

# Comparative analysis of political systems and ethnic mobilization: Assimilation versus exclusion

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## **Comparative Analysis of Political Systems and Ethnic Mobilization:**

### **Assimilation vs. Exclusion**

The success of minority nationalisms and their claim to autonomy is primarily dependent on the popular support they receive from their constituencies. Aspirations of minority groups demanding self-rule are also accepted as democratic because of this popular consent. The unsuccessful autonomy referendums in both Puerto Rico and Corsica, however, deviated from this trend leaving questions behind about where and when autonomy is likely to be a democratic and realistic solution. The article elaborates on five variables explaining popular support for ethno-nationalism and questions their reliability across the cases of Quebec, Flanders and Western Thrace. Experimenting with the most different systems design (the Mill's method of agreement) this article concludes that minority nationalism is stronger in political systems of ethnic differentiation than assimilation. The article also verifies this in the contrasting cases of Corsica and Puerto Rico where the nationalist factions failed to mobilize their ethnic constituency because of their political culture being divided by the political systems of integration and assimilation.

**Keywords:** Autonomy Referendums, Ethnic Mobilization, Political Systems, Assimilation, and Exclusion.

## **Introduction**

“Autonomy in a political and legal context refers to the power of social institutions to regulate their own affairs by enacting legal rules. In international law, autonomy is taken to mean that parts of the state's territory are authorized to govern themselves in certain matters by enacting laws and statutes, but without constituting a state of their own. This refers to territorial autonomy, which gives an ethnic group self-rule--political authority over a certain territory--in order to govern its internal affairs to a determined extent” (Cornell, 2002, pp.248-249). The success of minority nationalisms and their claim to autonomy is primarily dependent on the popular support they receive from their constituencies. Aspirations of minority groups demanding self-rule are also accepted as democratic because of this popular consent. However there is a fundamental difficulty with the ethno-centric projects of self-government and legislative autonomy in some cases. This is so, because the ethnic groups are actually composed of individuals and sub-groups who might have incommensurably different interests. This becomes especially problematic when the nationalist parties fail to mobilize their ethnic constituency in the first place (Kukathas, 1992). The unsuccessful autonomy referendums in both Puerto Rico and Corsica are just two examples to name.

In Corsica “A total of 114,970 voters cast their ballots on July 6 in a referendum that would allow the island of Corsica to exercise a degree of autonomy. The referendum asked voters whether they would accept a new territorial assembly and

executive body that would manage more of the island's affairs. Based on the results released by the French Ministry of the Interior, 57,180 voted against limited autonomy compared to the 54,990 who voted in favor of a new government structure" (Election Guide- Country Profile: Corsica. 07.08.2003). In the 2010 regional elections, the *Corsica Libera* that wanted independence and did not condemn terrorist FLNC (*Fronte di Liberazione Naziunale Corsu*,: National Liberation Front of Corsica ) could gain only 9.85 % in turn out. Even PNC (*U Partitu di a Nazione Corsa*: Party of the Corsican Nation), which rejects terrorist activities and wants only limited autonomy, could gain only 25.88 % in turn out (World Elections 2010). In the 2016 regional elections, pro-autonomy coalition *Pè a Corsica* (For Corsica) won 35.34 % of the votes in Corsica. However, Corsican society is still deeply divided and, as the election results show, the remaining majority 64. 66% on the island still vote for pro-French parties and abstain from supporting the Corsican nationalists (Le Monde 2015).

Moreover in contrast to the assumption that the policies of multiculturalism can be panacea to ethnic conflict, the FLNC (*Fronte di Liberazione Naziunale Corsu*,: National Liberation Front of Corsica) conversely increased its operations as a response to multiculturalism discourse and limited autonomy solution. The FLNC increasingly continued its violent approach between 1990 and 2006 (Minorities at Risk Project 2013).<sup>i</sup>

Similarly the Puerto Rican question remains a conundrum. "These are a people

who have been American citizens since 1917 and have been under American rule since 1898. Who, when asked what status they wanted for their future, in three referendums, over the course of the 20th Century, have not so far been able to give a definitive majority answer. Commonwealth status has always won, statehood has been gaining considerable ground, but it is far from the two-thirds majority, while the choice for independence has remained very low” (Brau-Cebrian, 2004). In the 2012 referendum, of those who went the ballot box on the island of Puerto Rico 61.16% chose statehood, 33.34% chose free association, and only 5.49% chose independence.

These cases of long lasting ethnic conflict and unsuccessful mobilization of ethnic minorities left questions behind about where and when autonomy is likely to be a democratic, legitimate and a realistic solution. This article is aimed at revealing why some cases such as Quebec and Flanders are less problematic than the cases of Corsica and Puerto Rico where the majority of minority members have consistently failed ethno-nationalist parties.

The article will first elaborate on the examples of Quebec, Flanders and Western Thrace and examine the reliability of five most salient variables put forward to understand why some minority nationalists are consistently supported by the absolute majority of their ethnic constituency. The chosen cases are all different from each other in many respects. However, despite their differences, ethnic minority mobilization is similarly successful in all three cases. Based on the comparative method of most different

systems design (also known as the Mill's method of agreement) the article will argue that it is the political system of ethnic differentiation in the state that makes the minority members more likely to support their nationalist faction. In the second part, the finding of this analysis will be verified with examples from contrasting cases such as Corsica and Puerto Rico where the political system of assimilation in stark contrast to ethnic differentiation has resulted in more divided national minorities, which then made it more difficult to find a definitive answer in referendums than other cases.

### **Literature Review**

The conventional literature on national minorities (Kymlicka 2001, 2004) argues it is not *ethnicity* per se that legitimizes the self-government claims of minority nationalists but the *popular support for minority nationalism*. Kymlicka (2001), for example, does not reject the possibility of cross-cutting identities or their changing impacts on electoral behaviour. He emphasizes that, in spite of their differences, most ethnic minorities do choose to support parties that are representative of their ethnicities. It is suggested that “national minorities have typically responded to majority-nation building by seeking greater autonomy which they use to engage in their own competing nation-building” (Kymlicka & Opalski, 2001, p.23). This has been the case in Canada, Belgium, Spain and many other countries (Connor 1999). Gurr's (1999) Minorities at Risk Project also showed “none of the 117 ethnic groups that raised economic grievances failed to raise issues of political rights and only 1 of the 98 ethnic groups that raised cultural grievances failed to raise political grievances” (Roedo, 2003, p.512). Following this evidence, scholars such as Kymlicka (2001), Connor (1999) and Taylor (1992) “based their case

(for political autonomy) on a somewhat simplistic model of the support of ethnic minorities on a purely cultural level” (Rex 1997, p.31).

“Much of this literature fails to specify the mechanisms that link ethnicity to political action but studies that do typically build their accounts around the ability of ethnic groups to solve collective action problems” (Humphreys, Posner and Weinstein, 2002, p.4). For this reason such studies have so far failed to explain deviant cases such as Corsica and Puerto Rico where the majority of local communities have not translated their cultural grievances into a demand for political autonomy.

The recent research on ethnic voting as an indicator of ethnic mobilization has controlled various factors in order to understand the dynamics behind mass support for minority nationalism and autonomy. Henderson and McEwen (2010) have conducted a statistical research on the level of turn out in regional elections to understand the degrees of ethnic mobilization. Their research suggests that “the level of turnout in regional elections will vary depending on the degree of regional attachment and authority, with stronger regional attachment positively associated with higher levels of turnout” (p.408). On the other hand according to Goodnow and Moser’s (2012) statistical analysis of electoral politics in Russia “ethnic federalism (implying a high level of regional authority) did not seem to provide its own additional impact on ethnic voting or minority turn out” (p,188). Their results are quite useful to understand the regional nature of political participation. However, neither Henderson and McEwen (2010) nor Goodnow and Moser (2012) have been able to explain why some groups, although showing high

levels of regional attachment, have not supported ethnic parties in referendums. They cannot explain why some groups with high levels of regional attachment develop an understating of alienation from the mainstream whereas others do not.

The large-n studies focusing on ethnic voting to measure the degree of ethnic mobilization are not able to account for the fact that ethnic voting is a highly volatile outcome. This is mainly because factors that generate ethnic voting within the minority community can be more salient at particular times for certain factions. As such, their temporary significance may not in any case last as long as suggested. For example Reilly and Reynolds (1999) and Wilkinson (2004) found a correlation between institutional design and ethnic voting (as an indicator to support for ethno-politics) suggesting that the proportional system politicizes ethnicity. Huber (2012) in his statistical work argued, “economic development is associated with higher levels of ethnic voting behavior” (p.1). Morgenstern and Swindle (2005), on the other hand, argued that statistically the electoral system does not have a clear impact on the local vote. No matter what their mostly conflicting findings are, the problem with all these studies is that variables they use to explain the prospects for ethnic voting are changeable over time. It is therefore difficult for them to investigate where ethnic autonomy referendums can ascertain a stable definition of ‘what the people want’.

Moreover most large-n studies including Gurr’s (1999) Minorities at Risk Project define ethnic group as a monolithic actor. Large-n quantitative studies mostly use a set of data on minorities that is usually collected through a limited analysis of nationalist minority parties and activists or ethnic conflict frequency (Mahoney 2007). In their

simplest formulation, “this boils down to the claim that individuals will tend to act in support of organizations claiming to represent their ethnic identity—so much so that individuals and organizations can be conflated into a single actor, the ‘ethnic group’” (Kalyvas 2008, p.1043).

### **Explaining Ethnic Mobilization**

This section will provide a qualitative comparative analysis to explain the potential causes of popular support to autonomy within ethnic minorities. This method accounts for both the segmented nature of ethnic groups in question and the reasons why their nationalist factions have repeatedly secured a higher level of support from their ethnic constituency in some cases.

From a qualitative perspective it is possible to list five explanations presented earlier in the literature to understand why ethnic minorities are successfully mobilized and politically support their nationalist factions. They are 1) pre-existing group coherence, 2) political repression and history of conflict, 3) ethnicity-class relation, 4) regional disparities and the pursuit of material interests, and 5) exclusive cultures- ethnic distinctiveness. Using the Mill’s method of agreement, the following section will test the reliability of these five explanatory variables across the different cases of Western Thrace, Flanders, and Quebec. The article focuses on all these different cases to show that each control variable that might explain ethnic mobilization in one case does not

exist in others or actually operates in the opposite direction than originally suggested. Moreover despite their differences in terms of those controlled variables all three cases have similarly high levels of ethnic mobilization and political support for minority nationalism. The following section will show what it is that all these three different cases have in common producing similarly high levels of ethnic mobilization and popular support for minority nationalism.

### **‘Political System’ against Five Alternative Explanations**

#### **1-Pre-existing coherence**

The pre-existing coherence of ethnic groups is given as the most important factor explaining ethno-nationalist mobilization. Most arguments about the politicization of ethnicity in masses are based on this assumption. Fearon&Laitin (1996) suggests that ethnic identities matter because they ease collective action. Kaufmann (1996) and Caselli& Coleman (2006) even suggest that ethnic identities are remarkably sticky and evident, and hence more restraining than any other source of identity can be. This presumption that shared ethnicity per se is predominantly the driving force in mass mobilizations, however, has already been refuted by constructivist and post-modernist scholars. All ethnic communities are internally segregated by linguistic, religious, gender, class-related, geographical or political divisions. The Muslim community in Greece is, for example, not ethnically homogenous. “There are an estimated 120, 000 Muslim Turks

in Greece” (Bahceli, 1987, p.109), yet approximately 35.000 of them are Pomaks whose mother tongue is actually a Bulgarian dialect and there are nearly 5000 Muslim Gypsies who are of Romany origin. Although the Muslim community in Greece is fragmented as shown they still find it more appealing to classify themselves as Turkish (Demetriou, 2004; Adamou 2010). Alexandris (2003, p.126) states that “in fact most of the nationalistic (Turkish) minority figures in Thrace are of Pomak or Roma descent”. Similarly in Quebec “the Liberal Party and the Parti Quebecois, differ dramatically on some policy issues, (yet) the degree to which, they are in agreement regarding culture policy is quite striking” (Kresl, 1996, p.499).

This is not to say that all Quebecois are nationalists in the sense that, for example, members of the independentist Parti Quebecois are; even the Parti Quebecois in power since 1976 and the most successful by far of all Quebecois nationalist political parties, was unable, in 1980, to win a referendum concerning the independence of Quebec from Canada. In a less militant sense, however, most French-speaking Quebecois-even those loyal to Canada-are Quebecois nationalists, for most of them are at least nominally committed to their identity as French-speaking Quebecois (Handler, 1984, p. 59).

The article acknowledges the fact that all ethnic groups are internally fragmented. The article is primarily concerned with explaining why cases such as Quebecois in Canada are likely to overcome their internal divisions and appeal to the ethno-political representation while the Corsicans or the Puerto Ricans will not.

## **2-Political Repression and the History of Conflict**

Political repression is assumed to be another reason why members of an ethnic group develop a resistant mobilization (Olzak, 2006; Marshall and Gurr, 2003; Birnir, 2007).

Political repression is significantly associated with the use of formal social control. The suppression of individual and group rights, forced assimilation and imprisonment for political views are different forms of political repression (Ruddell and Urbina, 2007).

Connor (1999) argues that identity movements and social struggles are stimulated by political repression and the consequent need to revive or create ethnic boundaries.

Horowitz (1985) also argues that this social struggle has typically translated into mass mobilization in many cases.

During the Franco regime, for example, Euskadi was repressed in Spain and the majority of nationalist ETA (*Euskadi ta Askatasuna*) leaders were either exiled or imprisoned. This injustice contributed to mobilize grievances which then morphed into public support for ETA amongst the Basque people (Sullivan 2015). Similarly, most Muslim Turks in Western Thrace faced extensive formal social control. “The Greek authorities undertook large-scale expropriations of Muslim –owned land and imposed strict controls on the movements of person to and from the area, which had been declared ‘restricted military zone’” (Agnantopoulos 2014, p.130). This repression continued during the 1980s as well. Two politicians of Turkish origin in Greece, who referred to the Turkish minority in their election campaigns, were arrested on the grounds that they were inciting citizens to violence simply by using the word 'Turkish'. It is suggested that the

Muslim Turks who were systematically repressed in Greece have therefore suffered from such injustices and have been marginalized further to mobilize and resist ethnic domination. (Ataov 1992)

However, this is not particularly relevant to explain all ethnic mobilizations because ethno-nationalist mobilization for greater autonomy is still relevant in cases where the policies of multiculturalism have already been introduced as a solution for the problems of national minorities. The political domination, which may account for the emergence of the conflict in the first place, is no longer to have an explanatory power for continuing and increasing levels of support for ethno-nationalist politics as in Flanders or Quebec.

### **3-Ranked Systems: ethnicity – class correlation**

It has been argued by the literature on political domination that the people are more likely to mobilize around ethno-cultural identity if the state has systematically discriminated against them on the basis of their membership of an ethnic group. This is, as suggested by Horowitz (1981), particularly relevant where there is a significant overlap between ethnicity and class.

In cases where members of an ethnic group comprise a “worse off” or “better off” social class, the depth of separateness cannot be perceived as simply a fabrication or an overstatement by ethno-nationalist projects. Although most national or collective identities are imagined and can be interpreted as an outcome of political projects, some

are by no means imaginary and will strongly resonate with many people for different reasons. Clear-cut competition between ethnic groups, bureaucratization of ethnicity and material inequality are some of the reasons given to explain the strong boundaries between ethnic groups and their members' support for ethno-cultural politics (Cornel and Hartman, 1998). These elements are strongly associated with what Horowitz calls 'ranked societies'.

The ranked systems and hierarchical relationship between groups explain why minority members' electoral behaviour can primarily be motivated by their ethno-cultural identity. What it cannot explain is, the *en masse* support for ethno-national politics in cases like Catalonia, Flanders and Quebec, where the national minorities are now prospering equally in relation to the majority. In such cases the persistent claim to self-government, or even independence, is no longer grounded on class-ethnicity correlation or a sense of economic discrimination and injustice. In Canada, for example, Shapiro and Stelcner (1997), Breton (1998) all showed in their research that the Francophone wage gap in Quebec has disappeared by 1985. Albouy (2006) illustrated statistically that, "in Quebec, Francophones now earn significantly more than similarly skilled Anglophones" (p.1212). The nationalists' claim for independence is, however, still an on-going issue. It is also the case in Belgium where the Dutch speaking Flemish people with a claim to independence are now financially outperforming the French-speaking Walloons. Flemish people are actually resentful about "exorbitant and inefficient financial transfers that

amount to over ten billion Euros per year (about 1,734 Euros for each Flemish person)” that they are required to make to Wallonia and Brussels (Mnookin and Verbeke, 2009, pp.152-153). The Flemish people’s persistent call for independence, thus, can better be explained by their desire to move away from what they see as a burden (Covell, 1986, pp.261-281).

#### **4- Regional disparities and the pursuit of material interests**

Based on the Flemish example, ‘the economic interests’ argument is introduced to explain the popular support for ethno-cultural politics with its capacity to maximize the material interests of its followers. Richard Jenkins (2009) argues, “Identity and ethnicity do not, *sui generis*, cause people to do things. They must always be understood in political and economic contexts in particular with respect to the pursuit of local material interests”. For example, Northern Ireland is actually divided along class, urban-rural, and unionist-loyalist lines. Yet the salience of an overarching Protestant identity is only possible because of the socio-economic benefits and advantages that it has historically enjoyed in the UK. Similarly, Hale (2008) argues that “ethnicity has no intrinsic motivational implications; instead, it determines the strategies that individuals use to maximize their life chances by pursuing ends such as wealth, power, security, self-esteem and status” (Breuilly et al. 2011, p. 683). This perspective is also often used to explain

why more prosperous and relatively self-sufficient former USSR countries like Ukraine were first to leave the Union. In line with this argument, more economically dependent Central Asian countries like Uzbekistan were unenthusiastic to endorse the fall of the Union and leave its collectivized economic structure (Strokov and Paramonov, 2006).

However, this approach does not seem to be able to account for some other cases. Members of minority, who comprise the less prosperous group, sometimes support the ethnic cause when in theory adopting the majority language to benefit future employment prospects for example would leave them potentially better off. Muslim Turks in Greece fall in to this category. “Western Thrace is the least developed and the poorest region in Greece” (Bahceli, 1987, p.114) and the Turkish language does not offer any prospects for having a good career beyond that of a farmer in rural Greece. The instrumentalist utilitarian approach cannot therefore explain why the Muslim community of Western Thrace is increasingly following an ethno cultural-politics when speaking the Turkish language does little to maximize their material interests in Greece.

##### **5- Exclusive cultures and ethnic distinctiveness**

Starting from the relationship between Muslim Turks and Christian Greeks, the microcosm of Samuel Huntington’s (1996) ‘global clash of civilization’ is introduced to understand ethnic high levels of ethnic mobilization. This thesis suggests that, independent of their instrumental roles, cultures will inherently be positioned and defined

in relation to each other. Those members of mutually exclusive cultures will always, it is suggested, support their own cause against one another. Roeder (2003) also suggested that escalation of domestic ethno-political conflicts is due to the increasing frequency of interactions of mutually exclusive cultures. The author statistically tested and confirmed the reliability of this claim by analyzing 1036 ethno-political dyads (linking 130 governments and 631 ethnic groups) from 1980 to 1999. This difficulty at the national level is also highlighted by some notable cases. In Canada, the majority Protestant Anglophone culture has been primarily defined in contrast to that of Catholic French culture. To fully assimilate into the majority culture, a French Canadian must first therefore relinquish many of their deep-held Catholic and cultural traditions. A reflection of the same duality was observed in Northern Ireland. The conflict between Unionist Protestants and Separatist Catholics was primarily defined by the presumption that Protestantism and Catholicism are mutually exclusive categories. Similar dynamics can be found in Western Thrace, Greece. Muslim Turks find it unacceptable that part of becoming fully Greek means relinquishing their Islamic and Turkish identity for that of the Orthodox Christian identity imposed by the state (Kucukcan 1999, p.65, Human Rights Watch, 1990). So the argument suggests that the mutually exclusive natures of the cultures in the relationship may have an explanatory power for the persistence of boundaries between them.

Binary cultures have some explanatory power in cases where religious categories are used as the primary expression of self-identification. It cannot explain, however, why that boundary between mutually exclusive categories should be politically

relevant anyway. Neither can it explain the reason why members of linguistic cultures, which are not mutually exclusive, do still have a persistent support to keep the boundary between them. For example, in Belgium the linguistic difference between Catholic French-speaking Walloons and Catholic- Dutch Speaking Flemish does not constitute a barrier for members of either group to assimilate into one another. The two groups can generate crosscutting bi-lingual identities. However we see that the historical separation between the two communities in Belgium has always been made politically relevant by the state; popularly supported; and increasingly strengthened by Flemish claims to independence.

The hierarchical ranking systems, “power differentials between individuals of different ethnic backgrounds” as suggested by Horowitz (1981), Cornell and Hartmann (1998) cannot explain ethno-nationalisms in unranked communities of Canada and Belgium. ‘The pursuit of material interests’ as Jenkins (2009) suggested do not seem to be a relevant motivation for Muslims in Greece to classify themselves as Turkish, the utilitarian value of which is quite low in that country. Duality of the religious cultures involved cannot explain the separatist tendencies of linguistic groups who share the same religion like the Flemish and the Wallonians.

None of the points made above can individually provide a general logic as to why ethno-cultural politics of autonomy is widely supported by the majority of the

national minority in some cases but not in others. Employing the Mill's method of agreement this article finds out that the political persistence of a cultural boundary between the two communities is primarily an outcome of the political system of ethnic differentiation that has facilitated it. This can be observed in all of the cases above. The Greek state has historically facilitated the ethnic distinctions through exclusion in the forms of discrimination and deportation in Western Thrace. The historical recognition of ethno-cultural groups in public, albeit positively, has been persistent in Flanders/ Belgium and in Quebec/ Canada.

### **The Political Systems of Ethnic Differentiation vs. Civic Assimilation**

Ethnic mobilization is pre-dominantly facilitated by the political systems of ethnic differentiation and that policy and politics affect ethnic boundaries as much as the reverse. However this finding does not work against the other explanations such as material interests, ranked systems or cultural incompatibilities between the minority and majority. The argument in this article does not ignore the possibility of multiple causation and relevance of plural determinants to explain mass support for minority nationalism. On the contrary, the explanations this article examined earlier are helpful for understanding why and when they become important. The comparative study of exemplary cases for each argument helps the reader see all relevant determinants together and draw a more encompassing picture. The article showed that material interests

correlate with ethnic identity; the ranked systems occur; and cultural incompatibilities become relevant at times when ethnic nationalism in the form of discrimination is a barrier facing minority people. Such minorities could not assimilate into the majority even if they wanted to. Integration becomes difficult when influential positions are systematically exclusive to the dominant group; or when ethnic separation is recognized negatively (ghettoization) as in Greece. Integration is equally difficult when ethnic differentiation in the forms of autonomy, federation or self-government is effective in politics and allows a deeper segregation as in Quebec and Flanders.

Political anthropologists such as Barth (1969), Geertz (1973), Cohen (1985), Eriksen (2001), Jenkins (1999), and Wimmer (2008) used the inter-subjective paradigm. They explored the ways in which the relationship between ethnic minorities and the state are formed. Those scholars emphasized the foundational role of the interactive relationship between the state and its minorities in explaining the survival and cohesion of ethnic groups. However, their focus on this relationship has hardly been translated into the studies of ethnic mobilization and popular support for minority nationalism or autonomy.

The political theorists like Taylor and Kymlicka presume that ethno-cultural distinctiveness is all that matters in defining and catalyzing minority nationalism. As such they have so far made no attempt to focus on various circumstances under which ethnic cultures are translated into the politics of ethno-nationalism and supported by masses in a

consistent manner (Reitz, 2009, p.2). As shown by the literature on popular support for minority nationalism and autonomy earlier there is nothing inherently deterministic in the culture informing its members to make certain political decisions. What people make of their culture varies depending on the options available as to what they can do with it. Those options have been dominantly limited to the decisions of the state. It is, therefore, important to examine the nuanced policies and options that the state makes available to its national minorities before making overarching presumptions about the reactions of national minorities to the state's nation building project.

This article argues that in-group visions of ethno-national identity, individual expectations from the polity are more diverse within groups whose members have been exposed to the policies of forced assimilation and integrationist civic state building.<sup>ii</sup>

The coherency or harmony is less likely to be found within such a minority due to differing individual experiences, disparate economic gains and changing social status of its members living under the policies of forced assimilation and civic nationalism. The policies of forced assimilation<sup>iii</sup> employed in putatively civic nationalism take various forms. The prohibition of the use of minority languages in education as happened with Aboriginal people of Canada until the 1980s is an example. Another one is the punishment of the use of such languages in public as well as in the private sphere as the Kurds have experienced in Turkey until the 2000s. The forced teaching of the majority language in education as was in Puerto Rico until the 1950s and state policies completely blind to ethnic differences as the Corsicans experienced in France until the late 1980s are some other examples.

It is widely argued that “the denial of recognition provides the motivational and justificatory basis for social struggles” Honneth (1995, p.169) and that the policies of forced assimilation “rarely work, they are indeed more likely to strengthen than to erode differences, by provoking a reactive mobilization against such assimilatory pressures” (Brubaker, 2004, p.119). Going beyond this conventional wisdom this article suggests that forced assimilation is also the reason why some national minorities are more divided, underdeveloped and thus have become more inclined to integrating with the mainstream when this is an option.

The policies of forced assimilation in France marginalized and radicalized a huge number of ethnic dissidents. However, the consistent discourse of integration also created a high number of hyphenated identities and mixed marriages that cross ethnic boundaries between the Corsicans and Mainlanders in France. Assimilation has been the fundamental method used to this effect for a century (Hargreaves, 2000; Daftary, 2008, pp. 273-312). As a result, throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries most Corsicans identified with the French state. They joined the army, the police, customs and other branches of the French civil service. Identification with France reached its apex during the First and second World Wars, when thousands of islanders gave their lives for *la patrie* (Loughlin and Letamendia, 2000, p. 155). “In December of 1984, 25,000 Corsicans marched through the streets in favor of French unity. Their banners read: ‘No to Separatism, No to Terrorism’” (Walker, 2013, p. 25). In the election immediately after the establishment of the Corsican Assembly, the separatist candidate could win less than 13% of the vote (Hossay, 2004, p. 416). It is observed that most of the minorities who have been continuously exposed to forced assimilation under putatively civic nationalism are

usually lacking a complex vernacular and economic network. Native American Indians (UCLA Report, 2002) and Corsicans in France (Carillet and Roddis, 2007) exemplify how dispersed such groups can become. The utilitarian value of language also remains low in this context leading minority people to opt in to the language of the community that offers greater opportunities. This is exactly what happened when the majority of Corsican chose French to be the main language of instruction on the island (Mercator, 2012) and said no to further levels of autonomy in the 2003 referendum (Hossay, 2004). Similarly, “despite the constitutional reform in Canadian society, Aboriginal languages and knowledge (that were assimilated once) are not yet flourishing in education systems. The Canadian education system has not empowered the enormous creativity in Aboriginal languages and First Nations schools have not used them widely” (Battiste, 2012, p. 277).

The article also suggests the integrationist ideal of civic nationalism, for which the assimilation policies were used in the first place, is a more important factor that leads to the persistence of remaining differences within the group. The civic nationalism makes it possible to generate or preserve the differences between those minority members who want to resist assimilation on one hand and ones who want to integrate on the other. Puerto Rico is an example to this.

The voting laws of the United States and its policy decisions toward Puerto Rico have created two groups of Puerto Ricans with distinct experiences with United States citizenship and the American democratic process: islanders and mainlanders. This disparity in experiences with United States citizenship and participation in the United States democratic process produces a political isolation between these two groups that prevents Puerto Ricans from uniting as a political voice or an ethnic group with common interests (Arnaud, 2013, pp.703-704).

Most islanders speak Spanish although United States has attempted to impose English on the Puerto Rican population through forced teaching of English in public schools (Walsh, 1991). Nevertheless “those islanders who favor a closer relationship with the United States diminish the importance of language, while those favoring independence advocate the importance of the Spanish language to *puertorriquefidad*” (Arnaud, 2013, p.720).

In the projects of civic state-building people with different backgrounds are accepted as members of the majority in contrary to ethnic nationalism that rejects the incorporation of people with different ethno-cultural backgrounds into the dominant core. No matter how the minority members are willing to integrate to the mainstream community, this is not an option in a state that adopted ethnicity as a criterion for membership and segregation. Indian Tamils of Sri Lanka are a group who suffered from ethnic nationalism of the Sinhalese Majority, which did not recognize citizenship to up-country Tamils in 1949 and, amongst many other things, discriminated against them in university admissions (Edrisinha, 2005, p. 247). Similarly, Uyghur Turks in China cannot enjoy equal opportunities in mainstream Chinese life, which has even discriminated against those Uyghurs who became fluent in Mandarin (Becquelin, 2004). In theory Muslims can move to more affluent Greek cities to improve their conditions. However the observation shows that “in practice this is not a credible option, since life for a Muslim Turk is not easy in any part of Greece... Oran suggests that in 1986, it was very rare to find any Muslim student registered in any of the universities in Greece” (Bahceli 1987, p.114). Such groups of people have no other option other than choosing to live in

their own vernacular. On the contrary, people of the minority can choose to adopt the culture of a civic state and can equally make use of opportunities it would offer as Appiah (2005) and Levy (2000) assumed. As Patten (1999) stated “it does not matter if one’s own cultural structure is destroyed so long as one has access to some sufficiently rich and healthy alternative cultural materials” (p. 10). It is suggested that so long as the doors are opened in civic projects there will always be some subgroups showing high degrees of willingness to enter into the mainstream community and adopt its culture. The fact that forced assimilation policy is used in a civic state-building project does not mean that nobody might voluntarily participate in it especially when the assimilation is additive and does not imply cultural annihilation.<sup>iv</sup> This evidently has been very much the case for the Corsicans and the Puerto Ricans. Unsuccessful referendums for autonomy in both cases also suggest that the political systems of assimilation and/or unitary civic state building in both France and US have generated similar impacts on the political culture of national minorities. This process rendered the attempts for autonomy and independence more difficult than they are in others cases.

## **Conclusion**

Evidence suggests that when ethno cultural boundaries are easy to cross and socio-politically irrelevant under the projects of civic state building, the scales of separation and hierarchy are low. In such contexts “classificatory ambiguity and complexity will be high and allow for more individual choice (compared to those fixed by ethnic distinctions” (

Wimmer 2008, p. 1011). Following this argument, this article showed, the civic state building and its politics of assimilation and integration creates a higher level of complexity that makes it impossible to find one single ‘people’ on a consistent basis.

Most of the literature on autonomy for national minorities (Kymlicka, 2001; Taylor, 1992; Connor, 1999) relies on the unanimity and singularity of ‘ethnic group’ in terms of their attachment to ethno-nationalist politics. In addition to this deflection also seen in large-n studies, most statistical work on the topic (Reynolds and Wilkinson, 2004; Huber, 2002) are unable to account for the longitudinal impact that the political systems of assimilation have on national minorities in some cases. For these reasons neither purely theoretical nor statistical empiric works have been relevant to explain outlier cases such as Corsicans and Puerto Ricans who have been far too fragmented to secure the two-thirds majority in referendums for autonomy.

Using a qualitative comparative analysis this article showed that the salience of ethno-national identity is powerful when the minority has neither incorporated to the mainstream culture nor been forced to assimilate in the past. Such groups are found always ethnically recognized as belonging to a group that is distinct from the majority. In such cases as Kymlicka (2011) suggested “when (ethno) nationalist parties compete in free and fair elections, they often gain the support of the plurality or majority of the group on a consistent basis (e.g. in Flanders, Quebec, Catalonia, South Tyrol)” (p. 285). “Ethnic

group formation is a process of social closure [and that] high degrees of closure imply that the boundary cannot be easily crossed” (Wimmer, 2008, p. 977). In successful cases of ethnic mobilization such as Canada and Belgium, it is easy to observe this historical continuity. For example “although the Canadian Model continued to evolve well into the 1980s, many of its key features been in place since the mid-nineteenth century” (Choudhry, 2008, p.14). In such cases this historical trajectory of social closure between ethnic groups creates the reality, which is then appealed to a further justification for support to autonomy (Barry, 2001). The article showed that this self-reinforcing path of social closure between ethnic groups can also explain the minority’s popular support to autonomy more broadly than any other factors such as economics, culture or political repression can do. This article suggests it is primarily the political design and the state discourse that has led to popular support for autonomy in the cases of Quebec and Flanders and not vice versa.

This sheds light on whether or not the problems of ethnic conflict can be democratically resolved through referendums in other cases. The article concludes that whatever the conditions are, it is more likely that only those minorities who have already been systematically differentiated by the state along ethnic lines will resort to ethno-nationalism in masses. This will then render the referendum for autonomy as a successful and democratic solution.

The common wisdom foresees that forced assimilation creates nationalistic sentiments and “reactive mobilization against such assimilatory pressures” (Brubaker, 2004). Those who share this perspective have not taken into account the dividing impact that the policies of assimilation have on national minorities and couldn’t explain why the Corsican nationalists on the Island have not been able to mobilize a reactive movement. This article showed that those minorities such as Corsicans whose populations are divided in regard to whether they assimilate voluntarily or not are also divided when it comes down to the political organization of their communities. All in all, the article concludes that the autonomy referendums are inconclusive and ethnic conflict will last longer in such cases where the minority constituency itself is deeply fragmented by the policies of forced assimilation and civic-state building.

### *Notes*

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<sup>i</sup>In contexts where there is a history of forced assimilation into and integration with the majority society, the ethnic group is more fragmented and far less cohesive than other cases. So support for inter-group violence is not as strong and intra-group conflicts over how to resolve the issues are prominent. As such, when policies shift to weak forms of multiculturalism, while some of the group is content, others are not, leading to terrorist acts aimed at creating fear within the group, as well as a continuation of violence between the group and the state (Reinares 2005, p.125; Fisher and Sonn, 2003, p.119; Trickett, Watts and Birman, 1994). This has also been the case in Corsica. “What complicates the situation is the divorce between the Corsican population and the separatists. The latter, along with policymakers in Paris, want to separate France and Corsica (to what degree is still a disagreement nevertheless) but the Corsican people wish to maintain strong ties with the mainland. France, being as unique as it is, has the awkward situation where both the government and a group of separatists (most of them criminals in disguise who run the island with a “mafia-style” system) want a similar objective, and it is the civilian population that resists it” (Sanchez, 2008, p.663)

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<sup>ii</sup> It is evident that most nation states have used different methods in their relations to different groups. For this reason I specifically clarify that I focus only on the individual relationships between the state and particular minorities in point; and that I do not try to classify state nationalisms as entirely civic, ethnic, assimilationist, or exclusionist. For example “the courts stress that there is no Macedonian minority in Greece” (Kalampakou, 2009, p.2), whereas the Muslims were recognized as a minority according to the 1923 Lausanne Peace Treaty and were evidently discriminated against in the country (Oran, 1986). Similarly non-Turkish speaking Romani and Pomak Muslims have occasionally been converted to Orthodox Christianity and deported to other regions in the country for integration; whereas Turkish speaking Muslims have always been left out of these projects (Poulton, 1997, p.91). In Canada Francophones have been differentiated and recognized along ethnic lines whereas the First Nations were continuously forced to assimilate through the residential school system (Woods, 2012). The Kurds in Turkey were forced to assimilate in a consistent way whereas the non-Muslim Greeks and the Armenians were excluded from the nation, deported and decimated (Canefe, 2002, p.145).

<sup>iii</sup> It would be wrong to categorize the state-minority relations on a simple dichotomy of ethnic exclusion and civic assimilation as binary oppositions. For example Canada (Quebecois) and Belgium (Flemish) that exemplify ethnic differentiation have also left room for voluntary assimilation to the majority. For this reason the article especially focuses on forcible assimilation in cases that still represent the ideal of integration and civic state building. In cases such as Quebec and Flanders where the minority has not been forced to assimilate it was only an underused option or that there was exclusion or promotion of groups on the basis of ethnicity. Even when there were signs of forcible linguistic assimilation, as in Greece, it was not aimed at integrating the Muslim Turk minority to the mainstream but intimidating its members to leave the country which had not been welcoming to Muslims anyway. None of the culturally united and politically mobilized ethnic groups had been assimilated in the sense that some Corsican people were forced to become French in an absorptive fashion. The national minorities whose absolute majority supports legislative autonomy are the ones that have never been exposed to these policies of forced assimilation and integrationist ideal of civic state building at the same time.

<sup>iv</sup> This particular type of state nationalism is civic although it uses forced assimilation and promotes an ethnic character in the public sphere. Having accepted that it is not a liberal form of civic nationalism, it is surely not an ethnic one either. This is so because the distinction made between civic and ethnic nationalism mainly refers to the distinction between methods they use with the aim of creating a homogenized nation. The conception of civic state building in this paper only refers to its assimilationist method. Therefore its aim is to increase the homogeneity through the method of fusion. On the other hand ethnic nationalism is identified with its method of exclusion and differentiation. Both civic and ethnic nationalism serve the same goal and imply certain injustices; however, their impacts on the minorities’ societal culture and political behavior differ from each other to a great extent.

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