Compatibilizing Sub-State Nationalism and Immigration Through Civic Nationalism

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Many scholars believed the sweeping effects of globalization would end the existence of national minority identities based on language and culture. However, this theory has proven contrary in the modern world, where sub-state or minority nationalism is stronger than ever (Kymlicka, 2). This form of nationalism has resiliently adapted itself to the modern world, but now faces many new challenges brought on by globalization. Immigration is seen as one of the leading challenges to minority nationalism, often resulting in potentially volatile tensions between the national minorities and increasing numbers of immigrants within a state. This paper explores whether the existence of sub-state nationalism can ever be compatible with immigration. I argue that, due to an increasing acceptance of civic nationalism by national minorities, immigration has come to be seen as advantageous for sub-state nationalists, effectively compatibilizing the two. I begin by explaining the reason for the tenuous relationship between sub-state nationalism and immigration, where the latter is seen as a threat to minorities’ nationalist interests. I then present the argument as to why these two are seen as incompatible, as national minorities are believed to always adopt a violent, disastrous ethnic nationalist approach in response to the threat. I will then explain why this view is mistaken, explaining how and why many national minorities are adopting a civic nationalist approach and using immigration to their advantage, effectively reconciling the two. I provide the examples of Quebec and Catalonia to provide further explanation. In addition, I also consider the role the state must play in encouraging the adoption of civic nationalism by offering national minorities more policy control over immigration. Finally, I will consider the objection that such policies may be illiberal, but will argue that the sacrifice of some liberal norms is necessary in order to prevent dangerous ethnic nationalist sentiments from arising. I conclude by maintaining that sub-state nationalism and immigration are more than compatible and can actually help each other realize the needs and desires of the minority and immigrant groups involved.

Let us begin by understanding the definitional meanings behind sub-state nationalism and immigration as well as their tenuous relationship. Will Kymlicka describes sub-state or minority
nationalists as “groups [that] sees itself as a distinct and self-governing nation within a larger state, and has mobilized along nationalist lines to demand greater regional self-government and national recognition” (4). They seek to preserve and encourage their distinctive identity, which is usually founded upon a historical language and/or culture that they claim is separate from the majority. Minority nationalists mobilize using nationalist sentiments, in varying degrees of extremity, in order to achieve protection and recognition for their distinct identity both legally and politically.

Immigration is seen as a threat to the achievement of national minorities’ nationalist desires. Rates of immigration, the permanent move of individuals to a foreign country, have dramatically increased since the beginning of globalization (Kymlicka, 3). However, immigrants do not share the same distinctive identity that minority groups have based themselves on and this is perceived as a serious threat to minority nationalist interests. Sanjay Jeram explains, “minority nations define themselves from the larger state by way of distinct cultures and languages and now they must contend with an influx of migrants that do not share those languages or cultural traits” (1). Charles Leddy-Owen also remarks that “immigration [is] seen to be—variously and to differing extents—disturbing and undermining national borders, the national economy, culture, story, and so on” of the majority as well as minorities in a state. Specifically, there are four ways immigration has proven to be a threat to sub-state nationalism. First, immigrants will most likely integrate into the dominant culture of the state, as this offers them greater economic opportunities and mobility (Kymlicka, 9). Resultantly, national minorities become further outnumbered and less influential politically. Secondly, many states have encouraged immigrants to settle in land held by the minority group, as a means to further disempower the national minority (Kymlicka, 9). Canada is a prime example of this when European immigrants were historically encouraged to settle on originally held Aboriginal land, deliberately marginalizing the Aboriginal minority. Moreover, since immigrants typically integrate into dominant cultures, this influences the state to pressure minority groups to do the same (Kymlicka, 9). If immigrants can and are happy to integrate, the majority asks why
sub-state groups do not do the same. Finally, immigrants do not share the same ‘survival’ mentality
national minorities do (Kymlicka, 9). They do not share the same historical struggle to protect their
distinctive identity as minority groups do, thus are extremely unlikely to support nationalist mobilization
and interests (Kymlicka, 9). There is no doubt that immigration has proven to be a threat to sub-state
nationalism in various ways. As a result, most national minorities act defensively and unwelcoming
towards immigrants, creating the tenuous relationship between the two groups.

This has led to the assumption that most or all national minorities resort to *ethnic nationalism* in
response to the threat of immigration, leading many scholars to believe the two are always incompatible.
Ethnic nationalism is an extreme form of nationalism that is based solely on ethnicity, thus relying on
immutable characteristics such as race to define group identity and membership (Jeram, 2). By depending
on shared heritage to define their nation, ethnic nationalists are often deeply xenophobic, racist, and
exclusionary of immigrants (Kymlicka, 10). Ethnic nationalism often runs contrary to values such as
liberalism and democracy most modern states promote, consequently threatening the immigrant
population as well as the stability of the state as a whole (Kymlicka, 10). It is also seen as extremely
dangerous, as ethnic nationalism can and has led to violent, disastrous consequences for everyone
involved. It is true that many sub-state nationalists have turned to ethnic nationalism in an effort to protect
and promote their interests. But this has mistakenly led many scholars to resolve ethnic nationalism is
synonymous with sub-state nationalism, which, as we shall see, is not always the case. This has led to the
conclusion that immigration and sub-state nationalism will never be compatible; as long as minority
nationalists resort to ethnic nationalism in response, there will always be chaos within a state. Kymlicka
explains, “this connection between minority nationalism and ethnic nationalism is so strong that many
commentators view minority nationalism as inherently based on ethnic exclusiveness, and as inherently
opposed to ‘civic’ nationalism based on shared political principles” (10). However, simply because some
minority nationalists have appealed to ethnic nationalism in response to immigration does not mean this is
a trend of all minority groups. Such instances are not enough to conclude sub-state nationalism and immigration as always incompatible.

Simply because immigration can be a threat to sub-state nationalism does not mean this is always the case. In fact, there has been an increasing trend of minority nationalists appealing to *civic nationalism*. Civic nationalism is the exact opposite of ethnic nationalism. Kymlicka explains, civic nationalism “accepts shifting group boundaries, multiple and hybrid identities, and which is based on voluntary affiliations and individual rights” (10). It is compatible with modern values such as liberalism, democracy, and peace (Kymlicka, 11). Instead of basing group identification on immutable characteristics, civic nationalism accepts both shifting group boundaries and self-identification. It allows the minority group to adopt an “inclusive citizenship” to allow those into the national minority who would previously have been excluded (Jeram, 3). In this way, national minorities can be accepting of immigrants. It allows immigrants the opportunity to integrate into the minority culture and adopt their distinct identity. In turn, as we shall see in further detail, this allows the national minority to further protect and promote their nationalist interests. This change in attitude makes the existence of sub-state nationalism and immigration both harmonious and beneficial within a state. An influx of scholars, such as Kymlicka and Jeram, are now asking us to rethink the relationship between sub-state nationalism and immigration as this demonstrates the two can be compatible with each other. As Jeram writes, the “previously held assumption that minority nations manifest defensive and exclusionary attitudes towards immigrants may no longer be useful” (4).

There are various reasons why civic nationalism is becoming the best approach for national minorities to take in response to immigration. Economic reasons are definitely an influential factor, as immigrants are able to fill economic niches that are otherwise vacant and negatively impacting the local economy (Kymlicka, 14). Another factor can also be changing demographic trends, such as the need to offset declining birth rates or an aging population (Kymlicka, 15). However, the most important reason
for this change in attitude is the need to survive in rapidly changing and globalizing societies. Kymlicka points out that “it has become clear that migration is difficult if not impossible to fully control” and is definitely continuing (15). Traditional ethnic nationalist responses to immigration have typically led to further chaos and conflict, creating alternative challenges to the realization of nationalist interests (Kymlicka, 15). Adopting a civic nationalist approach to immigration is a new way for national minority groups to survive in the modern day. Since they cannot control or fight back against immigration, national minorities must look how they can accept and integrate foreigners into their nation (Kymlicka, 15). As Jeram describes, it is a way of “adapting and changing their values to obtain broad support and maintain distinctiveness from the state identity” (4). By broadening the way the minority group identifies, it allows the immigrants to integrate into the culture, effectively increasing the minority’s numbers as well as resources and power to mobilize in order to protect and promote their distinct identity (Gans, 165). Sub-state nationalists can use immigration to their own advantage. They are able to pursue their nationalist interests while accommodating immigration, ensuring their survival into the future. Sub-state nationalism and immigration are more than compatible when a civic nationalist approach is applied.

The state must play a part in helping to motivate national minorities to adopt a civic nationalist approach. This is crucial to ensure the compatible existence of sub-state nationalism and immigration within a state as well as the overall stability of the state. Though the state may not want to encourage the development of national minorities, this is crucial to ensure its wellbeing. Charles Leddy-Owen emphasizes that “[negative] perceptions of immigration […] are contributing to an economically troubled and socially divided society, thus undermining the trust and social bonds required for a functioning, potentially progressively minded national polity” (343). Not all national minorities currently appeal to a civic nationalist approach. Salvador Cardus I Ros emphasizes the necessity of helping society view immigration as a “memory place” rather than something to fear. To allow minorities to see immigration as an opportunity, he explains the state must enable “the transformation of immigration into a ‘memory
place’ [...] into a sort of ‘origin’ insofar as the society takes ownership of it’” (42-43). He envisions the idea of immigrants as ‘foreigners’ be replaced with them as “founding members”, integrated into the minority culture that originally sees them as threats (43).

Let us look at the examples of Quebec and Catalonia to further explain. Quebec, Canada is home to a distinctive historically French minority that has long asserted and fought for their right for self-determination and to protect their culture. In recent years, they have been taking advantage of increasing immigration to further build their “distinct society” (Kymlicka, 12). In the process, Quebec has reshaped its national identity to be more inclusionary towards immigrants, thus adopting a civic nationalist approach. Jeram writes, “Quebec nationalism overcame its early ethnocentric character and redefined the boundaries of the nation to allow for the inclusion of immigrants without French ancestry” (15). Since the 1970s, they have pursued a policy of “interculturalism” that seeks to affirm and accommodate other ethnocultural identities as long as they abide by several shared principles, such as respecting the French language and liberal values like democracy and civil rights (Kymlicka, 12). They have been successfully influencing the integration of immigrants into their minority culture through avenues such as making French the public language of Quebec, thus encouraging foreigners to learn their language. Kymlicka explains Quebec has been given substantive control over the integration of immigrants, which has been the key to the successful existence of minority nationalism and immigration within Canada. Many immigrants now consider themselves Quebecois and practice the minority culture at home, such as speaking French (Kymlicka, 14). He writes, “control over immigration is one of the powers Quebec nationalists have sought and gained, and the province administers its own immigration programme, actively recruiting immigrants” (12). This allows the Quebec minority to grant immigrants citizenship, help immigrants easily integrate into their culture, and increases both minority and immigrant participation in public institutions— a seeming win-win for both groups (Kymlicka, 12).

Catalonia has taken a similar path towards the reconciliation of immigration with sub-state
nationalism. Catalonia has always had a high immigration rate (Kymlicka, 13). The Catalan people, though once opposed and were hostile towards the entrance of foreigners into their state, have realized the advantages immigration offers. Immigrants are now welcomed and encouraged in an effort to modernize and allow Catalonia to progress. Salvador Cardus I Ros writes, “without immigration, Catalonia would potentially have suffered economic decadence, cultural irrelevance, and political non-existence” (38). Just like Quebec, the Catalan people have been given control over policy initiatives aimed at encouraging immigrant integration (Ros, 38). This has allowed them to protect their national culture and identity in the face of immigration (Ros, 41). Realizing immigration is an advantage not a threat has helped both national minorities and the state progress and modernize in both Quebec and Catalonia’s cases as well as countless other states.

The best way for the state to encourage this civic nationalist mindset is through policies that allow the minorities more direct control over immigration. This will help prevent radical ethnic nationalist sentiments from arising, instead encouraging the adoption of a civic nationalist approach (Kymlicka, 18). Furthermore, as Chaim Gans reminds readers, national minorities’ right to self-determination is often already recognized within a state (174). The right to self-determination ensures the right to protect their distinctive identity however they see fit, thus they should have some say influence in controlling the influx of a foreign population that has proven to be a threat in various ways to their culture (Gans, 174). As Kymlicka suggests, the national minority must have control over the volume of immigration (18). This will ensure the number of immigrants will not overwhelm the ability of the minority to successfully integrate them. It is also important to rectify historical instances where the state encouraged immigrant settlement on the land of the national minority (Kymlicka, 18). Furthermore, the national minority should have control over the terms of integration (Kymlicka, 19). Certain policies may be necessary to ensure the immigrants do integrate into minority culture, such as offering public services or schooling only in the minority’s language (Kymlicka, 19). For example, Quebec’s strict language laws encourage immigrants to
learn the minority language as it makes it clear this is the main public language. The minorities are best equipped to know which policies would be most effective and thus should have the main control over their creation and implementation. Instilling policies that allow the national minority to have direct control over immigration encourages their adoption of a civic nationalist approach as well as ensures the compatibility of immigration and sub-state nationalism within the same state.

It is worth noting that one may object that such policies may be illiberal. This may offer national minorities the opportunity to pass discriminatory policies that harm and unfairly target immigrants. Even Kymlicka recognizes there is a dilemma, as he acknowledges “such illiberal policies may be required if national minorities are to integrate immigrants successfully” (20). For instance, in Quebec, many commentators applaud Quebec for ridding themselves of an ethnic definition of nationhood, yet they criticize their policies on education and language as being illiberal (Kymlicka, 22). But, at the end of the day, this may be the cross we must bear in order to reconcile sub-state nationalism with immigration. The alternative ethnic nationalist approach national minorities may take has historically proven to spawn further conflict and chaos. Ethnic nationalism is extremely dangerous and we should do all we can to disarm it. We may have to sacrifice the liberalness of state policies in order to prevent the unrest that will likely arise without the adoption of a civic nationalist approach, but it is worth it to prevent ethnic nationalism. With that being said, just as Kymlicka acknowledges, we must also consider to what extent a policy in question violates the liberal norms (22). Such difficult considerations should be left up to the individual state government on a case-by-case basis. As long as the sacrifice of the liberal norm is outweighed by the consequences ethnic nationalism can have, then such policies should be allowed to ensure the harmonious existence of sub-state nationalism and immigration within a state. If we accept this, then we can accept that sub-state nationalism and immigration are indeed compatible.

In conclusion, I maintain that sub-state nationalism and immigration can definitely be compatible within a state. We have looked at the tenuous relationship between two and how immigration is seen as a
threat to national minority interests. I presented the view that national minorities always turn to dangerous ethnic nationalism in response to this perceived threat, making the two always incompatible with each other. However, I then explained how this view is mistaken, as many national minorities are adopting a civic nationalist approach in order to recognize and use immigration as an advantage. I presented the examples of Quebec and Catalonia to further explain. Finally, I discussed the important role the state must play in encouraging minorities’ civil nationalist approach by allowing them more direct policy control over immigration. I also briefly considered the objection that such policies may be illiberal, arguing that we must sacrifice some liberal norms in order to prevent the disastrous consequences of an ethnic nationalist approach from arising. Currently, not all sub-state nationalists take a civic nationalist approach to welcome and encourage immigration into the state. However, it is clear that the possibility to reconcile sub-state nationalism with immigration is possible. In order to prevent further chaos and destruction, fostering a civic nationalist approach is essential to ensure the wellbeing of the immigrants, national minority, and state as a whole.

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