


necessarily deal with fewer nations and languages but demonstrate how the link was established and preserved by certain groups in certain countries at certain periods of their distant and recent history. At the same time, Bortone's book will be useful to those readers of this journal who want to learn more about language processes accompanying, and contributing to, the formation and evolution of nationality groups.

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**The Symbolic State: Minority Recognition, Majority Backlash, and Secession in Multinational Countries**, by Karlo Basta, Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2021, 272pp., \$130.00 (cloth), ISBN 9780228008057, \$37.95 (paperback), ISBN 978-0228008064.

Multinational states are not nation-states. They have peculiar political dynamics involving the relationship between national minorities, majorities, and the state. Karlo Basta's book delves into the very heart of this relationship by presenting a dynamic theory of nationalist demands and state responses using the cases of Canada/Québec, Spain/Catalonia, Yugoslavia/Croatia, and the "velvet divorce" of Czechoslovakia.

The theory begins with the idea that national minorities present both instrumental and symbolic recognition demands. Instrumental demands are demands for policy and fiscal autonomy. States will typically choose to respond to these demands as opposed to symbolic recognition demands because policy and fiscal autonomy do not directly involve a compromise on national identity, or the "symbolic-institutional order." For Basta, states will respond favorably to instrumental demands if the central government's broad ideological approach (he distinguishes between *state-interventionist* and *pro-market*) is the same as the regional government seeking autonomy because autonomy will then not threaten the central government's policy objectives. This is what Basta calls the "political economy story." More important is the subsequent "symbolic politics story." As initially the demands of the national minority are only partially met (at best, demands of an instrumental nature are met), a second round of claims focused on symbolic recognition unfolds. Here, the central government may choose to offer some form of symbolic recognition of nationhood to relieve nationalist pressure. Such recognition, Basta tells us, is likely to offend the majority group's vision of the country and, therefore, to trigger a backlash against recognition within this (majority) group. In turn, such backlash (which may very well lead to the termination of the recognition agreement) can be used by (minority) nationalist politicians to stimulate mobilization in favor of independence. The end result is a secessionist crisis.

The most interesting argument here is that symbolic recognition is likely to trigger secessionist crises. It is counter-intuitive and provocative. Indeed, the argument goes against much of the literature on the accommodation of nationalism, which tends to suggest that formally recognizing the existence of a minority nation is for states an effective way to manage nationalism. The argument is well-developed and persuasive. It is built on an ontological and theoretical position on institutions that provides them with symbolic importance. Indeed, backlash to recognition occurs because the majority group feels that such recognition is a threat to what is essentially *their* symbolic-institutional order. An original and powerful aspect of the theory is that institutions have symbolic value not only for the national minority, but also for the majority group. In this sense, the book builds on the (still very slim) literature on majority and state nationalism.

Basta's theory rests on an analytical distinction between instrumental and symbolic recognition demands. In reality, the line between these two "types" of demands is blurred. For example, the

initial granting by a state of political autonomy to a national minority who asks for it involves some form of recognition, albeit implicit. The “political economy” part of the theory is less compelling than its “symbolic recognition” component. Even using some of the cases in the book, it is not clear that ideology and policy objectives are what determines if a central government acquiesces to demands for increased policy and fiscal autonomy. For example, in Canada, the center-left Pierre Trudeau Liberal governments (1968–1979 and 1980 to 1984) often turned down requests from Québec’s center-left Liberal or Parti québécois governments for additional autonomy. Basta’s theory uses time effectively, developing a causal chain for secessionist crises, but what happens at the end of the chain (i.e., when a secessionist crisis does occur, or even when it does not get to that because the state refuses to offer symbolic recognition) is unclear. Does another chain begin with feedback loop effects from how the previous process of demands and responses unfolded? Finally, while Basta’s compelling theory strongly suggests that the symbolic recognition of minority nationhood is a bad idea (at least, if the majority does not solidly endorse recognition) because it immediately triggers a surge in secessionism, we can wonder about the long-term effect of non-recognition. Such non-recognition might not immediately provoke a secessionist crisis, but it can over time erode the attachment of members of the national minority to the state and the nation it promotes.

Karlo Basta mentions in his book that there is much to do to build up multinationalism as a field of study. There is no doubt whatsoever that *The Symbolic State* is a major contribution to this enterprise. By theoretically stressing the symbolic value of institutions, in line with some of the author’s previous work, the book also represents a major contribution to the study of nationalism and its management, and to comparative politics more broadly.

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