

How to Understand the Relation between Nationalisms and Immigration Policies:

A Relational Longue Durée Approach

Abstract

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The ethnic and civic models of understanding of the relation between nationalisms and immigration policies are now at an impasse. The root of the impasses, lies with understanding national identities and institutions as fixed structures (ethnic) versus perceiving them as malleable and open to transformation through policies and agency of the policymakers (civic). In this paper we propose a third relational long durée analytical approach as an alternative to ethnic-civic models to analyze the relation between nationalisms and immigration policies. We build on and merge a relational theoretical lens (Wimmer 2018; 2011) and a longue durée approach (Malesevic 2019; 2018). In contrast to ethnic-civic models which base their analyses on a set of predefined fixed *characteristics*, the relational perspective shifts the focus to the dynamic *relations* between nationalisms and policies. Rather than understanding one element strictly determining the ultimate form of the other, this approach conceives nationalisms and national policies as forming in relation to one another along with other long-term social and historical processes. The focus on relations is because nationalisms and policymaking are not mere consequences of a set of institutional guidelines or fixed ideologies. Nationalisms and policymaking are outcomes of cumulative processes which involve evolving structures, ideologies, and everyday interactions. We apply our approach to the Canadian case. Rather than concluding that Canada's nationalism and immigration policies are fundamentally attuned to its Anglo-Saxon heritage (ethnic model) or that the country is experiencing rapid transformations (civic model), we examine Canada's nation building process and highlight the national and ethnic minorities' gradual rise to power despite the persistence of White Anglo-Saxon core national identities. We conclude by arguing for contextualized analyses that strengthen our understanding of the historical and national variations in nation building and immigration policymaking processes.

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