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Editorial: Representation of minority nations in multinational federal states

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Editorial on the Research Topic

Representation of minority nations in multinational federal states

Studies on nationalism are legion (see, for example, [Hobsbawm, 1990](#); [Greenfeld, 1992](#); [Brubaker, 1996](#); [Guibernau, 2013](#); [Smith, 2013](#); [Gagnon, 2014](#); [Keating, 2001](#)). Nonetheless, the issue of competing representations of national minorities by majority groups in the public space has received less attention in political science ([Rocher and Carpentier, 2022](#); [Rocher, 2023](#); [Budd, 2024](#)). The question of representation that is addressed in this thematic issue focuses on a few cases of multinational states within which national minorities have institutional levers granting them a certain political autonomy, as is the case in Canada for the Quebec population and indigenous peoples, in the United Kingdom for the Scots, the Northern Irish, and the Welsh, and in Pakistan, particularly with regard to the Baluchis. The question is how and in what terms the main spokespersons of the national majority groups construct and convey a particular representation of the national minority(ies) cohabiting on the same federal territory. These representations can be deployed in several discursive spaces: mainstream newspapers, television, electronic and social media, citizen groups, political parties, etc. They may be constructed by political elites, political commentators, and analysts but also expressed more widely in the media.

The central question is whether the majority group's portrayal of the national minority group is based on a strong critique of the latter's identity representation and political claims. Does this strong critique contribute to reinforcing the social norms and identity representations of the majority group, which constructs itself, among other things, in opposition to its national minority? Is the use of negative discursive representations of the national minority part of differentiation and an inferiorization process, or does it instead contribute to defining the identity of the majority political community? How are these discursive representations transposed into the political relations between the two political communities? These are the main questions addressed by the authors of the special Research Topic.

This special Research Topic features five articles. [McGarry](#) approaches the question from an angle of ethnic domination. The overall trend is to portray dominant national majorities positively and minorities negatively. [McGarry](#) identifies three types of domination narratives. The first two present themselves in accommodating forms but propose (1) simulacra of autonomy or (2) simulacra of power-sharing. The third type

takes an integrationist stance and puts forward an egalitarian discourse but perpetuates discriminatory practices and sees the demands of groups as divisive or regressive. His analysis illustrates these three narratives by focusing on the cases of the former Soviet Union, South Africa, Palestine (West Bank and Gaza), Rhodesia, Burundi, Rwanda, Cyprus, Northern Ireland, and the USA. He concludes by pointing out that regimes of domination seek to present their discriminatory practices under the morally acceptable terms of accommodation and integration so that they are dissonant with ongoing practices in other regimes.

Two articles look at negative discursive representations of national minorities in the mainstream media or by political actors that are part of national majorities. The Quebec case is analyzed by Félix Mathieu and Alina Hart. They examine unfavorable representations in the English-language print media published between 2019 and 2023 of two legislative initiatives ratified by the Quebec government: Bill 21, which deals with the secular nature of the Quebec state (2019), and Bill 96, which aims to strengthen the status of French in Quebec (2022). They show that negative representations of Quebec, whose nationalism is often portrayed as a source of exclusion for religious and linguistic minorities, are illiberal, racist, xenophobic, and regressive, presenting a negative vision of the Quebec nation. This portrayal of the Quebec nation serves as a backdrop for a glorious vision of Canadian values based instead on respect for individual freedoms and tolerance of cultural, religious, and linguistic minorities. This tension contributes to undermining the vision of Canada as a multinational society.

Brown Swan and Anderson focus on nationalist claims in the United Kingdom. They examine representations of Scotland and its position within the UK by conservative political elites and conservative-leaning media (2019–2024). Their observations concur with those of Mathieu and Hart. They distinguish three distinctive currents in these representations. The first presents British unionism as actively and vigorously defending an inclusive, open, and patriotic union, while Scottish nationalism is depicted as narrow, anti-British, anti-democratic, divisive, and grievance-based. Another current presents essentially economic arguments against the Scottish independence project, while the third focuses on a critique of Scottish governance, undermining the performance and motivations of its pro-independence government. These competing currents feed one another and give added meaning to the notion of state nationalism.

Aboriginal peoples in Canada, a political regime embedded in the process of colonization, are national minorities with inherent territorial and jurisdictional rights. Luoma analyzes their representation in Ontario curricula (2004–2023). He examines the role of public education, either promoting or undermining the conditions for multinational identity formation among members of the majority group. The article looks at how the following five themes are articulated in these programs: aboriginal presence and relations to the land, colonialism, aboriginal governance, treaties, and consent/consultation. These transformations are enabling the construction of a political identity within the majority group that documents an aboriginal presence and a history of colonial

misdeeds against them, indicating that there remain essential limits that these programs will have to overcome. The author notes that the programs have clearly improved over time, particularly in terms of affirming an aboriginal presence on Canadian territory, taking into account the history of colonization and its effects, as well as the importance of treaties and aboriginal governance.

Khoso's article adopts a different perspective, focusing on the differences between representatives of the Baluchi minority in Pakistan's Baluchistan region. Based on a discursive analysis of press articles, he shows how the self-representation of political actors contributes to ethnic representation in political discourse. There is ethnic one-upmanship on the part of the political elites of these three groups so that none can adequately represent the Baluch as a minority group within the federation. Each cluster of elites derives symbolic, social, political, and material benefits from their ideological positioning.

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