Introduction

For two British-based geographers seeking to evaluate and reflect on various forms of Argentine territorial nationalism, as the Romans might have understood, to enter the Lion’s den. Notwithstanding established debates about positionality and reflexivity (Katz, 1994; Keith, 1992; Rose, 1993, 1997; Townsend, 1995: 7–17), the bitter and enduring dispute between Britain and Argentina over a group of islands in the South West Atlantic, shapes not only diplomatic, trading and commercial encounters but also more everyday exchanges (Dodds & Manovil, 2001). This extends to the geopolitically sensitive connotations attached to naming the Islands either the Malvinas or Falklands. We recognise these sensitivities and use the name most contextually appropriate throughout this paper but this does not serve to deny or downplay the Islands disputed status.

Having both lived in Buenos Aires and travelled extensively around Argentina, our encounters stretch from a period between 1992 and 2010, and include formal interviews with Argentine civil servants, academics and journalists to informal conversations with young people, war veterans and political representatives in cafes, on the street and at public events such as the commemorative ceremonies marking the Malvinas war. So this is partly a paper informed by our personal reflections and memories of being identified as British citizens carrying out fieldwork in a country where the experience of war remains visceral, whether it be either in terms of collective experiences and memories of being identified as British citizens carrying out fieldwork in a country where the experience of war remains visceral, whether it be either in terms of collective experiences and memories of being identified as British citizens carrying out fieldwork in a country where the experience of war remains visceral, whether it be either in terms of collective experiences and memories of being identified as British citizens carrying out fieldwork in a country where the experience of war remains visceral, whether it be either in terms of collective experiences and memories of being identified as British citizens carrying out fieldwork in a country where the experience of war remains visceral, whether it be either in terms of collective experiences and memories of being identified as British citizens carrying out fieldwork in a country where the experience of war remains visceral, whether it be either in terms of collective experiences and memories of being identified as British citizens carrying out fieldwork in a country where the experience of war remains visceral, whether it be either in terms of collective experiences and memories of being identified as British citizens carrying out fieldwork in a country where the experience of war remains visceral, whether it be either in terms of collective experiences and memories of being identified as British citizens carrying out fieldwork in a country where the experience of war remains visceral, whether it be either in terms of collective experiences and memories of being identified as British citizens carrying out fieldwork in a country where the experience of war remains visceral, whether...
This paper, however, is also a theoretical intervention. It draws and extends on Jones and Merriman’s (2009) recent critique of the use of Billig’s (1995) ‘banal nationalism’ to further explore the everyday contexts in which Argentine territorial nationalism is (re)produced. It moves beyond the identification of mundane ‘texts’ (e.g. postage stamps, monuments, street and plaza names, television advertisements) as static exemplars of Argentine banal nationalism (see Child, 2005, 2008; Dodds, 2005; Nuessel, 1992), to thinking more sensitively about variations (i.e. temporal, spatial and so on) in the production and consumption of these representations. Also salient here is Müller’s (2008) timely intervention regarding the ways in which discourses, practices and the everyday co-constitute one another in the formation of geopolitical identities. Thus, we acknowledge the “centrality of representations in the media, in government documents or politicians’ speeches as formative of identity” (Müller, 2008: 333), but also remain attuned to “the enactment of identities by ordinary people and in micro-contexts” (Müller, 2008: 335; see also Navaro-Yashin, 2002). The notion of everyday nationalism as posited by Jones and Merriman (2009: 165) places an emphasis on the diverse contexts and ways in which such geopolitical symbols are constructed and read. Pertinent here is Raento’s (1997: 197) demonstration of how public art campaigns and street protests in the Basque Country were received differently by people living across the territory, depending in part on their political persuasions and geographical location. Equally, the fascinating strategies of resistance employed by Finns resisting Imperial Russia explored by Raento and Brunn (2005: 145) illustrates how seemingly banal signifiers of the state (e.g. postage stamps) can be contested and viewed as anything but mundane. Raento and Brunn go on to point out that, “stamps are everywhere, and their ceremoniality [and indeed their consumption] is perhaps more private, optional and thus uniquely intimate” (Raento & Brunn, 2005: 146). Rather than being uniformly and passively received by the nation’s population, these analyses start to acknowledge and encourage more sensitive understandings of the ways in which banal geopolitical representations might be read and experienced.

Using this notion of everyday nationalism with its emphasis on fluidity and variation the paper highlights the temporal and spatial nuances of Argentine territorial nationalism, with specific reference to the Malvinas/Falklands Islands. So often framed as an issue that unites the entire nation-state, there has been an implicit suggestion that Argentines read, and are ‘moved’ by banal reminders, such as memorials commemorating the war dead during the Malvinas war (1982) or signs declaring that ‘The Malvinas are Argentine’ (‘Las Islas Malvinas son Argentinas’) in regularised and/or standardised ways – as if all Argentine citizens are drilled to act and respond homogeneously (Edensor, 2002: 20). This idea of constancy and/or uniformity is challenged by focusing firstly on the temporal nature of Argentine territorial nationalism. Events such as the oil drilling operations undertaken by British contracted companies in the waters surrounding the Malvinas, as well as British military exercises in the South West Atlantic, in recent years, have witnessed a dramatic ‘heating up’ of this protracted geopolitical dispute (Dodds & Benwell, 2010). These ‘unilateral’ actions, as defined by the Argentine government, are considered alongside the growing prominence placed on the Malvinas dispute by the Kirchner administrations (2003–present), to illustrate the ways in which geopolitical territorial nationalism can become more (or less) pervasive in the media, on the street, in the central city plaza and so on. As Jones and Merriman contend:

The everyday, therefore, in addition to being a place of banal and mundane processes, may also incorporate a variety of hotter ‘differences and conflicts’ [at certain temporal junctures] that affect people’s lives on a habitual basis (Jones & Merriman, 2009: 166).

There are geographies to these everyday nationalisms. The geographical proximity of the southern provinces of Argentina (on contemporary Argentine maps the Islas Malvinas are always included as part of the southernmost province, Tierra del Fuego, and therefore as sovereign Argentine territory) and the memories of people (and the transmission of these memories to younger generations) from the region stemming back to the Malvinas war, have meant that territorial nationalisms are prioritised and framed in different ways when compared with the capital Buenos Aires (see Lorenz, 2006). In a similar vein, we posit the need to recognise that individuals will read and engage everyday territorial nationalism in multiple ways depending on a whole range of factors (physical geography/location as just one of these). For instance, an individual with friends or family members who served in the Malvinas war will likely read geopolitical ‘texts’ relating to the issue in different ways to those without such explicit connections. We tease out some of these distinctions by incorporating several interview extracts from a pilot study of young people conducted in Buenos Aires in late-2010. The majority of the sample population were current or past students at the Universidad de Buenos Aires (UBA) and other universities within the city. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were carried out with twenty young people (aged between 18 and 27) in cafeterias and/or their homes situated around Buenos Aires. Through this study, albeit one limited to a relatively small number of university-educated young people (who nonetheless came from different parts of the country and thus were not all from the capital city), we aim to show that readings of banal representations concerning territorial nationalism in Argentina are anything but simple. This is perhaps all the more important to acknowledge, for two British-based researchers, mindful as we are of the long-standing and deeply entrenched view of successive British governments that have caricatured Argentina and Argentine citizens as attracted to hysterical forms of nationalism, and inhabited by military governments and authoritarian leaders enamoured with spatial expansionism and the domination of place (Dodds, 1993, 1994, 2002).

Theorising banal nationalism

Michael Billig’s *Banal Nationalism*, since its publication in 1995, has proven extremely fecund as a coterie of geographers, sociologists, political scientists and others continue to engage with its claims (Billig, 1995 and see his response to critics, Billig, 2009). It is a testimony to the book’s appeal that it now seems *de rigueur* to attend to the production, dissemination and negotiation of the national through discourse, objects and practices including, as Billig noted, the unremarked-upon features of everyday life, such as a flag fluttering from a public building. As Billig noted, “The unwaved flag, which is so forgettable, is at last as important as the memorable moments of flag waving” (Billig, 1995: 10). The notion of the unremarked, or as Billig noted ‘the double neglect’, continues to resonate with scholars (Jones & Merriman, 2009; Leib, 2011; Raento, 2006, 2011; Webster, 2011). With reference to the forgettable and neglectful, Billig contended that existing scholarship (produced in the 1980s and early 1990s) remained beguiled by the more extreme forms of nationalism and thus tended to conceive of nationalist discourses and practices as extraordinary and exceptional, especially when writing either about independence movements and/or events such as the break-up of Yugoslavia. Moreover, if there was an interest in the extreme forms of nationalism then attention tended to turn towards particular parts of the world where nationalist aspiration had yet to find some kind of culmination. The net result was to ‘shut down’ conversations about nationalism within the Euro-American world, especially the United States, which tended to be portrayed as more settled in that regard
unless reference was made to say nationalist groups such as the IRA in Northern Ireland. But the assumption appeared to be that this was either unusual and/or out of kilter with the general post-nationalist trend.

The second aspect of this ‘neglectful’ relationship was a tendency to forget that nationalism, and expressions of national identity, need to be understood as a “form of life which is daily lived in a world of nation-states” (Billig, 1995: 68). However, he argued that if this ‘form of life’ was so entrenched it was likely that symbols like ‘the national flag’ would no longer register in a significant manner. In other words, the daily practices which help to reproduce human existence (Jones & Merriman, 2009: 166) in the fact that is something that has been used to integrate the road signs in Wales has contributed to a welcome advancement of how nationalism is embedded, resisted, rejected and so on in a messy, unexpected and lively way, which may actually take us (in the sense of both citizens and academics) by surprise (Bratiss, 2006; Chaney, 2002; Edensor, 2002).

These kinds of caveats strike us as important when considering the ways in which the issue of the disputed islands of the Malvinas is part of the everyday lives of citizens within Argentina. The symbolic dimension of territorial disputes in the South West Atlantic has been ubiquitous during the terms of successive post-1982 Argentine governments. This symbolism includes the construction of nationalist monuments; the near continuous production of maps and other territorial representations reminding domestic and foreign citizens alike of the links between the disputed territory and the homeland (Child, 2008; Nuessel, 1992); the gendering of the territories in speeches and representations of the Malvinas in particular as, “the little lost sisters” (Escudé, 1988: 164; vom Hau, 2009); and the role, as Escudé recognised, of public education and media reporting on issues pertaining to the disputed territories in the South West Atlantic and Antarctica. Finally, we would need to acknowledge the role of apparently subtle reminders including words and practices such as including the Malvinas in weather reporting (despite their international status as a self-governing Overseas Territory of the UK) and the frequent use of works such as ‘ours’ when political leaders and journalists refer to the Malvinas (Billig, 1995). Despite their pervasiveness, one of things that we seek to challenge is a frequently lazy assumption (and strategically useful to Argentina’s political critics) that all Argentine citizens are equally moved by these banal markers and associated discourses pertaining to Argentina as an ‘incomplete nation’ (see Child, 1985; Child & Kelly, 1988; Kelly, 1997). While we find Billig’s original thesis immensely helpful, there was a tendency to underplay the role of multiple audiences and constituencies within a nation.

National identity and national claims to ‘completeness’ may not be either banal or contentious to everyone (Leib, 2011). In the case of the Malvinas issue, the spectre of conflict between April–June 1982 and the ongoing implications for bereaved families and veterans created schisms within Argentine society, with veterans’ organisations accusing governments of ‘forgetting’ about the losses endured in 1982. If anything, these groups contend, therefore, that a ‘hot’ form of nationalism has been allowed to ‘cool’ with implications for them in terms of how long-term care and financial support is organised, notwithstanding claims that Argentina’s return to a democratic state of affairs in 1983 might help to ‘rein in’ hotter forms of nationalism associated with the military period of rule in the 1970s and 80s.

**Blowing hot and cold: Argentine territorial nationalism**

Every year on the second of April the Malvinas question receives extensive media coverage as Argentina commemorates its war veterans as part of the día del veterano de guerra y de los caídos en la guerra de las Malvinas. It is first and foremost a sombre day of reflection and remembrance, and yet one which is inextricably linked to the issue of Argentine territorial nationalism in the South West Atlantic. While many television networks broadcast interviews and/or documentaries with veterans and historians retracing details of the 1982 conflict (in some instances pulling apart Argentina’s military tactics in great detail), the viewer is regularly reminded of the contemporary relevance of the Malvinas to the interests of the nation-state. In short, this is a day when politicians as well as groups of veterans and their families (sometimes with competing interests as the latter are vigorous in arguing for greater state recognition and reparation for veterans who served in the military during the Malvinas war), attempt to bring the Malvinas...
question to the fore of public consciousness through the popular media. Representative of this intensified attention was a multimedia webpage produced to coincide with the anniversary by La Nación (2010), one of the most influential and politically conservative newspapers in Argentina. This re-traced the experiences of British and Argentine troops involved in the war, the current perspectives of officials from Argentina and the Falkland Islands regarding the sovereignty dispute, as well as anecdotes pertaining to contemporary life on the Islands.

In 2010 (the 28th anniversary since Argentina’s military landed on the Islands, an event which preceded the 1982 conflict with the UK) the services held throughout the country were particularly significant and impassioned, as a consequence of the recent diplomatic and military tension in the South West Atlantic between Argentina and the UK. The arrival of the Ocean Guardian oil rig (contracted by British companies) in the waters surrounding the Malvinas in February 2010 to begin oil exploration work (and subsequent rumours, propagated by the British tabloid newspaper The Sun, that a British naval submarine had been sent to the area) was the catalyst for the latest spat which has ensued between the two nations. While the second of April represents a sombre day of reflection and respect for the 649 Argentine military personnel who lost their lives in the Malvinas war, the events also provide an opportunity for politicians, the military and the public to register their disapproval at the UK’s ‘illegitimate’ territorial presence in the South West Atlantic, as well as the government’s associated determination to reclaim, what they consider to be, sovereign Argentine territory (Dodds & Benwell, 2010).

Two extremely emotive sites on the day of commemoration in 2010 were the Plaza Islas Malvinas in Ushuaia, where the President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner delivered a keynote speech in front of gathered war veterans and their families, and the Monumento a los caídos en Malvinas, in central Buenos Aires, which drew large numbers of high-ranking military officials, families and veterans (see Fig. 1). As we discuss below, the presence of the President in the southernmost city of Argentina rather than the capital is not insignificant and represents the region’s geographical and historical ties to the Malvinas. Hence, the symbolism of the President attending a service in the capital of the province of Tierra del Fuego, which includes (on Argentine maps at least) the South West Atlantic territories and a portion of Antarctica, should not be underestimated. Despite the emotive nature of the day and the controversial British oil exploration activities being undertaken several hundred miles away, some Argentine newspapers reported that the number of people attending the event in Ushuaia without clear associations to the military was markedly small (Clarín, 2010a). While the notoriously inclement weather in the southern tip of Patagonia could have been partly responsible for the reported downturn in attendees, the observation is salient because it hints at other explanations for non-attendance. Could Argentines be losing interest in the recuperation of the Malvinas at such a contentious moment, one of the issues thought to unite the nation like nothing else (apart perhaps from the national football team)?

This may well be the case given that an opinion poll carried out within large urban centres in Argentina by Poliarquía Consultores (2010), which coincided with the British round of oil exploration, found that 45% of Argentines had little or no interest in news relating to the Malvinas. 52% of respondents were found to follow news about the Malvinas with considerable interest with men and respondents over-50 most likely to fall within this group. Those respondents in the younger age bracket of 18–29 were more likely to show little or no interest in the issue. While such statistics drawn from opinion polls should be read with caution, they do begin to encourage deeper interrogation of the various ways in which young Argentines receive, and respond to, these more explicit expressions of territorial nationalism which often coincide with key anniversaries or specific activities (such as oil exploration but also British military exercises which took place in late-2010).

This emphasis on reception does not preclude or dispute the need to visually analyse notions of Argentine territoriality, as projected through popular representations of the Malvinas in the form of government-produced television advertisements, maps and special edition postage stamps (Billig, 1995; Child, 2008; Edensor, 2002; Escudé, 1988). These are invariable ‘texts’ which help us grasp the geopolitical inclinations and intentions of nation-states and their administrations and which, for example, shed light on when and where specific expressions of nationalism are explicitly reinforced (Brunn, 2011; Jones & Merriman, 2009).

Informative in this vein is a television commercial produced by the government of Argentina about the Malvinas in April 2010 which opens with the words, ‘Buenos días argentinos, buenos días isleños’, setting the tone for the short sequence of images and words that follow. The advertisement listens in on an imaginary morning radio programme while cleverly juxtaposing representations of an imagined future for the Malvinas and its inhabitants (an imagination as constructed by the Kirchner administration at least), in ways which incorporate the population and culture of the Islanders already present, with those of Argentines who are represented as having a permanent presence. Images quickly flash across the screen depicting certain ‘stereotypical’ reference-points connected to both the Falkland Islands and Argentina. A woman drinks English tea from a fine china cup, a man reads the Penguin News (the English medium newspaper of the Falkland Islands. Interestingly, the words Falkland Islands appear on-screen underneath the title, symbolically important as the British name is seldom used to refer to the territories in Argentina), the traditional British pub, the Globe Tavern in Port Stanley (or Puerto Argentino in Argentina) appears alongside the colourful architecture characteristic of the Falkland Islands today. Intermingled amongst these representations are images of a man drinking mate (the national drink of Argentina), an Aerolíneas Argentinas flight supposedly arriving in the Malvinas (important, as currently no Argentine airlines operate between Argentina and the Islands) and a school playground scene with the flag of Argentina being raised by its students. The narrator speaks predominantly in Spanish but also greets the ‘Island friends’ in English and states that the next songs to be played will be by the Beatles and León Gieco (a famous singer—songwriter from

Fig. 1. Memorial service at the Monumento a los caídos en Malvinas, 2 April 2010 (source: authors).
Argentine). The advertisement ends with the words, ‘This is the future that we dream of for the Malvinas. To work in peace to realise this is the best way to honour the memory of the fallen soldiers’ (in the 1982 conflict).

The advertisement was repeatedly aired on all the major public and cable television channels during the following weeks and therefore would have been viewed by a substantial number of people within Argentina. The timing of its release, to coincide with the anniversary of the Malvinas war is also important to consider, reminding viewers of the subject’s historical context and its interconnections with contemporary diplomatic efforts regarding the sovereignty of the Islands. Interestingly, the advertisement also makes a statement about the kind of territorial nationalism the Kirchner administration wants to be seen to be pursuing. The tone of pacifism and conciliation depicted in the advertisement seem to explicitly challenge British policymakers’ stereotypical construction of Argentines as ‘hot’ and/or ‘irrational’ nationalists. This stereotyping stems predominantly from Argentina’s decision to invade the Falkland Islands in 1982, a decision that was made by an increasingly desperate and unpopular military dictatorship. Yet, it is a construction which endures as evidenced by the recent letter penned by former Royal Navy admirals in The Times, regarding the retirement of the Royal Air Force’s Harrier fleet and concerns about British naval defence capacity in light of ‘unpredictable’ Argentine military intentions in the region (BBC, 2010).

The advertisement reviewed here and subsequent statements from the President and other principal ministers represent a distinctly ‘cooler’ nationalism, one which goes to great pains to stress Argentina’s peaceful intentions and respect for the existing population of the Islands, as well as international law (in direct contrast to how Argentina frames the UK’s unilateral actions and refusal to enter into talks at the United Nations). Importantly, the impression of a ‘cooler’, more measured approach to territorial nationalism has not necessarily reduced the stinging criticism of Britain’s occupation of the South West Atlantic territories and Argentina’s repudiation of the British claim to have a legitimate presence in the area (and indeed the heightening of measures to impede oil exploration by British companies. The Argentine government introduced a law in early 2010 which made it necessary for all vessels travelling to the Malvinas from Argentine ports to seek government-level permission which has had hugely detrimental effects on the lives of Falkland Islanders). Nevertheless, a statement delivered by Argentina’s Minister of Defence on the second of April was replete with references to the respect that Argentina currently has, and will continue to have as part of their ongoing reclamation efforts, for the lives and culture of people living on the Islands. While the name Falklands Islands was not used in full, mentioning the current Island population made the reference implicit at least. It should be noted that these discourses have surfaced at various historical junctures, for example, during the Menem presidency Foreign Minister Di Tella recognised that the Falkland Islands was not an empty space and the Islands’ community were, “Part of the problem and hence part of any solution” (Dodds & Benwell, 2010: 785).

Timing: territorial nationalism on the international stage

The emphasis on respecting the presence and rights of Falklands Islanders also informs the ways in which Argentina is projecting itself as a post-colonial state and its approach to this specific dispute (i.e. through its respect of international law), in regional and international forums. The Cumbre de la Unidad de América Latina y el Caribe (CALC) held in Cancún, Mexico, in February 2010 gathered 33 heads of state of Latin American and Caribbean nations and provided President Kirchner with a platform to speak to the region’s politicians, people and media. In light of the tensions over oil exploration, it was perhaps unsurprising that Kirchner devoted her entire speech to the Malvinas dispute. More striking was her presentation of this distinctly bilateral dispute in ways which resonated with the regional concerns of her audience (Dodds & Benwell, 2010). The speech explicitly critiqued the structure of, and power imbalances inherent to, international organisations such as the UN and more specifically the UN Security Council; themes which were received extremely well, and later reinforced by other Latin American leaders such as Presidents Lula da Silva and Chávez of Brazil and Venezuela respectively. President Kirchner and the then-Chancellor Taiana continually utilised the phrase ‘double standards’ in speeches and newspaper interviews to highlight the existing inequalities within the UN and the impurity with which historically powerful nation-states (i.e. those with a permanent seat on the Security Council) can violate UN resolutions, while ‘weaker’ members have to tow the line and adhere to the rules of the international community (Clarín, 2010b). Hence, the structural hierarchy of the UN is highlighted as being inadequately equipped to deal with the contemporary world order and pressing international issues such as the management of natural resources (and especially those resources situated in developing nations or disputed territories). As the Argentine president recalled:

If the 18th and 19th centuries were characterized by colonialism; if the 20th century was characterized by the creation of the United Nations after world war II with the advent of the cold war and its ideological dispute; the 21st century will undoubtedly face a dispute about natural resources among all those sitting here and those that are not here today (translated extract by the authors from President Kirchner’s speech at the CALC, Cancún, February 2010, emphasis added).

The timing of the decision to more vigorously lobby members of regional (e.g. Unión de Naciones Suramericanas, UNASUR; Mercado Común del Sur, MERCOSUR and CALC) and international (e.g. the UN Group of 24 or G-24 which has an Argentine chairman for 2011) forums on issues pertaining to Argentine territorial and resource nationalism is not accidental. Argentine government officials have frequently framed the dispute as one linked to resources as well as territory, emphasising the importance of the existing and potential natural resources for Argentina’s future generations, as well as highlighting the ecological hazards associated with British companies operating in the area. These concerns were more vocally expressed in the wake of the BP/British Petroleum oil disaster in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010 and are a timely reminder that it was not just President Obama who sought to remind audiences of ‘British’ commercial involvement.

Drawing attention to the issue also coincides with a period when Latin America has an increasingly important geopolitical standing on the world stage, most notably characterised by Brazil’s impressive economic growth and their imminent hosting of significant global events such as the 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2016 Olympics Games. This is also a moment when many leaders in Latin America are sceptical about, if not positively hostile to, external intervention in the political affairs of the continent (see Meade, 2010: 305–334). The spectre of US-sponsored dictatorial regimes in nation-states throughout Central and South America and the human rights abuses which ensued, have left an indelible mark on the region’s attitude to ‘colonial agendas’ from elsewhere. The controversial involvement of the US military (for Venezuela and Argentina in particular) in Colombia as part of the alleged fight against drug cartels is illustrative of these territorial and political sensitivities. In this context, the conscious and deliberate ‘heating up’ of the Malvinas dispute in ways which draw on growing Latin American continental solidarity, represents an intelligently-timed example of international diplomacy. One which has reaped some
rewards in terms of concrete action, as both Brazil and Uruguay have subsequently rejected the entry of British warships into ports within their territory; acts which drew praise from the President of Argentina herself via her Twitter account.

On the regional and international stage President Kirchner has also looked to distinguish between the geopolitical intentions of the UK and Argentina. The invocation of ‘colonial present’ (as Derek Gregory noted in 2004) is noteworthy in the sense that the Falklands/Malvinas is connected to other colonial encounters and occupations, especially in the post 9/11 era. At the CALC in Cancún she stated that, “We [Argentina] are not in Afghanistan, we are not in Iraq, we oppose any type of occupation, we oppose any type of violation of international law.” Responding to accusations from the then British Prime Minister Gordon Brown that Argentina was escalating the conflict in the South West Atlantic (through the drafting and eventual passing of a law to block the movement of ships between ports in continental Argentina and the Islands), President Kirchner expressed surprise, highlighting the irony of a global military ‘aggressor’ such as Britain citing Argentina, a country involved in two peaceful military operations in Cyprus and Haiti, as having intents bélicos (or warlike intentions). Of course, there is also a deliberate attempt here to distinguish the contemporary democratic nation-state of Argentina, from the troubled and relatively recent history associated with the last military dictatorship (1976–1983), a history which is intimately bound up with the Malvinas war and which Argentine society is, arguably, still trying to come to terms with (Knudson, 1997). Yet these traumatic experiences for Argentina and its population, manifest in the shocking human rights atrocities which characterised the years of the dictatorship, are utilised by President Kirchner to reaffirm the nation’s present strict anti-war stance. The consistent position (as expressed, principally, by the Chancellor and President) that Argentina will register its disapproval and rejections over the South West Atlantic territories using solely peaceful and diplomatic means, is an important message that is not only relevant on the international stage. The scars from the 1982 Malvinas war are still extremely raw in Argentina, in particular the treatment of young, poorly-trained and –equipped conscripts during the military campaign on the Islands (as depicted in Tristán Bauer’s acclaimed film, Iluminados por el fuego, 2005). Themes which are also highly emotive for Argentine youth, born after the conflict, who learn about the experiences of soldiers (who were of a similar age in 1982) in the classroom by looking at magazines and related regalia from the era, as well as occasionally listening to veterans who enter secondary schools to talk to students.

As one Argentine student (aged 25), originally from Misiones (a province bordering Brazil in the north of Argentina) but university attendance in Buenos Aires, pointed out during an interview:

…my mum or my aunt had friends from Misiones or Corrientes which are very hot places and they [the conscripted soldiers] were like 16 year old kids. And they would be taken by the military and sent to the Malvinas to fight in the war, you know. And they would freeze over there because they didn’t have jackets or things prepared to be in 25 degrees minus zero, you know what I mean. Yeah, they were freezing, they were freezing…so they were taken there and told, OK here you have a gun and you have to fight for the nation. What nation? I don’t care about the nation! So many people died there and they were my mother’s friends…and she would tell me about that.

This account pertaining to the inexperience and origins of Argentine conscripts from provinces far removed from the theatre of conflict in the South West Atlantic is commonly recited by both adults and young people in contemporary Argentina society (see Guber, 2001: 115; Lorenz, 2006). Interestingly, despite the geographical education (not least through visual reminders such as maps, banners and road signs) and consistent reminders that the Malvinas were Argentine, many conscripts arrived on the Islands with very little knowledge of the conditions and the reception they would face from the Falkland Islanders (Dodd’s, 2002). The expression of ambivalence in the quote above starts to hint at a disparity in both the extent of knowledge about, and the sentiment towards, the Malvinas for Argentines from different parts of the nation-state. The contemporary reception of dominant geopolitical territorial discourses among young people from different parts of Argentina is further explored below.

In a diplomatic sense Argentina is making a concerted effort to draw very clear distinctions between the past and the present, from the ‘hot/irrational’ aggressor to the ‘cool’ pacifist, as well as what constitutes legitimate and illegitimate action in the ongoing dispute over the Malvinas Islands. Although Argentina’s current commitment to employing peaceful diplomacy in their attempts to reclaim sovereignty of the Islands is not necessarily new, representations of future co-existence (Argentines and Falkland Islanders) on the Islands through advertisements, and the use of words such as respect and friendship might suggest a new turning point in Argentina’s geopolitical strategy — notwithstanding the Argentine claim to the South West Atlantic territories, including the Malvinas, remaining unaltered within the 1994 Constitution.

Engaging everyday territorial nationalism in Argentina

In Argentina, Billig’s (1995) ‘banal nationalism’ has been usefully applied to frame the ways in which national territory is imagined and constructed by the nation-state (Dodd’s, 2007; Edensor, 2002). More specifically, it has examined daily reminders present in mundane things such as postage stamps (Child, 2005, 2008; Nuessel, 1992), school textbooks and posters/maps hanging on the classroom wall (Escudé, 1988; vom Hau, 2009), which reiterate the geographical proximity of the South West Atlantic Islands and Antarctica and the associated notion that Argentine territory does not end at the coastline of continental Argentina — indeed the Patagonian continental shelf would suggest a very material connection with the disputed islands of the Malvinas and Georgia del Sur. We have suggested that the production of popular expressions of territorial nationalism is temporally and geographically variable depending on, amongst other variables, wider events in the region, political agendas of the Argentine government and so on. Now our emphasis shifts to thinking about how such symbolism might be ‘read’ in everyday contexts by Argentine youth, in the process avoiding an assumption that territorial nationalism will mean the same thing to all Argentines (Jones & Merriman, 2009).

Many young Argentines were keen to point out that despite the omnipresence of popular references to the Malvinas in public life, the issue had waning relevance in their lives. Take these quotes drawn from interviews with two young women (aged 25) from the north of Argentina but living in Buenos Aires:

It seems that the Malvinas are more like a symbol of patriotism. We don’t feel so much like they are ours you could say. I think that to children in the school or signs in the street, all of these show them [the Islands] to us. They make us believe that they are Argentine...but for us in reality we don’t feel like we have to recuperate them or whatever. They don’t make us believe that they have to be ours...the youth don’t feel it so much, for me. Because we didn’t live in the period of the war and perhaps as well we think that they’re Islands that don’t have a purpose...equally other people can think, no we have to fight because they’re ours, we have to recuperate them, whatever; we can’t hand over some Islands like this...but I don’t know the truth is I don’t feel like they are Argentine...The Malvinas Islands don’t interest me.
...to me they [the Malvinas] just don’t mean anything… so sorry for the soldiers and for the history and blah but they don’t mean anything to me. For me they’re British and they have to keep being like that just, stay British. You guys have been there for like 100 and I don’t know how many years. 150, 120 years so just stay there. I don’t care! There are other issues that are kind of much more important… like university issues, university teachers don’t get paid. I mean that affects me a lot more than the Malvinas issue you know. It’s like straight to me and the Malvinas thing. I mean I don’t care!

These young women express opinions that are in some ways quite surprising, and not because they are necessarily unusual (many young people involved in this pilot study had similar views in relation to the Malvinas question, although the possibility that this was influenced by interviewing young people with similar educational backgrounds is acknowledged) but because they appear to say alternative things (to the overriding public/popular discourse in Argentina) about how Argentines might be receiving, reacting to, and perhaps even resisting territorial nationalism. The first quote makes reference to the constant reminders of Argentina’s sovereignty claim to the Malvinas manifest in road signs and in the school classroom, yet the subsequent views expressed suggest that these ‘texts’ and the narratives therein have not been passively received and reproduced. On the contrary, the respondent makes it clear that she does not identify with the national project to recuperate the Islands on a personal level, whilst acknowledging that other Argentines might have very different opinions and engagements. Similarly, the second quote shows that other political matters ‘closer to home’ were considered more important than the Malvinas dispute which is framed as socially and physically distant and irrelevant in the context of her everyday life.

Of course, conversations with other social groups such as older Argentine people (i.e. those who lived through the 1982 conflict) might well yield a different set of responses, yet opinion poll data generated from national surveys in Argentina would appear to echo some of the views expressed by respondents here. Nationwide studies (with representative samples of the Argentine adult population according to area, age, sex and socio-economic status) conducted by El Consejo Argentino para Relaciones Internacionales (CARI, 2010) and TNS Gallup (2010) show that in terms of foreign policy priorities, finding a solution to the Malvinas problem ranks far behind the development of international trade, the fight against narco-traffickers and improving regional integration. These quotes and survey data then, begin to complicate the assumed readings of banal manifestations of territorial nationalism prompted by Billig’s (1995) thesis. This plurality may also be in evidence in Argentina in other ways as this quote illustrates:

Also, what they [the Islands] mean to me is not the same as what they mean to people from Ushuaia, for example. Go to Ushuaia and in April the world stops let’s say. I know that on the 2nd of April the people are in mourning. They experience the topic of the Malvinas much more strongly in the south than here [in Buenos Aires].

This female respondent (aged 25) from Buenos Aires contends that there are geographies to Argentina’s territorial nationalism which influence the intensity of feeling towards an issue like the Malvinas dispute and anniversaries commemorating the victims of the 1982 conflict (as suggested above in relation to the President’s decision to attend remembrance services in Ushuaia). Alongside the need to consider how different social groups connect with geopolitical representations, proponents of everyday nationalism must be equally sensitive to their specific geographies of reception both within and outside of the nation-state. Banal nationalisms have hitherto been considered predominantly at the national scale and have not taken sufficient account of regional cleavages (for exceptions see Jones & Merriman, 2009; Leib, 2011; Raento, 1997). For example, how might Argentine expatriate communities living in European cities engage with similar representations of the Malvinas? Raento (2011: iv) reminds us about those multiplicities and uncertainties:

[re]presentations of ‘national values’, or a certain world-view, are rooted in particular territories and particular cultural realms. The message-receiving citizens have multiple, sometimes competing affiliations in their most intimate spheres of belonging. These include family, ethnicity, religion, subculture, political party, and consumer group. The door is always open for alternative readings, and identities and boundaries are constantly negotiated (authors’ emphasis).

Other social indicators and variables could be added to Raento’s suggestions above including class and age. Particularly pertinent in understanding the personal meanings of the Malvinas for the individual is family history, as this young man (aged 19) from Buenos Aires highlights:

An uncle of mine that had done military service and was about to have a break, they called him in 1982 and he didn’t know if he was going to go to the Malvinas. In the end no, thank goodness… because many young people of my age or my generation, their father or people quite close or uncles or someone, know that they went to the Malvinas war. Therefore, it’s something more than historical it’s something more personal because there are many people that are related directly to this.

When geopolitical tensions heat up as they clearly did to an exceptional degree in the South West Atlantic in 1982, individuals and families are implicated in a multitude of different ways for many generations. This is not to suggest that young people with family or friends who fought in the Malvinas will receive these territorial discourses in a uniform manner; rather it emphasises that research into the reception of nationalism, whether expressed in banal ways or otherwise, should take account of these histories. Such geopolitical issues, manifest through various representations, “are interpreted in different ways by different people: some in banal and unconscious ways; others in a more conscious and overt manner. It is impossible to make a priori judgements concerning the impact of everyday discourses of nationalism” (Jones & Merriman, 2009: 167).

Despite this, some young Argentines expressed unease with the pressures to conform to the dominant geopolitical line propagated by the nation-state concerning the Malvinas:

And with football. Well, listen! The people chant the one who doesn’t jump is English. And I jumped! (Laughter.) I remember we were watching the World Cup and you had to jump… if you didn’t have the will to jump, you jumped. Jump! Because the song, what can I say, I was 18 years old and if you didn’t jump you were associated with the English and you had to jump.

I just think that some parties or people tend to try to politicise certain subjects and you take a certain position and they say, ‘You don’t think the Falklands are ours, you’re not Argentinean. You haven’t got the right to call yourself Argentinean’. And you’ve got to try and take your own stand on the subject, try to investigate a bit by yourself. Not let other people decide what you’ve got to think and what makes you a man, what makes you Argentinean. You’ve got to decide for yourself!

These responses from a young woman and man respectively (both aged 25 and from the province of Buenos Aires) talk about how showing support for Argentina’s sovereignty claim is bound up with expected performances and expressing certain views. Müller (2008: 333) observes that these “performance[s] can be a recitation of the already established knowledge, positioning the subject within certain discourses, but it can also result in contestation, in asserting subversive difference”. The first respondent discusses her experiences of feeling like she had to conform by jumping to a song which is often sung at Argentine football grounds and at other public events (including Argentina’s bicentenary celebrations in
Buenos Aires in 2010 during the Malvinas segment of the procession. The song, _el que no salta es un inglés_ (the one who does not jump is English) stems from the 1982 conflict and typically results in a gathered crowd jumping en masse to show their opposition to the English cause. The young woman jumped with those around her although her recounting of the event was tinged with a hint of embarrassment at conforming, something she suggests was related to her age and inexperience. The second quote actively resists popular narratives by arguing that people have the agency and ability to construct views about geopolitical disputes such as the Malvinas, which can conceivably reinforce, subvert and/or resist the dominant geopolitical representations produced by the nation-state. Nevertheless, there is a sense that expressing support for Argentine territorial claims is popularly wrapped up with notions of masculinity and part of what makes you a man in Argentine society (see Archetti, 1999; Connell, 2005; Dowler & Sharp, 2001). In other words, despite these respondents' irritation towards, and active resistance against, what they identify as expressions of uncritical territorial nationalism, there is acknowledgement of the societal expectations associated with the dominant geopolitical message propagated by the nation-state.

As we have suggested, many (although not all) of the young people involved in this pilot study explored and indeed critiqued the form of territorial nationalism espoused by the current Argentine government. While some framed their concern for the territories and the surrounding waters in terms of the potential natural resources and for the wider geopolitical meanings associated with British 'occupation', others also considered ways in which nationalist politics is manifested and mobilised. The focus on resource potential is, however, not surprising given the timing of the research, coinciding with British oil exploration in the waters surrounding the Malvinas. These events received widespread coverage in the Argentine media and, as stated, resource nationalism played an important part in government communiqués relating to the dispute. As some of the students interviewed recalled:

Yes, I would like to recover them because there would be benefits for the country but now it has more to do with the _económico potencial de los Islas_; the truth is that I don't know the way to solve this conflict...Perhaps, before when they didn't know that they could exploit the resources it was easier but well, now it's more complicated.

The Islands as such are not much of a symbol for me. I think that yes it would be good if we had access to some things of _económico significado_ or if there were lots of resources then it would be good to have islands with lots of petrol, but at an economic level and with a practical use. But I don't feel a love for the Malvinas.

These two young women (aged 25 and 24 respectively) from Buenos Aires reproduce in part the resource nationalism discourse relayed by the Argentine government. They position the Islands as bringing potential economic benefits to the nation-state but they, and most of their young counterparts involved in this pilot study, did not identify with the notion of Argentina as an 'incomplete nation' and the wider discourses of territorial nationalism associated with the Malvinas. One might infer that the lack of a more meaningful bond to the territories is a result of having been born after the conflict, as well as some of the other variables already discussed (i.e. regional differences in the intensity of expressions of territorial nationalism and so on).

A much stronger emphasis was placed on what the UK's presence on Islands so close to the Latin American continent represented in a supposedly post-colonial world. It's part of, I read it as a part of the colonialism, British colonialism. They got the Malvinas, as they took over India and Hong Kong and like a thousand more places and islands and big territories. It's not an issue right now because I mean I'm used to the fact that the British are there and the Malvinas are theirs, urm, yours. But it's part of who you guys are, I mean the history of the UK. They went there took over everything, killed everyone. Basically that was it!

The young people were generally much more attentive to these colonial narratives and were strongly opposed to the British presence, aligning it with the established government discourse in Argentina, as an occupation. However, it did not necessarily follow that they wanted the UK to leave and for Argentina to reclaim the territories with one respondent even suggesting that, "what would be better is that they become independent. That they are separate so that they are not part of either [UK or Argentina]. And that's it!" Above all, these extracts from young Argentines illustrate that an individual's standpoint regarding territorial nationalism is "not fixed but negotiated, the subject of dialogue and creativity, influenced by the contexts in which it is produced" (Edensor, 2002: 17).

That is, the young people seemed to both reproduce and resist aspects of Argentine territorial nationalism as constructed by the government. Although young people were exposed to many examples of what Billig (1995) would define as 'banal' forms of (territorial) nationalism, their reception was extremely variable and dependent on a complex amalgam of factors only perceptible in their social contexts. Explorations of nationalism must, then, be situated in their everyday settings using ethnographic research which is adequately equipped to pick apart their complex constitution (Edensor, 2002; Müller, 2008; Navaro-Yashin, 2002).

**Conclusion**

Jones and Merriman's (2009) examination of everyday nationalism in Wales provides a welcome intervention, which further advances debates within geography and beyond about the manner in which banal forms of nationalism are diversely received. In this paper we have traced through some of the spatial and temporal variations associated with the production and reception of everyday territorial nationalism in Argentina. Informing this discussion is a concern for how the disputed Malvinas Islands are reproduced in multiple ways within and beyond Argentine society. We have suggested that the emotional investments of Argentine citizens vary across a range of sites and scales, pointing to the multiple audiences and interpretations of territorial nationalism promulgated by the nation-state. Moreover, we have highlighted variations in the political performances of Argentine politicians in regional and international forums such as the United Nations, which can bring themes of territorial nationalism to the forefront of public consciousness at particular moments.

Some of the young people participating in the pilot study referenced in this paper hint at the popular appeal of this kind of resource nationalism, particularly pertinent given that many respondents did not place symbolic importance on the Islands as sovereign Argentine territory. Nevertheless, as we have suggested, young people did not receive this territorial and/or resource nationalism uniformly; its reception was far more multifarious influenced by factors such as geographical location, family history, generation and so on. Future investigations of territorial nationalism in Argentina must continue analysing popular representations and state discourses produced by the government in the ways Billig might (1995) espouse, whilst recognising that their reception takes place within distinctive micro-contexts at the scale of the everyday.

Despite the prominence of the Malvinas in the political and everyday life of the nation, recent Argentine diplomatic efforts have increasingly sought to 'offshore' this dispute to include additional South West Atlantic and Antarctic territories — with due reference to potentially lucrative resources which may lie underneath the seabed. This has seen the symbolic importance of the Malvinas for Argentina (manifest in the various cultural reminders discussed)
interwoven with the economic potential of the South West Atlantic region and thus we see evidence of everyday resource nationalisms becoming more significant. President Cristina Kirchner and successive Argentine Chancellors have made efforts to emphasise the value of these surrounding waters, perhaps a necessary measure given recent military and resource exploration action by the UK, and the overwhelming attention placed on the Malvinas sovereignty question in Argentina. Ex-Chancellor Taiana talked of an “illegal” British occupation and action (i.e. oil exploration) in the region as constituting a threat to the “heritage and national wealth of Argentines and their future generations” (Página 12, 2010). The Argentine government have used this additional maritime resource dimension as a means to broaden what might have otherwise been seen as an exclusively bilateral dispute, framing it instead as an issue that concerns the entire Latin American continent and developing nations around the world. Kirchner has repeatedly stressed (with firm backing from the Venezuelan President, Hugo Chávez and Bolivian President Evo Morales) how the presence of a “British colonial enclave in the South Atlantic” should concern developing nations around the world with renewable and non-renewable resources, underlining the obligation of all states in Latin America to act regionally, supporting one another in cases of extra-territoriality regardless of whether those claims pertain to land or maritime spaces. So here, at least, we might find evidence not only of a variety of banal nationalism but also a banal internationalism that will resonate in diverse and indeed unexpected ways within and beyond Argentina.

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References


Web citations


