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Special Issue Editor's Introduction: New Frontiers in the Comparative Study of Ethnic Politics and Nationalism*

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This special issue grew out of a roundtable at the annual conference of the Association for the Study of Nationalities (ASN) in 2014 dedicated to the topic of "Research Methods in the Study of Nationalism and Ethnic Politics." Despite the yawn-worthy title, the response was overwhelming. The comparative study of ethnic politics and nationalism has long been dominated by conceptual discussion and empirical observation, while the actual task of conducting research on the subject frequently gets shoved aside. The roundtable revealed that there is, in fact, a real thirst for sustained discussions of research methods and their intersection with both theoretical traditions and empirical focus.

This special issue of *Social Science Quarterly* represents an attempt to address this need for methodological reflection. It presents overview articles that address the field from a studied distance as well as empirical articles that illustrate the pressing issues and methodological stakes involved in the ways that we research ethnic politics and nationalism today. This special issue makes no pretense of providing a representative sample of all approaches or areas, opting for depth rather than breadth. The result is a selection of articles that are at once focused and eclectic. The first few articles raise broad concerns about the use of existing data sets, ethnographic observation, and archival material. Each article addresses the relationship between theory and method. Of particular concern for each author is the identification of limitations, gaps, and blind spots in existing approaches, but also the proposal of ways to address the methodological challenges emerging from contemporary studies. The concerns raised in the first articles echo throughout the empirical contributions, creating a dialog throughout the issue and (hopefully) a foundation for ongoing methodological and theoretical reflection.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the study of ethnic politics and nationalism was dominated by theoretical debates among constructivism, instrumentalism (or circumstantialism), and primordialism, as well as related approaches such as perennialism and ethno-symbolism (Smith, 1998; Young, 1993). By the millennium, a consensus emerged around constructivism as the most sensible way forward, though the consensus lacked any clear accomplishments in terms of useful generalizations to rival those of prior generations (Chandra, 2001). The last 15 years have seen significant advances in linking ethnic politics with the broader study of social identity (Abdelal et al., 2009). Part of this enterprise meant finding ways to reconcile decades of data collected under different (often primordialist) theoretical auspices with constructivist insights about the multiplicity, malleability, and manipulability of identity categories. For others, it meant tapping into related disciplines such as social psychology and cognitive science (Brubaker, 2004). However, the constructivist consensus

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also meant a proliferation of versions of constructivism (Chandra, 2012). Each version of constructivism bears distinctive methodological tendencies in relation to their privileging of agency or institutions, as well as their conceptualization of power as semiotic or material. It would be a gargantuan task to map the field of study along these lines, though one may get a clear sense of the dividing lines simply by leafing through the contributions to this special issue.

The issue begins with four articles drawn from the ASN roundtable presentations. Most of the remaining contributions were presented at ASN as well, or contributed by active participants in the conference. Hence, there may appear to be a certain predilection for cases in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. This reflects the organizational influence of ASN in forging a community of scholars who share a common interest in the region as well as the diverse range of approaches for studying nationalism and ethnic politics. Nevertheless, we recognize that readers of *Social Science Quarterly* are more likely to be familiar with the literature on race and ethnicity in American politics than with the comparative politics literature on ethnic politics and nationalism. We elected to view this as an opportunity to build bridges, and each contributor sought to make his or her article accessible for a broad audience that perhaps is encountering this literature for the first time.

In the first of three overview articles, Kyle Marquardt and Yoshiko Herrera take stock of existing quantitative measures of ethnic diversity, differentiating between data sets recording the existence and diversity of groups, indices of the fractionalization and polarization of groups, and the combination of data sets on grievances with measures of ethnic diversity that link groups to conflict. In uncovering the “inclusion boundaries” implicitly or explicitly used for enumerating groups, they identify the sometimes unexamined and unintended theoretical consequences of using data with inconsistent principles for inclusion. Their contribution performs a valuable service for the field of study in collating and presenting important criticisms with an eye toward driving research forward. Newcomers as well as experienced researchers will find particularly useful their annotated bibliography of existing data sets.

Paul Goode and David Stroup argue that existing constructivist approaches suffer from a series of related shortcomings that are both conceptual and methodological: the relative neglect of dominant ethnicity and a related (if inadvertent) reinforcement of the so-called civic-ethnic distinction, a preoccupation with agency and mobilization to the neglect of legitimacy, an outsourcing of causal mechanisms to institutionalist theory, and a lingering tendency toward methodological nationalism. Rather than seeking to tweak and perfect existing quantitative measures, they argue for an “everyday nationalism” approach that replaces individuals and groups as units of analysis with ethnic and nationalist practices, and that proceeds from ethnographic observation rather than statistical analysis. Recognizing that this approach runs against the norm in American social science, they propose ways that such an approach might be leveraged for examining large-scale phenomena such as authoritarian legitimacy or ethnicized development. They defend the ability of such an approach to yield decontextualized observations for secondary analysis and generalization, concluding that an “everyday nationalism” approach has an advantage over existing constructivist studies in self-consciously resisting the temptation toward methodological individualism.

Harris Mylonas scrutinizes the advantages and pitfalls of archival research in studying ethnicity and nationalism. He identifies three varieties of methodological concerns in the study of nation building and illustrates them with reference to his own research: inferring intentions from behavior or known outcomes, relying on census data to identify ethnic groups and minorities, and arbitrary periodization or anachronism—in other words,

attributing concepts or meanings to past actors who would not have found them salient or even intelligible. His concerns about census data clearly resonate with those raised by Kyle Marquardt and Yoshiko Herrera and Paul Goode and David Stroup. Harris Mylonas suggests ways that political scientists interested in ethnic politics might helpfully use archival materials to resolve these problems if one adopts a historicist approach that situates actors, groups, and meanings in social and temporal context. Despite the difficulty of reconstructing a landscape of active and salient ethnic categories, the resulting analysis provides nuanced, process-oriented observations of relevance to the wider field of study.

The remaining contributions address different empirical and theoretical puzzles, and each demonstrates a different methodological approach. Taken as a whole, they present a compelling (though perhaps not wholly representative) sampling of the current state of comparative research on nationalism and ethnic politics. They also illustrate to different degrees the challenges posed in the first set of articles.

Turning to recent empirical studies, Mikhail Alexseev investigates the difference between nationalist attitudes toward migrant worker inclusion and exclusion in Russia. He notes that much of the literature tends to treat attitudes toward inclusion and exclusion as if they are mirror images. Examining survey data gathered in Russia from 2005 to 2013, he finds that the relationship between inclusion and exclusion is, in fact, asymmetrical: support for admitting (including) migrants significantly declined, while support for deporting all migrants (excluding) remained constant. Perceptions of the state's authority and, to a lesser extent, economic vulnerability drove intolerant attitudes. While his data are specific to Russia, Mikhail Alexseev's observation of asymmetry has potentially far-reaching implications for the study of intolerance toward migrant populations in general, including in the United States. He warns that studies of intergroup relations need to be mindful of the differential effects of changing political and socioeconomic contexts implied by this asymmetry; otherwise, scholars risk accepting false positives while underestimating the persistence of certain predictors.

Sener Akturk's article represents a different kind of contribution in breaking new ground on an important yet understudied topic: the phenomenon of religious nationalism and its coincidence with ethnic separatism. His analysis focuses in particular on Islamist and ethnic separatist movements challenging the state, using case studies of Turkey, Algeria, and Pakistan. He notes that it is relatively uncommon to find cases with simultaneous and sustained religious and ethnic separatist movements, making these cases particularly fruitful for investigation. In terms of methodological strategy, Sener Akturk demonstrates the value of comparative historical analysis for untangling large-scale, small-*n* political puzzles and integrating short- and long-term causal mechanisms. He finds that, in all three cases, new regimes came into existence by way of Islamist mobilization for independence, yet the new incumbents pursued secular nation-building agendas counter to expectations. The ensuing crisis of legitimacy for the new regimes drove, in turn, repeated military interventions while accelerating nation-building policies. Sener Akturk's analysis dovetails with the call by Paul Goode and David Stroup to restore focus on nationalism as a doctrine of legitimacy. He concludes that canonical depictions of nation building must be revised to take into account paths to nationhood through religious mobilization.

David Siroky and Valery Dzutsati's contribution builds upon existing rationalist approaches to political violence and civil war. Given that the use of indiscriminate violence by states is often counterproductive in fighting insurgency, its continued use is puzzling. Analyzing a data set of reporting on counterinsurgency in the North Caucasus over an 11-year period, the authors argue that states are more likely to resort to indiscriminate violence in fighting insurgency where confronted with relatively homogeneous indigenous

ethnicity and forested terrain. They develop the notion that the state's resort to indiscriminate violence is conditioned by its lack of information-gathering capacity. With regard to ethnic homogeneity, ethnic solidarities limit the ability of the state to obtain reliable, useful information about insurgents. Forested terrain reinforces ethnic solidarity by further frustrating the exercise of state capacity.

Taking up the concern for ethnic majorities raised by Paul Goode and David Stroup, as well as Harris Mylonas's call for attention to the active and meaningful categories of group membership, Eleanor Knott provides a timely assessment of the varieties of ethnic and kin-state identification in Moldova and Crimea. Relying upon interviews conducted in both areas in 2012–2013, her approach to identifying varieties of social categorization in relationship to putative kin states demonstrates the complexities that are papered over by affixing a single ethnic label to a people. The findings are especially compelling in light of the subsequent annexation of Crimea by Russia in March 2014 and the highly politicized claims relating Crimean residents to Russian nationhood (not to mention ongoing concerns about the potential for similar action in Moldova's breakaway region of Transnistria). She concludes that the range of meanings associated with ethnic and kin-state identities are suggestive of tactical choices available to individuals in manipulating identity repertoires with implications for interstate relations.

Tatiana Oskolova, Maxim Cherepanov, and Alena Shisheliakina present a focused case study of competing ethno-political Russian and Tatar movements in a Russian region. They deploy a range of methods, including ethnographic observation, interviews, and content analysis of local press, to assess the conditions for the emergence of each movement, to evaluate their relationship to regional authorities, and to situate the movements in relation to broader changes of regime in Russia. The comparison of Russian and Tatar ethno-national movements further presents a useful comparison of politicized majority and minority ethnicity, particularly as most studies of ethnic movements in Russia focus almost exclusively on minority ethnic groups. In this sense, their article answers Paul Goode and David Stroup's call for increased attention to ethnic majorities in constructivist analysis.

Finally, Florian Bieber contributes an examination of the politics of the census in post-Yugoslav states. Whereas most studies of census politics focus on the institutionalization and reification of identity categories or, alternatively, their distributive implications, Florian Bieber notes that a significant portion of the population actually reject or "opt out" of the national, religious, and linguistic identity packages crafted by the state and elite actors. His analysis gives further substance to Harris Mylonas's warning about reliance on state census categories and the need to recreate the active and meaningful categories using multiple sources.

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