serves as a perfect reminder of this fact. Similarly, TikTok's sudden apparition in the media landscape has thrust video content even more in the spotlight. While the platform does not reinvent online communication entirely, it certainly makes a fast-paced and semiotically rich medium accessible to the masses (at least, those with a smart phone and internet connection).

The themes one encounters on TikTok are not principally unique or unexplored outside of the application, but the medium does have an impact on how communication is created and recreated. Preliminary research has been conducted on this topic (Schellewald, 2021), but the vast breadth of content on the platform creates a daunting task; with the application undergoing constant updates and the culture itself on the

platform constantly evolving, examining communication within the app becomes complex. Still, we can also see that it has never been more salient than now, with the app having accumulated over one billion active users as of February 2023 (Doyle, 2023).

Examining the ways that the nation is constructed and by whom is a primary step in understanding how hegemonic discourses are being reproduced, or conversely, challenged, by everyday actors. The nation is, in essence, a myth which has the potential to obfuscate the complexity of the individuals it claims. Identifying discourse that invokes the nation and understanding how it is constructed is important, as it allows us to not only recognize the idea of a world of nations, but to look past it to examine what it may be obscuring in the process.

I begin my research with the definition and exploration of key concepts before outlining my methodology. In particular, I investigate and define the concepts of everyday nationalism and cosmopolitanism, explore their constructions in online spaces, and look closely at TikTok as a platform. I follow this by delving into my methodological background. I am informed heavily by media studies, modeling my investigation on the social media research of Alexandra Georgakopoulou and adapting it for TikTok. In my findings section, I define and explore the typology of videos I create, and give examples of the ways in which videos are constructed and incorporate everyday nationalism. Finally, in my discussion, I focus on the intersection of TikTok's affordances, everyday nationalism, and national and cosmopolitan identities. My aim is to engage with and explore the following research questions:

- 1. How do creators construct and co-construct everyday nationalism on the TikTok platform?*
- 2. How do TikTok's affordances contribute to how everyday nationalism is constructed within the application?*
- 3. How are the identities of creators under #expat constructed in communication on TikTok?*

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 The Nation and Nationalism

For nationalism to be recognizable, first so must the nation. For a term so ubiquitous, the nation has remained an ever-elusive concept from the very beginning of its history in modern usage, rarely defined exactly the same way twice; when examining definitions given in different languages, the ambiguity of the term becomes even more apparent (Hobsbawm, 2012, pp. 15–31). Although the term ‘nation’ has always been associated with other concepts – state, people, ethnicity, race, language, religion, geography – it cannot be captured only by these associations, nor can they be ignored. Nationalism as we know it today took several hundred years to develop, with the modern idea of the nation emerging enigmatically in the crossroads of the Enlightenment and Romanticism, taking hold through the decline of divinely ordained dynastic empires, sacred languages and religious dogmatism that had long been the status quo while being formed and influenced by the rise of the modern state, liberal thought and the use of vernacular (and publications in vernacular) across the continent (Anderson, 2006; Hobsbawm, 2012). Renan (1882, p. 10) influentially referred to the nation as ‘a spiritual principle’ and ‘a daily plebiscite’ while arguing that the nation is essentially an agreed upon heritage to which a group of people continue to feel some sort of obligation toward in the present. Popular modern definitions (including that of Benedict Anderson) note that Renan’s observations were rather astute ones (Anderson, 2006, pp. 6, 199–206).

For my research I adopted Anderson’s much cited conception of a nation: “[A]n imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign... imagined because even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members... yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion”

(Anderson, 2006, p. 6). The nation is constantly brought into existence in communication, rather than being something concretely tangible; it is a myth, although this is not to say that it is not real, nor that its existence does not have real consequences.

The reinvention and reinforcement of the very existence of the nation is the basis of what Michael Billig calls 'banal nationalism.' He defines the term as "the ideological habits which enable the established nations of the West to be reproduced... Daily, the nation is indicated, or 'flagged,' in the lives of its citizenry" (Billig, 2010, p. 6). This definition attempts to stand in contrast to common conceptions of nationalism.

When we first think of the term 'nationalism' in its everyday usage, we are bound to think of overt displays in which the nation is referenced in some kind of direct call to action. Nationalism often seems relegated to being a motivator for political unrest and uprisings, removed from more domestic domains of life. In order to counter this conception, Billig coined the term 'banal nationalism' to encompass subtler and sometimes unspoken ways in which the concept of the nation is reinforced. Billig points to the limp flags hanging outside public buildings as an example of banal nationalism: in their everydayness, they do not draw attention, nor demand a reaction, and so they gradually become commonplace and unnoticed (Billig, 2010, pp. 39-43). In his conception of banal nationalism, Billig hoped to call attention to the production and reproduction of nationalism in the West, particularly by the state and the media, noting that scholars often focus instead on what he calls 'hot nationalism.' Hot nationalism is overt rather than covert, obvious and often accompanied by political turmoil or unrest (Billig, 2010, pp. 43-46).

Since the publication of Billig's book, scholars have made an effort to notice the pervasiveness of the framework of a world of nations in all sorts of contexts, from mass media, to cityscapes, to online discourse. So normative has it become to view the world as one composed of nations that this framework is often invoked even when not seemingly necessary; recognizing not only where, but how this occurs, is important as the media landscape continually evolves.

In application, this means that banal nationalism is a flagging of an imagined community, an allusion to a collective invented and reinvented in communication. It need not explicitly make reference to a state, ethnic group, people, language, religion, or geographical border, but any of these things can be incorporated into its mythos. Furthermore, to give a couple of contemporary examples of the ways in which the above are reworked, in Canada, the nation is often defined in part by its multiculturalism. The idea of a multicultural Canada was shown to be repeatedly co- and recreated during focus groups and interviews with members of the Tamil diaspora in Ontario (Amarasingam, Naganathan, & Hyndman, 2016). While these discussions display a wide range of reactions toward the idea of Canada as a multicultural nation, the narrative is seemingly familiar to many of the participants, demonstrating its

pervasiveness. Similarly, by engaging in a multimodal critical discourse analysis of a partially-online marketing campaign designed by the Woolworths grocery store chain, Cramer (2022, p. 73) demonstrates the ways in which the nation of Australia is constructed as a multicultural (but linguistically homogenous) nation.

It is worth noting that the nation and that state, although often mentioned together, should not be conflated either. Kurdistan, used to denote the geographic area occupied by the Kurdish people, stretches across parts of today's political territories of Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria, and while the Kurds have historically never had a Kurdish state, they have been recognized as a nation, and the discussion of a self-determined and independent state has been taken up not only by the Kurds themselves, but also by occupying forces (Radpey, 2022). On the other hand, the aftermath of the breakup of states such as Yugoslavia demonstrates a complicated relationship between the state and the nation, one in which it is possible for individuals to report still feeling that they are Yugoslav even nearly two decades after the end of the state (Kolstø, 2014).

This is all not to say that the national myth is limited to its most common associations, either, nor that it is always cohesive. It is quite possible to recreate the nation in endlessly different ways through communication, and certainly, over time, national myths are resemiotized.

2.1.1 Everyday Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism

Billig's approach is decidedly top-down, with a primary focus on communication from highly influential actors and organizations and especially the press and government. He himself acknowledges this stance and has noted that his lack of focus on a bottom-up approach was intentional, although he does not condemn such approaches and finds them compatible with his work (Billig, 2009, P. 350). While compelling arguments have been made for the case of staying true to Billig's original vision (Duchesne, 2018), Billig's thesis need not be confined to being applied to top-down communication.

While the need to examine state actors should not be entirely cast aside, Skey (2009) points out that bottom-up approaches that focus on everyday actors is a necessary addition to the study of nationalism, and furthermore, that Billig's original conception of the role of the media should not be taken for granted, nor the assumption that it addresses a coherent national public (Skey, 2009, p. 335). This is especially relevant in a time when news distribution is done in highly digital formats that more easily transgress (some) national boundaries (and in many cases, intentionally, with the aim to achieve a larger readership).

As a response to the need for a bottom-up approach, so-called 'everyday nationalism' studies have emerged. The divergence between banal nationalism and

everyday nationalism studies is made visible in Jones' and Merriman's (2009) study on road signs in Wales. In their article, the authors contest the binary between banal and hot nationalisms, particularly because there is little account taken for the dialogue surrounding and resulting from the symbols of nationalism. They proceed to demonstrate how seemingly banal objects, such as the road signs, can become highly politicized. Instead of a binary between hot and banal nationalism, they suggest instead the term 'everyday nationalism.' The interaction with the signs (namely, the conversation and outrage at a lack of Welsh language on the signs) created a noteworthy political dialogue.

While everyday nationalism was indeed posited as a response to banal nationalism studies, they are not incompatible. Fox (2018) explains that everyday nationalism studies are not necessarily in opposition to Billig's work, but rather another approach to the study of nationalism, which might be of interest to scholars for a variety of reasons. Fox asserts instead that both kinds of scholarship are necessary and contribute to the wider field of nationalism studies in different ways (2018, p.864-865). Similarly, Goode and Stroup (2015) argue that an everyday nationalism approach subverts many of the issues of nationalism studies; namely, that the nationalistic practices of those with the most power are underrepresented in literature.

Fundamentally, banal nationalism and everyday nationalism are sometimes overlapping but distinct entities, in practice made distinct by a difference between top-down and bottom-up approaches. If Billig's original intentions are to be followed, banal nationalism studies are primarily interested in the state as an actor and the constructor of nationalism, while everyday nationalism is more concerned with individual actors, the 'everyday' people (although this is hardly a strict binary). Banal nationalism is by its very nature difficult to identify, in that it goes, by definition, unnoticed, while everyday nationalism may (but not necessarily) be more 'overt,' although its subjects (individuals) likely have much less societal influence than the state or national press.

In designing my approach, I settled on a bottom-up, everyday approach, as I was more interested in examining how everyday actors recreate and reimagine the nation. Naturally, I also chose to draw on Jones' and Merriman's (2009) concept of everyday nationalism. Users creating multimedia on TikTok, and creating a discourse around it is, I would argue, not necessarily an intentionally political act, in that the focus of the content is often centered around the everyday lives of the creators.

In reflecting on nationalism, cosmopolitanism often appears as the flip side of the same proverbial coin. While cosmopolitanism is often treated as the opposite of nationalism, their everyday appearances often lead to the same conclusion: "[T]hose who posit a new era of global or cosmopolitan realities simply end up reifying the myth of a historically stable, coherent nation-state" (Skey, 2012, p. 473). In other words,

for the cosmopolitan to emerge, it must come from a world in which nation states are the norm, as cosmopolitanism is often implicitly defined by its challenging of nation-state borders. Employing a cosmopolitan lens indeed invokes the nation, whether intentional or not. Inversely, to evoke the nation is also to evoke a world of nations. Billig notes that “[w]ithout constant observation of the world of other nations, nationalists would be unable to claim that their nations meet the universal codes of nationhood” (Billig, 2010, p. 80).

A concrete definition of cosmopolitanism is often somewhat elusive in that it can encompass anything from consumer habits to awareness of global social issues to the socio-cultural centers of the highly mobile upper class (Skey, 2012). Cosmopolitan as a term has often been employed to denote “professional-occupational transnational cultures,” resulting in an academic focus which was often biased toward individuals hailing from the Global North and excluding low-income migrants and refugees. (Werbner, 1999, p. 17). Furthermore, cosmopolitanism as a theory also has its roots in the sphere of political philosophy, further muddying the waters. Kant (1795, third article) argued, for example, that world citizenship (a tenet of perpetual peace) entailed never treating a stranger with hostility upon his arrival, and furthermore, not refusing him if doing so would cause him harm; simultaneously, states have the right to refuse passage to individuals who would inflict harm upon them. In the creation of these guidelines, a link between the conception of cosmopolitanism and an emphasis on individual rights was implicitly defined. Now, over two hundred years later, cosmopolitanism and cosmopolitan democracy have become political stances, although not without criticism (Calhoun, 2002; Isiksel, 2020).

For the purpose of this research, I rely on a definition from Ong (2009, pp. 458–460), who defines the term banal cosmopolitanism as a performance by those wanting to construct an identity that posits them beyond a single nationality. This acknowledges the idea that cosmopolitanism subtly reinforces the idea of a world of nations. While this definition is relatively open, it allows for an inductive approach to a range of constructed communication. Ong (2009, p. 460) argues that in examining cosmopolitanism, we need to move beyond consumer habits, reminding ourselves that an individual’s purchasing habits do not determine the construction of a cosmopolitan identity. In other words, cosmopolitanism is not just an incidental occurrence resulting from consumerism and an increasingly economically interconnected world. This definition avoids a deterministic view on what it means to be cosmopolitan, and instead places the individual and constructed communication at the center of the research.

2.1.2 Identifying Everyday Nationalism

In taking an inductive approach, identifying everyday nationalism (or cosmopolitanism) becomes a rather complex task, especially when taking Billig’s ‘banal’ conception

of the unnoticed into account. By definition, banal nationalism does not draw attention and escapes our attention as being nationalism in the first place. While everyday nationalism is not necessarily so covert, it certainly can be. In order to address the problem of discovering sites of banal and everyday nationalism, relying on the examples and recommendations of other researchers is key.

Fox (2017) proposes a research agenda that should help scholars to find the spaces where banal nationalism becomes noticeable. Drawing on ethnomethodological approach that emphasizes micro-interactional moments over long term studies (p. 31), he asserts that rather than looking solely for reminders of nationalism, we need to look at how we are being reminded and where we can breach the edges of the nation in order to see where it is made explicit. Fox defines three types of edges: the spatial edges, the temporal edges, and the political edges. Spatial edges are composed of the physical border of a nation; airports and border crossings serve as two examples. Temporal edges refer to the ideal that a person is slowly acculturated to a nation over time, whether that begins during childhood or as part of immigration later in life. It can also happen at a larger scale, enacted by a state, whether it is part of nation state formation or simply a temporary surge in hot nationalism due to geopolitical events (Fox, 2017, p. 36). Finally, the political edges of the nation can be found when topics that are nationally relevant, such as education, immigration or taxation, come to be debated.

For the purpose of this research, I take special focus on the spatial and temporal edges, which I argue are always implied in the terms 'expat' and 'expatriate.' An expatriate is, by literal definition, "someone who does not live in their own country" (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, n.d.). A border crossing is therefore implied to have happened in the act of calling oneself an 'expat.' Furthermore, Fox's idea of acculturation is implied in the act of each individual simply existing over time after having moved.

2.2 Social Media as a Site for Research

2.2.1 Nationalism and Identity Negotiation Online

Over the past couple decades, a focus on applying and adapting more well-established methodological tradition to new forms of media has been brought to the foreground. With such a rich sphere of interaction, identity construction online is visible and sometimes unavoidable. Identity plays a unique and important role in online spaces, especially in that it can be enacted differently depending on the affordances of the platform itself. Unsurprisingly, nationality and national identity are pervasively reproduced and negotiated online and according to the affordances of the platform.

The design of webpages and applications often nationalizes online spaces where the focus is not explicitly on the nation. In an examination of banal nationalism in LGBTQ websites in Poland and Turkey, Szulc (2016) identifies several ways in which the nation is flagged in these spaces. Firstly, the use of national languages on these websites as the primary language of communication subtly reinforces them as 'national' spaces, as do the use of deictic words, designating spaces for 'Home' and 'World,' for example, on two of the Polish websites that provided news (p. 313). Furthermore, the website titles and descriptions also often included references to the nation, and website logos often utilized visual references that incorporated references to the map or flag of the nation. Szulc argues that despite the way that banal nationalism makes it difficult to think of the world in other terms, "queering the nation" has some benefits in that it allows minorities a way to feel at home within nations where the political discourse has traditionally excluded them (p. 318).

Indeed, social media platforms not only create spaces for those who have been marginalized in political discourse, but also host (sometimes widely-circulated) content that challenges normative depictions of the other. This has been observed both in the case of large creators who have developed an audience, as well as private individuals who largely utilize social media to communicate with people they know in some capacity. On YouTube, rapper-vlogger Hassan Maikal (a Finnish creator with parents from Somalia) responds to hate comments in a video by shifting the focus away from the racist nature of the comments he is reading aloud; he adopts a disappointed tone at the user's lack knowledge of Finnish language conventions, playing with the idea of who is actually more 'Finnish' (Leppänen & Westinen, 2021, pp. 143–145).

On a smaller scale, private individuals also use social media to renegotiate their national and ethnic identities, albeit utilizing the conventions and affordances of different platforms in different ways. Employing an ethnographic approach, Vico (2022) engaged with Serbian Londoners in their everyday lives, visiting them at their homes, attending birthday parties, and meeting up in local cafes, in order to gain a better understanding of their identity negotiation as it appears online. Participants often attempted to renegotiate and reconstruct the idea of being Serbian online, especially in light of negative perceptions following the breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s. Social media posts often focused on banal cosmopolitan negotiations (framing oneself as an expat surrounded by an international crowd), but also on more banal national symbols, such as food, traditions, and landscape (p. 36).

While online spaces provide a wealth of content to examine, the content itself perhaps tells only half of the story; hidden nearby, the comments section is a place where dialogue often flourishes. While comments are left by only a fraction of those consuming online content, they do provide a look into how ideas are created and recreated in ways that are appropriate and unique to the platform. Even those that do

not incite engagement (likes, replies, etc.) are likely often read by thousands and thousands of eyes.

Aryanstanbek (2022) utilizes discourse analysis to examine how hegemonic ideas of femininity are recreated through comments on social media in Kazakhstan (primarily over Facebook and Instagram). There is a demonstrable, reoccurring pattern of nationalist rhetoric, with users creating connections between ethnicity, nationality, and what it means to be a good man or woman in the comments section, while still others protest these definitions of a 'good Kazakh woman.' Similarly, KhosraviNik and Zia (2014) dissect rhetoric of nationalist identity within a Facebook group focusing on the political nature of the name of the Persian Gulf. Taking a closer look at the comments posted on a selection of five group posts demonstrating high engagement, the authors focus on referential and predicational strategies employed by members of the group in (re)constructing both Iranian (Self) and Arabian (Other) identities. These discourses take place primarily in the comments section of certain posts, where users are free to respond to the content and to each other in an informal manner.

YouTube represents another platform where the comments section is an important site of discourse, and banal nationalism has been shown to thrive here as well (Dlaske, 2017; White; 2015). Dlaske (2017) chooses to utilize both Billig's concept of banal and hot nationalisms, as well as Jones and Merriman's (2009) everyday nationalism, not seeing them as mutually exclusive concepts, in examining the discourse underneath two YouTube videos in minority languages (Irish and Sámi), noting that everyday nationalism is quite a prominent feature of much of the dialogue. Many commenters express considerable positive affect toward the uses of the languages, and often in doing so, also toward the Irish and the Sámi peoples themselves. The small number of negative comments are often quickly rebuked, and commentators outside Ireland claiming Irish heritage, for example, are often criticized for their claims on the nationality and language, drawing an us/ them divide. These comments are ultimately reinforcing and reconstructing the idea of the nation; it can also be seen as a prime example of imagined communities (Anderson, 1983). White's (2015) findings demonstrate the prevalence of many of the same affective comments, along with similar themes of enacted belonging.

2.2.2 TikTok

The international version of TikTok as we know it today was made available worldwide for download after merging with the app musical.ly in August 2018 (TikTok, 2018). Since then, it has become one of the most widely downloaded applications worldwide, and has rapidly become a source of a diverse range of short-form video content. It should be noted that Douyin (the version of the app available in China) and TikTok are not the same application and do not have the same set of features.

Furthermore, they do not share content, as user data is stored separately and according to different legislation (Su & Tang, 2023). For the purpose of this research, I will only be examining TikTok.

TikTok serves as a platform to create and share short-form video content. While video content can be viewed on other devices through an internet browser, such as a desktop computer monitor or tablet, the 9:16 aspect ratio of the video content is best suited to be viewed through the mobile application. Furthermore, video can be taken through the mobile application, subverting the need to potentially crop video taken using another device with a different standard aspect-ratio, such as a DSLR camera. The TikTok application also offers a constantly updated catalogue of filters, video effects and audio tracks, incentivizing users even further to create their content directly within the application itself. The barrier to entry (in terms of content creation) is perhaps lower on TikTok than other platforms in that one is able to create content entirely within the app and employ different digital effects that would take more time and technical knowledge to recreate outside of the application from scratch.

Upon making an account, users are introduced to the 'For You Page' (referred to as the FYP/fyp in shorthand), where video content is shown to the user based on TikTok's algorithm. Videos play automatically and on loop, and one has only to swipe up to see the next recommended video. On the right side, the user has the option to like the content (which adds the video to their list of 'liked videos,' which can be either public or private), open the comments/comment themselves (if commenting has been left on), bookmark the content (saving it for the user separately from 'liked' content) and share the content (both inside the app and out). Finally, across the bottom, the comments and hashtags from the uploader are displayed, and below that, the audio track is named, with the corresponding image displayed in the right-hand corner.

TikTok's FYP algorithm has been the topic of much debate and chatter. While the exact equation used has not been made public, a document including a rough outline of the user experience has been shared (Smith, 2021):

The document offers a rough equation for how videos are scored, in which a prediction driven by machine learning and actual user behavior are summed up for each of three bits of data: likes, comments and playtime, as well as an indication that the video has been played:

$$P_{\text{like}} \times V_{\text{like}} + P_{\text{comment}} \times V_{\text{comment}} + E_{\text{playtime}} \times V_{\text{playtime}} + P_{\text{play}} \times V_{\text{play}}$$

“The recommender system gives scores to all the videos based on this equation, and returns to users videos with the highest scores,” the document says (paras. 12-14).

While the ‘For you page’ is perhaps the main way to discover content, it is not the only way. Users have the option of following other users; content created by followed users is curated into a separate feed. Furthermore, users are also able to use the search function, which brings content up based on keywords and hashtags used (as well as seemingly sorting content by popularity, although it is unclear whether the algorithm steps in to further curate search results).

The complex interplay between users and algorithms should also be considered. Users are not passive receivers of content suggested arbitrarily; creators are often well aware of the ways that content may be pushed or not, and content is therefore created with the affordances of the algorithm in mind. Furthermore, social media is often designed with advertisers in mind, and these features are able to be successfully co-opted not only by corporations, but also political groups, activists, and micro-influencers (Maly, 2020; Jaramillo-Dent et al., 2022; Civila & Jaramillo-Dent, 2022). On TikTok, it is possible to pay to push content, partner with influencers interested in accepting sponsorship deals, and create a business account which allows access to analytics unavailable to standard TikTok accounts (TikTok for Business, n.d.). Marketable content is described as authentic, positive, and entertaining, and the incorporation of popular audio tracks, trends, and concise and informative text is pushed by TikTok as means of formatting a good ad (TikTok for Business, 2021).

Audio and music play a large role on TikTok; users have the option to tap on a track used in a video in order to display other videos that utilize the same sound, as well as to use the sound themselves. Many trends evolve this way; users may film themselves doing a popular dance that corresponds with the music clip, utilize an audio clip that is associated with a comedic trend, or recount a story in a multimodal fashion utilizing an audio setup. Entire genres of video storytelling rely heavily on the use of both diegetic and non-diegetic audio (Vizcaíno-Verdú & Abidin, 2022).

Entextualization, the process by which discourse material is lifted from its original context and repositioned in a new context through audio is therefore highly evident (Leppänen et al., 2014, p. 7). In terms of entextualization, audio can literally be taken and inserted into new videos without any alteration at all, and the popularity of doing so is made evident when one taps on an audio track, as one can then see a collection of videos that utilize the same audio track in different ways.

TikTok also enables one to track the use of filters in much the same way; by tapping on a filter used in a video, you are taken to a page populated with videos using the same effect. Furthermore, if you view a video through a user’s profile, a search bar

appears at the top populated with a search based on what the algorithm deems the content of the video to be (for example, if you are watching a video of a polar bear jumping into an ice hole, the text might read “polar bear swimming.” Comments also have the potential to be linked with a search page if they include key words that the algorithm associates with the content of the video. Take again the example of the hypothetical polar bear video, which is quite popular and has several million views: when you open the comments section, one of the top comments reads “I love watching polar bears swimming!” Since this comment includes what TikTok deems key words, ‘polar bears swimming’ might be in a slightly bolded blue text with a magnifying glass symbol appearing next to it. It should be noted that users who leave comments are not capable of manually adding this search function, but that it is seemingly put in place by the TikTok algorithm itself (made more evident by the fact that occasionally, the search bar suggested search seems entirely unrelated to the video’s content).

Features like this make what Georgakopoulou (2015a) refers to as ‘rescripting’ quite evident when analyzing practices on TikTok. Georgakopoulou defines rescripting as “a media-enabled practice that involves visually and/or verbally manipulating previously circulated stories so as to create alternative stories, that are offered and taken up as humorous, satirical takes on the original story” (2015a, p. 65). With so many ways of directly viewing how other users are participating in certain trends, utilizing certain features, and positioning themselves within content genres, rescripting is not only highly visible, but highly encouraged. Rescripting is not unrelated to resemiotization, a term used to capture the transformation of discourse over time, and in particular, how semiotic components may be reconfigured (Iedema, 2003). Still I utilize the term ‘rescripting’ as a way of drawing attention to the ‘media-enabled’ aspect of the transformation of narrative.

TikTok’s design encourages users to post with a relatively broad audience in mind. While it is certainly possible to follow and post content for people already in one’s social circle (and also possible to make one’s account private, so that videos are only viewable by approved followers), TikTok brings users to the FYP upon opening the app, which is populated with content based on algorithmic recommendations rather than solely content from creators the user is following. In this way, TikTok is perhaps closer to YouTube than platforms such as Instagram in the way that creators, even those who are not influencers nor have a large social media following, are encouraged to assume the role of an entertainer, interacting with an audience of people they do not necessarily know and may have never tried to search for the content themselves. (That is not to say that the audience is random, but that the potential reach of any video is perhaps broader than what the creator may have originally expected). Furthermore, TikTok is optimized for short-form video content. While it is not the first

platform to do this (and most popular social media apps have adapted rapidly in order to compete with TikTok: Instagram with its 'reels' function, Facebook highlighting video content more prominently on the application), it is currently the dominant platform for such content. For these reasons, studies focusing specifically on videos created for and published on TikTok are necessary.

A critical lens has already been turned toward the massive amounts of content on TikTok. By viewing the most popular videos under a hashtag, scholars have been able to glean some ideas indeed about who is at the forefront of certain conversations (in terms of exposure and engagement, at least) floating around in the cultural zeitgeist. For example, Krutrök and Åkerlund (2022), in examining the tag #BlackLivesMatter, demonstrated that many of the most popular videos on the platform are created by white content creators who seemed to address a primarily white audience, calling attention to the movement without engaging in much activism themselves and simultaneously receiving a significant amount of exposure by using a popular hashtag. In other words, content creators with a large following stood to benefit from aligning themselves with a viral movement on social media, and therefore this must be considered when approaching the content itself.

In a study investigating the identity performance of self-identified Moroccan-Spanish mixed couples, researchers Civila & Jaramillo-Dent (2022) noted that many of the topics addressed by the content creators prioritized emphasizing Moroccan culture, and that their cultural hybridization tended to focus around adopting the Moroccan partner's lifestyle. The authors hypothesize that this is due to the marketability of such content, especially by using the affordances of the TikTok platform (Civila & Jaramillo-Dent, 2022, p. 6).

These studies both emphasize the fact that creators on TikTok are highly aware of the content they are posting, the trends passing through on the app, and their audience. Content is anything but random, and the marketability of content seems to play an important role for creators. Although the design of the TikTok platform indeed encourages the creation of entertainment and content that demands ones' full attention (TikTok itself has chosen to align itself more with the entertainment industry than social media; Honigman, 2022), it still incorporates user-generated content, and views and engagement metrics put an emphasis on utilizing video formats that are demonstrably popular. Furthermore, TikTok's Creator Fund allows users with at least 100,000 authentic video views in the last 30 days to earn money based on audience engagement (TikTok, 2021), further cementing TikTok as an arena for internet celebrities and influencers alike to commodify their content.

3 METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

3.1 Methodological Approach

Discourse in the online sphere is constantly changing and reinventing itself with the advent of new platforms; the massive surge in the popularity of the app TikTok stands as a testament to this. Social media provides an endlessly rich arena for collecting new kinds of data, and naturally it is up to researchers to not only adapt old methodological traditions, but also reinvent them.

In designing my own methodological framework, looking under the umbrella of discourse analysis (DA) was a somewhat obvious choice, given that my data was naturally occurring and my research questions concerned with how certain ideas are constructed in social interaction. Furthermore, as I was working with Billig's theory of banal nationalism, it is worth mentioning that Billig himself is a prominent voice within CDA studies (1999a, 1999b, 2008), emphasizing the importance of situating the subject of research within its broader context (Billig, 1999a). His thesis of banal nationalism hinges on arguments articulated with the use of CDA, as he explores nationalism both in its broader, historical context, while illustrating cases of banal nationalism through specific, contemporary examples. The critical turn to the research is evident throughout, in that by describing banal nationalism, he points to the discrepancy between the large amount of power that discourse in Western states and mass media held, and the comparatively small amount of critical attention being given to it in academia. As I do not see Billig's original thesis as incompatible with a bottom-up approach (everyday nationalism), this made the integration of the theory into my methodology relatively seamless.

I decided to model my approach in accordance with the data I was collecting. Being a regular consumer of content on TikTok, I drew parallels between the video

clips in my feed and Georgakopoulou's 'small stories' approach to social media (Georgakopoulou, 2016a, 2017). While Georgakopoulou's studies focus on other social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, all of which predate TikTok and differ in their affordances, I argue that the media posted to all these platforms can be considered and analyzed as a form of storytelling. Furthermore, Georgakopoulou places emphasis on situating social media communication within its greater context, taking interest in rescripting and resemiotization of discourse online (2013, pp. 21–23). This focus is ideal for investigating TikTok, where rescripting plays an integral part of storytelling.

Well established in the field of sociolinguistics and social media studies, Georgakopoulou's research focuses on what she calls 'small stories.' Small stories are defined in contrast to typical, autobiographical stories that have been the traditional subjects of narrative studies, and instead are often fragmented, may focus on events that are currently taking place or even future events, and occur in interaction (and sometimes are co-authored), rather than requiring formal elicitation (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008). Furthermore, these small stories are demonstrated to be sites of identity performance and negotiation in interaction (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008). Georgakopoulou has applied and adapted the concept to social media, putting emphasis both on place as an integral part of the discourse (2015a, pp. 64 – 66), as well as the fragmented and open nature of online storytelling (Georgakopoulou, 2016a). In other words, social media is identified as a site in which the telling of small stories takes place quite regularly, especially because the affordances of social media quite literally encourage users to be concise (Georgakopoulou, 2013b).

In examining small stories on social media, Georgakopoulou does not prescribe a strict structure in terms of methods, but instead relies first on an adaptive ethnographic approach that involves observing content over time in order to become familiar with patterns of activity and platform affordances (Georgakopoulou, 2016b, p. 272). Once patterns become recognizable, qualitative or quantitative methods may be employed to help sort and collect data, which is then coded qualitatively, utilizing the observations made initially during the ethnographic phase of the research (Georgakopoulou, 2016b, pp. 273–275). Data collection methods vary and are adapted to the type of data at hand; in examining selfies on Instagram, for example, Georgakopoulou employed her daughter in helping her to identify top selfie posters from within her friends list (Georgakopoulou, 2016a). Finally, patterns that appear during coding are investigated further using an approach informed a heuristic for the analysis of small stories developed by Georgakopoulou (2015b, pp. 258–259).

In this heuristic, three levels of analysis are considered: ways of telling, sites, and tellers (Georgakopoulou, 2015b, p. 258). Investigating ways of telling involves taking note of what Georgakopoulou refers to as the iterativity of storytelling. "[C]apturing

iterativity in the ways of telling necessitates an emphasis on types of stories as recurrent social practices and engendering specific types of expectations about what story is to be told where and by whom” (Georgakopoulou, 2013a). In other words, understanding how narrative forms are constructed and reconstructed, and who is taking up this task, is taken into consideration.

Sites, the second level of analysis, refers to what Georgakopoulou also interchangeably refers to as place. For the purpose of this research, I also employ the term ‘place’ according to Georgakopoulou’s (2015a) definition:

“...I view *every space as place*: as an experience, lived, and practised social area by social actors. Whether it refers to the taleworld or to where stories are actually produced, place is an integral part of socioculturally informed everyday life practices, shaping communication, including stories, and being constituted by it, through the participants interactional dynamics. On this basis, I opt for the term *place* over a notion of *space* as an abstract entity or a physical location devoid of social action” (p. 65).

In the case of my own research, the ‘place’ can be conceptualized as a number of different sites: the TikTok application, and more specifically, its user interface, the nature and location of the device used to view content (TikTok is, for example, available in-browser on a traditional computer, but the user interface is not as well developed, making TikTok a somewhat different place depending on how it has been accessed), the physical locations of the users, as well as the taleworld constructed by the creators themselves.

The final heuristic level of analysis, tellers, asks us to pay attention to the individuals telling stories as complex actors fulfilling a number of roles, both inside and outside of the storytelling act: this includes their roles as storytellers, as characters within the story, and the many identities and roles they may respectively construct and enact outside of the storytelling act (Georgakopoulou, 2015b, pp. 258–259).

I integrate Georgakopoulou’s approach with Billig’s theory based on several points of theoretical and methodological overlap. Firstly, in Billig’s conception of banal nationalism, he notes that the concepts of ‘nation’ and ‘place’ are intimately linked, even in the age of electronic media (Billig, 2010, pp. 74–78, 143–145). The nation is not merely an imagined group of people, but also an imagined place to which said people are bound, and although nation-states indeed demarcate a distinct territory which they govern, it is indeed unlikely that many individuals will lay their eyes upon its entirety (Billig, 2010, p. 74). Therefore, this place to which the nation is tied is constructed in much the same way that the nation itself is constructed, that is, discursively. As Georgakopoulou’s heuristic specifically advises an analysis of place, as discussed

above, this provides an ideal opportunity to observe the construction of the nation as place, if it is indeed occurring, and connects with Fox's (2017) recommendations to search for spatial edges of the nation. It is also notable that Fox and Georgakopoulou both take ethnomethodological observation as a starting point (Fox, 2017, p. 31; Georgakopoulou, 2016b, p. 272).

Regarding the other two elements of the heuristic, 'ways of telling' and 'tellers,' I argue that approaching each of these through the lens of everyday nationalism allows for a large amount of depth in understanding how everyday nationalism is constructed, and by whom. I put more emphasis on 'ways of telling' than on 'tellers' due to considerations of scope and ethics for this research. (I do not investigate the creators beyond what is present in the content of the videos collected as data, both to prevent them from being too easily recognizable, as well as due to constraints in the size and scope of the thesis overall.) In particular, I pay attention to 'ways of telling' that Georgakopoulou identifies as being prominent on social media: narrative-stancetaking and rescripting.

Narrative-stancetaking refers to the teller's way of indicating that storytelling is happening or about to happen, and this can occur in conventionalized ways (Georgakopoulou, 2013b, p. 23). This is connected to the 'tellers' level of the heuristic, in that it often involves positioning oneself as the storyteller. I use the concept of narrative-stancetaking to investigate if and how the invoking nation (or nationality) is utilized in this process. Similarly, by paying attention to patterns of rescripting, we are able to potentially spot the ways in which invoking the nation is conventionalized across data and in relation with broader social media practices. It should be noted here that in examining rescripting, an understanding of the multimodal nature of discourse is necessary. The term multimodal is used to describe the fact that discourse is composed of "different semiotic modes (for instance language and image)" (Van Leeuwen, 2015, p. 447). Analyzing rescripting practices requires attention to all the potential semiotic resources available to the creator, especially in the context of video content.

3.2 Data Collection and Ethical Considerations

In curating my videos, I first created a second TikTok account, rather than using my personal one, to avoid any potential algorithmic biases, and avoided using the FYP entirely. I did indeed create the new account on my personal phone, but as the algorithm is not public, I cannot be sure how any personal or location data were used to populate the search page with results. TikTok's privacy notice does indicate that basic personal information is used in order to augment one's experience on the application (TikTok, 2023). I, a self-identified woman whose personal phone was set up to use

standard (American) English, was 24 years old and living near Paris, France, at the time of data collection; I assume that these factors were likely taken into account in some capacity by the app, although whether it applied only to the FYP or also to the search results, I cannot say.

I collected the data in June, 2022, by searching #expat and liking the first videos that appeared, coming to a total of approximately 200 videos. I had estimated that I would include around 100 videos in my initial content analysis, so I then worked from the first video I had liked forward, skipping and un-liking videos if they did not fulfill the criteria I had set out. I chose a larger number of videos than I expected to be able to do close analysis on, but a small enough number that it would remain manageable to sift through while searching for themes and patterns. With so many videos underneath this hashtag (1.7 billion at the time of research), limiting the number of videos was important.

The collection of data was guided both by General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the ethical guidelines published by the Federation of Finnish Learned Societies (TVS). The lawful basis of the collection and processing of data in this research can be found under GDPR Article 6.1e (Regulation 2016/679), which states that “processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest.” Data collected regularly fell into the category of “special categories of personal data” which is defined in GDPR Article 9.1 and prohibited from being processed (Regulation 2016/679). However, GDPR Article 9.2e states that there are several exceptions to Article 9.1, and processing is legal if personal data “are manifestly made public by the data subject” (Regulation 2016/679).

As noted on the TVS webpage on social media research, determining what data are truly public and ethical for processing in research is not as simple as only investigating the legal status of said data, and furthermore, may not adequately protect participants from harm (Ahteensuu, 2019). While all the data collected could be considered legally processable according to GDPR, and creators on TikTok are informed that their data is visible to third parties in the TikTok privacy policy (TikTok, 2023), it cannot be assumed that all creators are aware of GDPR regulations, nor the contents of the TikTok privacy policy. To account for this, I took extra steps to ensure that data was collected and processed in a way that would mitigate any impact on creators.

I decided to like and store the videos in-app, rather than download them, as a way of respecting the wishes of the creator in case they decided to delete their content for any reason; if a video disappeared, I simply excluded it from the data set entirely. I also chose to exclude any videos that did not have at least 300,000 views (this resulted in all videos having at least 100,000 likes). This ended up excluding only seven (7) videos from the original data set, but prevented me from including content that had not reached a relatively wide audience already, giving me some assurance that the

videos I was analyzing were truly known by their creators to be public beyond a small, niche audience (it should be noted that all the videos I liked are public and available for anyone to view through TikTok). Had there been any content created by someone seemingly under the age of 18, I would have excluded it as well, but creators were primarily professionals or university students. I also excluded any videos that were not primarily in English. Creators whose videos were included in the data set were contacted whenever possible, and primarily through the TikTok application itself or through Instagram. This contact informed the creator of the inclusion of one or more of their videos in the research, informed them of the ways in which this data would be processed and stored, and included a link to a Research Notification and Privacy Notice.¹

Once I had collected the data, processing occurred by describing each video in a descriptive fashion, excluding any names, usernames, or links. I did not screenshot any of the content, but instead relied on my own descriptions. This data was stored in a spreadsheet file, which was saved to the hard drive of a password protected computer to which I was the only person with access. This data will be deleted from the computer by December of 2023, as will the TikTok account used in data collection. I should also note that videos appearing in this thesis have had some identifying information excluded or changed to prevent it being easily searchable. For instance, I do not include any video descriptions or other hashtags, as these can easily be used to find the original video. While I cannot claim that the data is anonymized, and those who are familiar with the creator may be able to recognize them, videos that are used as examples in this text have had some identifying information changed in order to prevent the video from being too easily searchable within both TikTok and Google. This was especially important when including video text, such as video titles. Due to the amount of rescripting that occurs on TikTok, video titles often follow a popular format, and are made unique by only the nation-state or nation-states mentioned. Therefore, by replacing nation-state names in an effort to pseudonymize them, it is made more difficult to locate these individual videos easily.

I chose to search under the term ‘expat’ for several reasons. Firstly, when taking Fox’s (2017) idea of examining the nation’s boundaries, the term ‘expat’ proved to represent the idea of not only a border crossing, but acculturation over time. Secondly, the amount of content available under the hashtag made it a site rich with perspectives from many different users. With so many videos, it can be assumed that overall, videos underneath the hashtag must have a relatively wide reach, including many users who stumbled upon this content on their FYP. This was of particular interest to me in the way that it played into the idea of everyday nationalism. If these videos were being

¹ For the full Privacy Notice and Research Notification, see: <https://expattiktokresearch.wordpress.com/>

shown to and interacted with by users who were not specifically even searching for them, it would be a good place to try to spot commonplace, easily overlooked and seemingly 'everyday' constructions of nationalism. Furthermore, I decided to conduct a search underneath a key word, rather than following particular users, because I was interested in including videos from creators who were not necessarily only creating content around being an 'expat.'

The term 'expat' is highly contentious in many spheres for its connotations, as it brings about associations with affluent individuals, mostly hailing from the Global North, who choose to move away from their home for professional reasons (Vora, 2012; Leinonen, 2012). While the usage of the term is not always obvious in the way that it includes and excludes certain individuals, it is evident that the term is associated with individuals who are 'white' and 'Western' (Olier & Spadavecchia, 2022; Kunz, 2016). Furthermore, the way in which is often employed in lieu of words like 'migrant' and 'immigrant' implies a divide in the experiences of individuals who move to a new region of the world.

By exploring content from creators who utilize this term, I was intentionally narrowing my search to include individuals who felt comfortable associating with #expat. Still, considering the algorithmic nature of TikTok, I avoid too much speculation on the reasons creators utilized certain hashtags. Ivarsson (2019, p. 156) notes that "[l]iking' and 'sharing' posts may be a way to express identity, but they also function to build and sustain social networks so their content is not always the most important factor. For this reason, care should be taken in drawing conclusions based only on digital content and activity." I argue that this also applies to the usage of hashtags, which may be chosen to help spread a video to an audience that would engage with it, rather than a decision made because the creator explicitly identifies with the term (or think their audience would identify them with the term). It is worth noting that the term expat did not actually feature in the content of any of the videos I watched beyond its inclusion as a hashtag in the description.

3.3 Data Analysis

Before engaging in any formal analysis, I familiarized myself with the content by watching the videos I had liked. While I am a casual consumer of TikTok content and am somewhat familiar with the affordances of the platform, content niches are often very much separated on the app, and I did not recognize any of the creators nor content upon initial review.

My analysis process began with creating a spreadsheet where I described the content of the TikTok videos according to several criteria, but initially in a descriptive

fashion. In respect of privacy concerns, I did not include any names, usernames, screenshots, or links to videos in my spreadsheet, instead relying on my own descriptions to be able to identify the video in question. Elements I paid special attention to include the subject of the camera, the camera perspective, editing choices, use of special effects or filters, the audio used (both any track integrated through TikTok and the audio recorded by the user themselves), relationships to other videos or comments (dueting, responses to other videos or user comments), whether the video seemed to be a part of a larger trend, and captions included in the video (analyzing not only the text, but also the format of the text: its positioning on the screen, the color and font used, and the length of time left on the screen). I also noted whether any explicit mention of a nation or nationality was included in the video, whether any locality besides the nation was mentioned, and any notable themes in the comments of the video. Although I do not include an analysis of comments in my thesis due to privacy concerns for commenters, I did allow myself to use them as a tool for seeing what parts of the video stuck out to users. Simultaneously, more general observations that I made were written down on a separate spreadsheet page. I would describe this stage of the research as rather heuristic, as I moved between levels of analysis fluidly.

Once I had completed this for all the videos in my data set, I utilized both the spreadsheet and my saved videos to search for common themes, stances, and genres. This led to my creation of several categories, based on the way that users engaged in storytelling, and coded videos accordingly. These categories were reached using an approach that I qualify as primarily inductive, although I was aware both of Georgakopoulou's (2016a) typology of selfies and Schellewald's (2021) typology of communicative forms on TikTok. In regard to Schellewald's typology, two categories somewhat overlap with my own: comedic can be seen as corresponding with my category of humor, and the documentary category notes features present in several of my categories, in particular with my category of informational videos (2021, pp. 1443–1446). In identifying the categories of 'vlogs' and 'storytime' videos, I drew parallels to genres common on YouTube; academic investigations into these genres as a whole are somewhat sparse, but examples of their documentation can be found in Berryman and Kavka's study on 'crying vlogs' (2018).

Here, I leaned on Georgakopoulou's research on small stories and narrative stancetaking (2017) while keeping the affordances of TikTok in mind. After sorting the videos by category, I investigated each category to determine not only what kinds of stories were being told, but how they were told within the affordances of TikTok, and furthermore, how this incorporated a framework of a world of nations. I selected videos based on their ability to illustrate and explain this intersection.

4 FINDINGS

TikTok's fast-paced format and automatically repeating videos (you can tap to pause, but if left on play, videos will loop infinitely rather than stopping once they reach the end) encourage users to pack a lot of information into a short-form video. The maximum length of a TikTok video has increased over the years (with many creators now able to make videos that are ten minutes long), but as some videos dated back to 2020, it is safe to say that some users were limited to a maximum of 60 seconds to fully realize their video (Malik, 2022). Furthermore, for some types of video content (often content meant to hook the user from the beginning rather than content based on building suspense or capturing something seemingly organic), conveying a catchy title without lingering too long is of critical importance. Here,

To achieve this end, users often captioned or titled their video with an overlaid text while also saying the title aloud. Unembellished black-and-white text, however, proved relatively unpopular. To create a more eye-catching and symbolic effect, users often colored the text of their title employing national colors (words oscillating between red, white, and blue, for example, when speaking about the United States) and/or varied between different fonts. Also quite popular is the integration of emojis. While the usage of emojis is widespread in the online space, here it is utilized specifically in casual (literal) flagging of the nation and national. Flag emojis appearing over the top of the video or next to the name of the nation mean that viewers can nearly instantly identify that the content is focused around the context of the nation.

Less 'essential' information is usually relegated to the video description, of which, only the first two lines are visible at the bottom of the screen (unless you tap on 'show more.'). Hashtags are also placed here; if the creator has chosen to include text in the description as well, a longer text may mean that hashtags are not immediately visible, but instead only seen when the audience member taps on 'show more.' Information about more specific localities (often large cities, if included), is usually found here if the creator decides to mention it.

The content of the videos themselves, usually already framed by a ‘national’ perspective, often nationalizes products, habits, and language use in a way that is familiar, but made digestible for the TikTok platform. Furthermore, stories that might be difficult or lackluster to explain simply orally or exclusively through images and text (as an example, how a different type of window than you are used to can be confusing and startling to open) become much easier to make engaging when one can simply demonstrate opening said window, or even better and more humorous, create a skit in which you struggle to use the window. Suddenly, this seemingly novel type of window is not merely a mainstay of a specific climate or market, but being posited part of a national canon, and sharing the story and relating to it requires only sending the video to someone, making it easier to popularize a narrative that perhaps was previously not as widely known.

Creators also get to decide whether they speak aloud during the video. Some utilize captions exclusively, while others opt for a function which reads the text aloud. Although not featured as prevalently in the content I was looking at, voice effects are also possible, giving creators another way of adding humor while also potentially alleviating any self-consciousness associated with speaking aloud. Audio tracks in these videos are often instrumental and mixed to be rather quiet. It can be inferred that this not only prevents it from distracting from the spoken word and/or captions on the video, but also serves as an indicator of the tone of the video.

In my initial analysis of the first 100 TikTok videos that appeared under the term expat (after excluding any videos that did not fulfill my criteria), different varieties or genres of content became slowly evident. I worked on collecting examples of these different categories; while this list is not exhaustive, it does manage to highlight how TikTok is utilized in shaping narrative structure. I identified eight initial groups of video types which I then reduced further, combining several subcategories under a larger heading. The final list therefore included five main categories: lists, informational, vlog, storytime and humor.

4.1 Video categories

TABLE 1 Types of videos observed and their frequency (out of 100 videos). Some videos fall under more than one category.

Type of video	Frequency
List	30
Informational	29
Vlog	21
Storytime	8
Humor	27

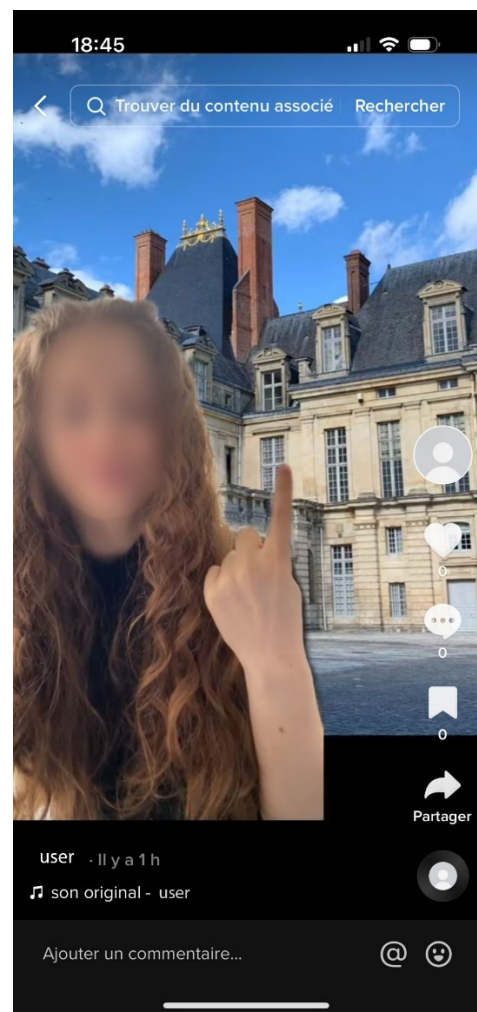
4.1.1 Lists

In perhaps the most prolific format that I observed under the hashtag, users often constructed lists according to popular criteria. The form of a list is one that is easily digestible to a wide audience and hardly unique to TikTok (or the internet), but instead quite prolific. In the online sphere, the list is not only a popular format for a wide range of journalistic articles, as it breaks down and organizes content succinctly, but is also a way to generate debate and express opinion within a familiar structure (Booth, 2015). The creators that I observed took advantage of TikTok's visual affordances, which added even more to the accessibility of the content.

Out of all the list-style videos I included in my data set, all included the mentioning of at least one nation during the video's duration (with Europe being mentioned once as well). The rest were composed of lists of things that the creators found unique to the country they found themselves in (often qualifying this argument by acknowledging their own perspective as being that of another nationality). Culture shock and cultural differences proved to be by far the most popular topics, with 14 of 30 videos highlighting what creators perceived as cultural difference.

FIGURE 1 An example of the how the green screen effect was used.

By taking advantage of a highly visual format, users have the ability to show their audience side-by-side comparisons of different objects and place, as well as insert representative photos to allude to broader concepts. This is illustrated in Figure 1 (note that this is not taken from any of the data collected, but a reproduction I created myself). Interestingly, many creators chose to keep their face in the video even when technically not necessary. In many of the list format videos, creators utilized a green screen effect to add images behind their face, which they would often point to or gesticulate toward, as if presenting in front of a projector. While they could have opted simply to speak over a string of images or videos, instead, we see their faces, expressions and



affect, providing for a rich understanding of how the creator feels about the two options.

In the visual construction of the list, creators employed a range of sources. They sometimes chose to display their own, personal photos, while other times they utilized photos clearly found using Google Image search. Ownership of the images is not usually made explicit, nor is it given explicit importance. This is made especially evident when users do not try to mask the fact that an image is not their own; I observed several list-style videos in which the creator displayed images that were simply screenshots from a Google Image search and still included the URL preview from the browser and other details from the smartphone screen. This arguably creates a sense of intimacy and authenticity with the creator of the video, as the use of screenshots is rather informal; authenticity has been demonstrated as being a valuable and highly marketable on social media overall, as it builds a sense of trust with the viewer (Georgakopoulou, 2022). These small glimpses directly into the creator's phone create a sort of meta-awareness of the way in which the video was created; screenshots act as a kind of evidence for the involvement of a smartphone in the creation of the video.

Many lists were comparative. Comparison can be either explicit or implicit. In a comparative example, creators can be seen highlighting products, prices of common goods, geographic landmarks, so-called 'cultural differences,' and lifestyle norms (and often all in a single video). Whether or not creators explicitly listed their own nationality, implicitly it was often defined as being incongruous with the place (country) that they had moved to, and often from the title of the video alone. To give several examples:

"Things that happened to me when I moved from Australia to the US"

"More CULTURE SHOCKS As a Canadian in Italy"

"What confused me when I moved to the Netherlands"

While the first and second examples list two countries and therefore directly allow the creator to compare, the final example only mentions the Netherlands. This can be interpreted initially as a slightly more nuanced formulation; the creator is naming only their own experience and not directly attributing their confusion to their nationality, unlike in the previous examples. Still, one nation is mentioned, and implicitly, we can deduce that the creator was confused because they are not from the Netherlands, but instead somewhere else. We cannot conclude why the creator chose to name the country of the Netherlands, rather than a more specific locality; it is possible that the user did not want to reveal their precise location for privacy reasons, or that they chose to include the country name with the hope that it would fare better algorithmically.

The result, however, remains that the nation is evoked immediately from the title and background images alone.

The above example also illustrates the ways in which lists, which may not initially seem to have much narrative quality, indeed utilize forms of narrative-stancetaking. While some list videos quite literally had creators listing nouns one-by-one, others proposing several micro-narratives in the form of skits in order to give an impression of a larger narrative about the nature of moving abroad. Both, I argue, are forms of storytelling; while the latter is more obvious, the former still creates the potential for a co-authored story in the comments. This can be seen as drawing a parallel with how Georgakopoulou defines Instagram captions as also having narrative quality, in that they encourage users to continue the story in co-creation, either in the comments or privately (Georgakopoulou, 2016b, pp. 311–313).

4.1.2 Information and Advice

In creating this category, I observed a pattern in which users created videos with the primary objective of sharing information specific to their location or to the act of moving abroad. Most of the videos favored a more minimal editing style: talking to the camera with few cuts was observed most frequently. Humor, while employed occasionally, was a less important element overall.

4.1.2.1 Informational

Thematically, topics tended toward the pragmatic; explaining differences in laws and regulations proved to be the most popular themes with seven videos diving into this area. These topics were addressed by speaking directly to the camera with minimal editing employed. One creator, sitting in what appears to be their home, talks about the covid-19 regulations that had been in place in New Zealand in a 57 second long, uncut video. The creator begins the video by stating that they get a lot of inquiries about why they don't wear a mask in New Zealand, and that they moved there right before covid hit. They then proceed to tell the audience about the restrictions put in place over the course of the past year (the video was released at the end of 2020). During this portion of the video, the creator oscillates between the use of the impersonal 'you' and the more personal "we" to describe the actions (and non-actions) that those in New Zealand took over the course of the pandemic:

“We were not allowed to go for hikes, 'cause if you fell and go into the emergency room you're taking a spot in the hospital”

Finally, they end the video by saying “And we beat covid... twice!” holding up their hand with two fingers extended. While the video begins as a simple response to

inquiries from viewers, the creator subtly aligns themselves with their fellow New Zealanders (and the pandemic response overall) with statements such as those above. Although the creator acknowledges early in the video that they moved to New Zealand only a little over a year before, their final statement regarding “beating covid” is used as a way not only to respond to questions regarding their mask use, but also invoke the imagined community of New Zealand with some pride, as well as show approval toward the government’s response to the pandemic.

While the theme of videos such as the one above was rather serious and perhaps more polarizing, more lighthearted videos also populated this category. Another popular source of content was seemingly ‘exotic’ elements in the home: doorknobs and locking mechanisms, windows, household appliances (such as the electric kettle) and a wet room-style bathroom, to give a few examples. Rather than explaining directly to the camera, like in the previous videos, users instead show the objects that they are speaking about, demonstrating how to use them in some cases. Editing was again here rather minimal, and diegetic audio or voiceover was used in all the videos of this style. Lessons on how to speak like a local of an area (Paris, for example) also appeared several times (four, to be exact).

4.1.2.2 *Advice (and Self-Promotion)*

Another group of videos, what I deemed as ‘advice’ style videos, also emerged (of which there were seven). In these videos, creators explicitly advertise themselves and their channel and invite the viewer to consume more of their content or contact them for help in moving abroad. Although these videos varied visually from intimately filmed, uncut talking-head takes to highly edited streams of video and photos, they all took a more prescriptive tone, emphasizing why one *should* move abroad or factors to consider before doing so.

One creator, who tells the audience that they have lived in several different countries for work, remarks “I love to reinvent myself in every new city. I get to meet new people, try new things, and experience new cultures.” They then encourage the viewer to move abroad by noting that their education and healthcare costs decreased upon leaving their country of origin, and that by moving abroad, travel and exploration of a region will become more affordable once you live there. This message is done via voiceover, while (11) different video clips are edited together. The clips are taken in different locations, some showing the creator themselves, as a popular TikTok audio plays in the background.

By explaining at the beginning of the video that they have moved abroad several times for work and have lived abroad for nearly the decade, the creator positions themselves as an expert in moving and living abroad. With the following passages (“I love to reinvent myself in every new city. I get to... experience new cultures”), the

creator constructs a cosmopolitan identity; no longer in the confines of their home country, they change and grow whenever they move. Although the creator mentions several countries, the message centers around leaving their country of origin and becoming somewhat nomadic, rather than relocating to one particular place. Furthermore, the creator does not mention any specific city, region, or other locality. This emphasis on going abroad as something that enables personal development and enriches one's life, and especially with comparison between life 'abroad' and life in the country of origin, establishes the creator's assumed audience as being both from the same country of origin, but also with the aspirations to leave.

4.1.3 Vlog

Vlog style videos took two basic forms: more classic (but still short form), style vlogging, and what I deemed snapshots, or a style of video meant to capture a singular moment. I categorized ten videos as belonging to the more classic style, and eleven videos as belonging to the snapshot category.

4.1.3.1 *Classic Vlogs*

Classic vlog style videos came mainly in two genres: four of them were vlogs of the physical moving process, involving a plane ride from one place to another, and another four were house or apartment tours. (The remaining videos were an ASMR-style vlog, and a video documenting expenditures throughout the day.) I classified these as classic vlog style videos in that the storytelling was not spontaneous in nature, but rather planned, with multiple clips edited together.

For example, one creator documents their move to South Korea, starting with their departure from an airport in the United States. The video includes eleven different video clips and one image, each ranging from about one to two seconds long; for audio, we hear only a pop/house track with singing in Korean, which has been incorporated into the video through the TikTok application. The first video clip, in which we see the cover of the creator's passport held in their hand while sitting in the airport, reads "Follow me on my move to South Korea [S. Korean flag emoji]". Already, two nations have been indexed visually in this clip, and in close proximity, with the text (and flag emoji) superimposed at the top of the screen, just above the U.S. passport (that presumably belongs to the creator), which is in the center of the screen. Narrative stancetaking occurs through a combination of the text ("Follow me," which encourages the viewer to stay on the video to see where the story goes) and the shot of the passport (which shows, rather than tells, that the creator is a U.S. citizen). This clip is followed in quick succession by a shot of the interior of the airport, which further solidifies the place in the video as the airport.

The following clip, taken from within the airplane, fills the frame with the seat-back display, showing a live map with the route and location of the plane between two airports in the United States. This clip serves several purposes: first, it serves to confirm that the creator is not only from the U.S. (as we are led to assume by the shot of the passport) but also that the creator was living in the United States prior to departing for South Korea. The next clip is taken from inside an airport window; outside, a plane waiting at a gate is visible. The side of the airplane reads 'Korean Air.' The next cut takes us to a panoramic view of the interior of an airplane, followed by another shot of a seatback display, this time with a clip of a K-pop group dancing. Over the top, a moving sticker of a hand (surrounded by hearts) snapping its fingers appears.

Both the shot of the plane and the clip of the K-pop group serve to indicate that the flight to South Korea is the next 'step' in the story. There is no direct mention of a specific airport nor locality as a destination (unless you check the video description and hashtags), and K-pop, as is made evident in the name, is a highly recognizable Korean cultural export to many young people around the world. Both Korean Air and K-pop notably utilize the nation in their marketing, and here in the video, this is reproduced inversely, as instead they are used to index the nation and the destination of the creator.

Finally, the video concludes with several point-of-view shots. The first is of several forms (which appear to be related to boarder control or customs, but are shown too quickly to read) spread out on the tray table in the airplane. The following shots show the interior of an airport and the interior of a taxi, with one shot showing the skyline of the city. The final shot is a point of view shot of the creator climbing onto a bed and looking out of a window; the journey is shown to be complete.

4.1.3.2 *Snapshots*

In a similar but distinct vein, I also identified a subset of videos as what I deemed snapshots, which unlike their vlog counterparts, capture smaller and more open-ended moments. Often filmed 'in the moment' and focused on more intimate topics, such as relationships with others (e.g., a host sister, a husband, a significant other) and on-the-go moments (e.g., leaving work, walking through a fashionable neighborhood) these videos are evocative of other social media posts, such as Instagram stories (Georgakopoulou, 2021). Most of the videos are relatively short (less than 10 seconds) and include only one video clip, or several taken from the same 'moment' edited together. While the editing style of including audio tracks, text and text-to-speech elements meant that these videos did take advantage of the affordances of TikTok, they also more broadly depend on the video content to tell the story, showing, rather telling.

An example of this can be seen in a short video in which the creator captions with a text overlaid on the video that they are going home after a long day working in Japan. The video itself shows the creator sitting on a bicycle, waving to people off-screen, before rolling up their sleeves and the legs of their pants to reveal tattoos. With the text alone, the story is incomprehensible; instead, we rely on the visual aspect, which allows us to infer that the creator is not able to leave their tattoos uncovered in the workplace.

It is noteworthy that despite the above example, the videos I identified here also mentioned a nationality fewer times in the content of the video than in other categories; in fact, only three videos mention a country name in text or spoken word at all. Instead, it was more common that the city or neighborhood was mentioned. This fits with the scale of the video content; as the topics were more intimate, using a national framework would perhaps aid the viewer less in understanding the moment at hand. For example, one video shows a creator filming themselves before switching the camera to show other people in the streets of a large, metropolitan city. The creator captions the video with overlaid text, explaining that everyone in that neighborhood was dressed well, while they were wearing clothes that were decidedly not fashionable.

4.1.4 Storytime

The storytime genre is certainly not unique to TikTok, nor would I claim to be the first to identify it as a genre on its own; YouTube has served and continues to serve as a platform where oral storytelling is filmed and published online, in similar format, where these videos are often referred to as ‘storytime’ videos. In terms of the way that these videos present themselves on TikTok, they stand out in that creators themselves do not necessarily show their story visually; instead, they often speak directly to the camera and engage in a form of oral storytelling. Here, filming oneself allows the creator to heavily incorporate affect and expression into a story they are recounting.

Nearly all the videos here were filmed inside the home of the creator and involved the creator speaking directly to the camera while recounting a story. There were two notable exceptions that instead featured a voiceover and included either a reenactment in front of a greenscreen or photos and videos from the creator’s life to help illustrate the story. One other video showed the creator sitting outside on a street.

In one of these examples, a creator attempting to introduce themselves to their audience on TikTok, begins their video by calling themselves “an American living in [city name], France”. They then recount the story of how they met their significant other while using video clips and images taken during the course of their relationship, documenting their initial vacation in France, long distance phone calls, their significant other’s move to a major city in the United States to stay with them, and finally, the creator’s move back to France with their partner. This combination of text,

voiceover and visual imagery evokes the sense of place described by Billig as being integral to the nation (Billig, 2010, pp. 74–78).

In this video, the creator’s journey with their partner is framed by that of two nations: the United States and France. The creator refers to themselves as an American directly at the beginning of the video, and shortly thereafter, when describing meeting their partner, explains that it was during a vacation in France. From the clips shown, we are shown the creator in several different cities across the country, but only one is mentioned explicitly (as it is relevant to the story). Near the end of the video, the creator explains that after her partner’s year-long visa to the United States was finished, they “moved to France with [them]!” Although they do state the city they are living in at the beginning of the video, it is not repeated. They then continue by saying “I love to share travel tips, life in France, and all the fun and interesting things I learn as an American living here. In short, I love France, and I love sharing it with all of you!”

These final phrases further cement the creator’s life as being heavily influenced by national differences, qualifying their perspective as an American one. The closing affective stance in which they declare their love of France and sharing the country with their audience posits national differences as benign, exciting and fun to explore. Furthermore, the creator positions themselves as existing between two nations, constructing cosmopolitanism by noting that they are learning many interesting things as an American living there.

4.1.5 Humor

While TikTok was born from musical.ly, an app that encouraged (often collaborative) content related to singing, dancing, lip syncing and other music-related content, comedic content still has found a way to dominate many parts of the platform; Schellewald (2021, pp. 1443–1444) notes that the app is largely associated with silly, funny content. While it would be reductive to simply label much of the content as comedic without further investigation, it serves as an umbrella to two more specific types of content which appeared regularly under the hashtag.

4.1.5.1 Memes

Considering the level of rescripting involved in most of the categories I define in this research, one could argue that nearly all the content I analyzed could be considered to fall into the genre of the meme. Still, my creation of the category was based on a certain positionality and method of rescripting that was distinct from some of the other videos I included in my analysis. While memes are popularly defined as reproduced cultural artifacts that require a transformation (in at least one category) of content, form, or stance (Shifman, 2013; Miltner, 2018), I argue that TikTok’s affordances also shape the way in which memes are created and defined in-app (that is not to say

that many users do not push back against these affordances). Being able to see a video collection based on a certain audio track or visual effect means that these elements are highly salient in meme creation, and furthermore, that certain meme templates are available in-app (Rogers & Giorgi, 2023). Therefore, the videos I categorized as memes fit into an easily recognizable trend that was observable outside of the hashtag 'expat' and had a level of irony or absurdity present in the stance that was absent from other trendy video styles I observed in my data set.

Mememes were not exceptionally prevalent in my data set. Those that did appear centered around the topics of language, and most meme-style videos focused on language use, playing with the meaning of idiomatic phrases. In one example of this, a creator adopts a popular trend which begins with the creator introducing the subject as " ____ that just makes sense." In this format, whatever follows this introductory phrase is usually absurd, contradicting the idea that it 'makes sense.' In the background, the audio track associated with the trend plays quietly. The creator, utilizing a video of themselves standing in a public space while posing, explains the meaning of a Thai phrase that would roughly translate to "shut the fuck up" by describing its ironic usage rather than its literal meaning, saying that the phrase can be used to encourage someone to tell you more of an interesting story. As the phrase itself is rather profane, the rest of the video is somewhat ironic; the creator speaks quite slowly and softly, and the video itself incorporates a filter which adds a pink haze and the effect of sparkles.

The trend employed here incorporates several visual and audio cues; the setup and the audio track are widespread across TikTok, but are not necessarily always in videos that incorporate an ironic positionality. The pink filter and ironic positioning, made evident by the use of a soft voice and a purposely misleading explanation of the Thai phrase, help to rescript the content into a meme.

4.1.5.2 *Skits*

Performing a skit or reenacting a particular moment as a way of communicating in a humorous way proved popular: 18 videos in my data set incorporated some kind of reenactment, usually with one person playing several roles. Cultural differences were the most popular theme (8 videos), followed by experiences teaching abroad (5 videos). Other themes included non-cultural differences between two countries and moving abroad for university or love.

Only one creator who enacted a skit included people besides themselves in their videos. In order to assume the roles of different characters, creators therefore needed obvious visual cues to indicate to the viewer who was supposed to be represented on screen. To accomplish this, creators consistently changed their orientation, facing toward the left, for example, to indicate they are playing themselves, and toward the

right to indicate they are playing another person. To add emphasis, it is popular to change one's appearance somehow (wearing a hat or other garments to indicate a specific character), or change the background to further indicate a change in the location of the character. This can be accomplished with either physically moving, or employing the green screen effect.

Structurally, most skits followed a format in which a creator would naively attempt to do something seemingly commonplace, e.g., scheduling dinner with a friend, addressing a father-in-law as 'sir' upon meeting him for the first time, or attempting to get back inside one's apartment after going downstairs to retrieve a friend. The outcome of and response to these attempts surprises and confuses the creator: the friend suggests meeting at 10 P.M. for dinner, the father-in-law jokes that he must be quite important to be referred to as 'sir,' and, upon trying to turn the doorknob to the apartment, the creator realizes that a key is needed as the door locks automatically. Surprise and confusion are conveyed through affective expression as the creator enacts the skit, and occasionally through captions, which allow the creator's internal thoughts to be known to the audience. In the skit involving the creator meeting their father-in-law for the first time, the creator assumes a confused expression, and above, a caption is overlaid which reads, "*doesn't understand what's funny*".

Considering the subject matter and construction of most of the skits, this type of content is rife with the reinforcement of cultural differences under a national framework. In one example of this, a creator reenacts her mother telling her, before departing to a Nordic country, that she will likely fall in love with a Viking. In several examples, self-identified U.S. Americans reenact themselves discovering the electric kettle for the first time while in a new country; while the use (or disuse) of an electric kettle seems to have little to do with nationalism, the framing of this issue as one of being American demonstrates how, in this niche of content creation, seemingly trivial and everyday differences are immediately related to a dichotomy of two nations. Furthermore, place is shown to play an integral role here

4.2 Themes

Notable in the previously mentioned examples is a relatively consistent, positive affect displayed toward the idea of moving abroad and experiences abroad, as well as consistent incorporation of audio tracks to indicate light and non-serious tone. Thematically, the three most popular topics were culture shock/cultural differences (26 videos), the logistical process of moving (16), and physical features of the home (13). Language, as well as laws and regulations, also demonstrated prevalent across the data set. Still, I want to point to several counterexamples, that, although not

representative of the majority of the data set, can help to understand the breadth of content under the hashtag.

Adopting an overtly critical tone when discussing one's destination country was visible in only six videos across the data set. Racism and xenophobia were discussed four times, and one video, a list style video, saw the creator listing things that 'did not make sense' to them as an American living in their destination country. The final video showed the creator explaining that by showing a realistic perspective of living in their destination country, they would receive death threats.

In one storytime video, a creator speaks to the camera while sitting at a desk, explaining that they will pretend not to speak the national language of their destination country if it will give them the social advantage of being perceived as a tourist, rather than a resident. They explain that they employed this tactic recently while being followed by a security guard in a shop and eventually accused of stealing. Once the guard understood that the creator did not speak the national language, they dropped the accusation and stopped following the creator. This video includes no additional audio apart from the diegetic audio of the creator, and the entirety of the story is captioned with overlaid text. The creator themselves maintains a neutral expression, and does not laugh nor employ humor in the telling of the story, leading the tone to be rather serious.

Other videos, such as the video mentioned above in which the creator shows themselves rolling up their sleeves and pantlegs after work (see 4.1.3.2 *Snapshots*), present a 'realistic' view that, by focusing on the experience of the creator, also presents an indirect criticism. The viewer is expected to infer why the creator would keep their tattoos covered during the workday, and several interpretations are theoretically possible; perhaps the creator is uncomfortable showing their tattoos at work for reasons other than intolerance or judgement.

Criticism of one's home country in juxtaposition to one's destination country appeared in 10 videos; all these videos included criticism of the United States. (Note, I did exclude several non-English language videos from my data set and my phone's language was set to American English at the time of data collection, so I cannot draw any conclusions about this, although it might prove an interesting point for further research.) Criticisms had a wide range, but accessibility to healthcare, high cost of living, little paid leave and racism all appeared several times.

In one example of this, a creator dances to a rap song in which the rapper lists expensive items. At the top of the screen at the beginning of the video, a text appears which explains that the following points are reasons the creator moved from Miami to a poor country like Ghana. After several seconds, short texts appear around the creator one by one, on beat with each line rapped in the song. These short texts include a decrease in cost of living, housing costs, and bills, the ability to travel and discover

Africa easily, and the ability to remove themselves from the “racist American culture.” The creator concludes the video by saying they are happy creating their life in Ghana with their husband.

This creator juxtaposes a low quality of life in Miami (and the United States as a whole) with a high quality of life in Ghana, which inverts popular perception. Individual liberation is emphasized here, from financial burden and the racism present in the United States, but also through the ability to travel and explore. Systemic issues here are presented as being confined to national borders rather than global in scope, and escapable once one crosses a national border.

5 DISCUSSION

5.1 Narrative-Stancetaking and Place on TikTok

In order to explore my first research question (*How do creators construct and co-construct everyday nationalism on the TikTok platform?*), I employ Georgakopoulou's concepts of narrative-stancetaking and place to demonstrate how everyday nationalism, in the sense that the nation is indexed, is a part of the narrative-stancetaking and construction of place under #expat. Everyday nationalism was most noticeable in the videos in my data set as a tool for establishing a perspective and place for the video. This took place most frequently in longer-form or more highly expositional video formats (lists, storytime, advice, vlogs, skits, and informational) and less frequently in shorter form, less expositional formats (memes, snapshots).

TikTok's heavy emphasis on consuming content through the FYP by bringing users to it automatically upon opening the app, and therefore on consuming content from creators who are often entirely unknown to the viewer, means that taking an easily understood narrative stance is heavily encouraged. (I would note, however, that this is not deterministic, but rather a complex interplay between an algorithm, platform affordances and millions of individual users.) Unlike YouTube, where users must click on content to view it and therefore engage in a kind of selection process, TikTok feeds videos to the viewer which begin playing automatically, forcing the viewer to sort by what does and does not interest them. Therefore, indexing nations by explicitly naming them or visually representing them through flags and colors makes the narrative framework immediately obvious and familiar to the audience.

Country names, national colors and flags were reproduced consistently as part of the narrative stancetaking, with titles such as "Things that happened to me when I moved from Australia to the US" informing the audience not only on the kind of

information we should be prepared to receive, but also that the things that happened to this individual make sense within the context of the juxtaposition of a person habituated to living in Australia being introduced to the U.S. context. The nationality of the creator is made highly salient from the very beginning, and the experiences of that person are very rarely constructed as hinging on many intersecting identities, especially when one moves beyond vocation. Only 13 videos did not include explicit reference to at least one country; this number is quite low considering the potential for incongruencies between hashtag use and actual content.

TikTok's geo-tagging feature is somewhat limited and not available worldwide, and it was not used by any of the creators whose videos appeared in my data set (TikTok, n.d.). This stands in contrast to other some social media like Facebook and Instagram, where it is possible for all users to add a location to a post through the interface (Georgakopoulou, 2016a, pp. 307–308), but aligns more with platforms such as YouTube, where place is often indicated visually or verbally (Georgakopoulou, 2015a). Textual, audial, and iconographic indexing of the nation (emojis) were most consistent across the data set, while other visual depictions were often secondary. In some video formats, especially affective, list-style videos, the physical space being occupied by the user was not made apparent at all, and instead, the greenscreen effect was employed to make objects of interest visible to the audience. In some ways, the place then truly becomes an intermediate space that can be seen either as purely digital, or representative of the nation itself. When using background images to indicate place in the case of reenacting a scene from life abroad, the image serves to index a typical scene in the destination country, further cementing the idea of the nation as an imagined place.

5.2 TikTok's Affordances and Mass Appeal

To examine my second research question (*How do TikTok's affordances contribute to how everyday nationalism is constructed within the application?*), I examine the TikTok platform itself as a place, as well as the relationship between the Tiktok platform as place and the construction of content. TikTok's affordances and business model imply that a good video is one that accumulates a large number of views, likes and comments. This is evident concretely through the emphasis on numbers, as the number of likes and comments are both highly visible on each video itself. Furthermore, views, likes and comments all play a role in whether the video is recommended to other users (Smith, 2021). The ability for individuals to monetize their content creation gives monetary incentive to accumulate views as well, and the platform also makes extra features available to small and large businesses hoping to utilize TikTok's advertising potential. This is not dissimilar to other social media such as Facebook and Instagram

(Georgakopoulou, 2021; Maly, 2020). In conclusion, the commodification of content is highly normalized under these circumstances.

Nations are highly recognizable to a wide audience, therefore, their incorporation into viral content as a part of the narrative stancetaking is logical. Users with a desire to create a large audience need to hook their audience from the beginning of the video with recognizable concepts and frameworks. The framework of a world of nations is just that: recognizable. With this noticeable pattern under #expat of users framing their content as being under a national framework through narrative stancetaking, nation becomes highly salient in seemingly domestic domains, including the home, one's social and romantic life, and the workplace. This is not unique to TikTok, but its interplay with algorithmic and platform affordances adds nuance to this discussion.

This is not to imply a deterministic point of view, as users are able to push against the affordances and platform limitations that TikTok has in place. Indeed, we see both how popular content makes use of platform affordances, but also ways in which they are ignored. Storytime videos provide an interesting example of this; by videoing oneself telling a story, it is possible to convey affect without employing the use of text, iconography, filters or non-diegetic audio, all of which were shown to be popular not only under #expat, but also incorporated heavily into different communities across TikTok and promoted by TikTok itself (Vizcaíno-Verdú & Abidin, 2022; Schellewald, 2021; TikTok for Business, 2021).

5.3 Identity Performance and the Invisibility of Critical Stances

In examining my third research question (*How are the identities of expats constructed in communication on TikTok?*), I rely on again on Georgakopoulou's small stories heuristic, this time focusing on the aspect of 'tellers' and how identity and roles are constructed within communication (Georgakopoulou, 2015b, pp. 258-259).

Overall, popular depictions of transnational experiences under #expat on TikTok are demonstrably light in tone and center on issues that are not controversial (on the surface, at least). Creators regularly introduce themselves as being of a specific nationality, and discuss, reenact, or document situations that are or were confusing or novel. Cosmopolitanism is regularly performed by demonstrating adaptability and a sense of humor toward unanticipated situations, while creators align themselves with their 'new' nation. This can be seen, for example, in the storytime video (Section 4.1.4) in which the creator ends their video by stating "I love France, and I love sharing it with all of you!" Similarly, in the self-promotion video (Section 4.1.2.2), the creator

explains, “I love to reinvent myself in every new city. I get to meet new people, try new things, and experience new cultures.” Visually, these videos incorporate images and video clips of the creators in their destination countries, usually at popular tourist destinations, giving a rather romanticized portrayal of life abroad.

Many videos also incorporated a positive appraisal of their new life through humor, and this is especially evident in the skits performed by creators. Creators perform the identity of a naïve and unaware outsider, showing confusion or shock at what are portrayed as commonplace social norms. No long-term harm is shown to come to the creator for their misunderstandings, and life abroad is again depicted at rather light and a series of funny, but harmless, blunders.

Considering the associations with the term ‘expat,’ particularly that it is often used to refer to Western professionals (Vora, 2012; Leinonen, 2012), the content of these videos generally depicted individuals who constructed their online personas as such, though with exceptions (university students and the partners of a national of the destination country comprised the other two most visible categories of constructed identities). Noticeably, cultural shocks were depicted as the main source of difficulty in moving abroad; depictions of othering, loneliness, and economic hardship in the destination country were notably absent, and discussions of discrimination, xenophobia and racism were limited to just a few videos. (It is also important to note that race and racism were addressed primarily and most directly by black creators.) In other words, nationality was the only identity made salient in the vast majority of videos. Moving to a new country was constructed as an empowering decision, in which quality of life improved and self-discovery was made possible. Several creators highlighted more comprehensive worker protection (paid sick leave, more guaranteed paid vacation, and work contribution toward lunchtime meals) as a benefit of moving from the United States, while there were no depictions of creators moving from the Global South to any destination. Creators moving from the Global North to the Global South all mentioned lowering their cost of living as one of the main reasons for doing so (see Section 4.2). This also evokes traditional constructions of cosmopolitanism as described by Werbner (1999) in that there is an extreme bias toward professionals hailing from the Global North.

5.4 Limitations and Further Research

The exploratory nature of this study naturally means that there are both several limitations, but also plenty of avenues for further research.

Firstly, the scope of the study and nature of data collection means that only a select few videos, especially those pushed by the TikTok algorithm, were analyzed. Therefore, this group of videos can hardly be seen as representative, especially when we consider the influence that my own personal data may have had on the search results. While the depth analysis given to this data set can tell us something about the way TikTok's affordances are being navigated, they can hardly be said to give an entirely comprehensive picture. Furthermore, new videos and new creators are constantly appearing on the app in tandem with the affordances of TikTok being updated and expanded; integration with other apps (such as CapCut, a TikTok video editing app), extensions of maximum video lengths and the introduction of formats suited for media other than video (photo slideshows are now quite common on the app as a way of compiling memes and setting them to audio) all contribute to an ever-changing landscape on the platform.

Secondly, this analysis used a hashtag as a starting point, rather than focusing in on individual creators. While this mimics one way that users navigate the TikTok app (searching using the search function), it is not an entirely comprehensive approach, as it does not situate content entirely within its creative context. Understanding the greater narratives created by individual creators is also important, especially if creators use their content as part of an online brand or business. From content alone, I was able to deduce that several creators did indeed use their content as a marketing strategy (as it was made quite explicit) for their own expertise or consulting, however, I can also hypothesize that much more of the content than I was aware of indeed fell into this category. As I did not collect data on creators themselves, however, due to the design and constraints of my study, this is an avenue that warrants further exploring. Everyday nationalism and cosmopolitanism (two sides of the same coin, I argue) are already demonstrably reinforced in corporate marketing (Cramer, 2022; Ruis-Ulldemolins, 2021; Andersson, 2019); not only how this occurs on platforms such as TikTok, but also how it is used in small, online businesses, is necessary to understand as social media continues to play an important role in these spheres and promote a kind of commodification of content surrounding the self.

While this study focused on the reproduction of everyday nationalism and cosmopolitanism by the definitions I established in the beginning of this thesis, further investigation of other ideologies informing these productions of nationalism and cosmopolitanism apparent within this data set merit investigation as well. For example, there were several videos in my data set (including the video I analyzed under section 4.1.2.2 "Advice") in which the creator not only positioned themselves as cosmopolitan and constructed this identity in their video, but also explicitly spoke about living abroad as something virtuous and having given them a 'broader perspective.' This

deserves to be analyzed more deeply: who is promoting these kinds of messages, and what ideologies behind cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism are implicit here?

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