



Migration in Sub-State Territories with Historical-Linguistic Minorities: Main Challenges and New Perspectives¹

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Abstract. Migration is an important reality for many sub-national autonomous territories where traditional-historical groups (so-called ‘old minorities’) live such as Flanders, Catalonia, South Tyrol, Scotland, Basque Country, and Quebec. Some of these territories have attracted migrants for decades, while others have only recently experienced significant migration inflow. The presence of old minorities brings complexities to the management of migration issues. Indeed, it is acknowledged that the relationship between ‘old’ communities and the ‘new’ minority groups originating from migration (so-called ‘new minorities’) can be rather complicated. On the one hand, interests and needs of historical groups can be in contrast with those of the migrant population. On the other hand, the presence of new minorities can interfere with the relationship between the old minorities and the majority groups at the state level and also with the relationship between old minorities and the central state as well as with the policies enacted to protect the diversity of traditional groups and the way old minorities understand and define themselves. The present lecture analyses whether it is possible to reconcile the claims of historical minorities and of new groups originating from migration and whether policies that accommodate traditional minorities and migrants are allies in the pursuit of a pluralist and tolerant society.

Keywords: migration, sub-state territories, historical-linguistic minorities, regional citizenship, participation

Introduction

Diversity governance and fair management of migration are challenging and complex matters that are at the forefront of the current political and public debate in almost all European countries. This is largely due to the increasing

¹ This paper draws from previously published volumes, in particular Medda-Windischer–Pelopier (2016) and Medda-Windischer–Carlà (2015).

number of peoples – especially migrants and asylum seekers – with distinctive identities in terms of language, culture, or religion, who have settled in Europe in urban as well as in more peripheral and rural contexts, with varying degrees of permanence. Their reasons are partly political and humanitarian, partly as a result of differing economic situations and the freedom of movement that growing economic integration within Europe entails (Eurostat 2018, UNHCR 2017).

Migration and diversity are also increasingly important realities for many sub-state territories, such as Catalonia, South Tyrol, Scotland, Flanders, Basque Country, and Quebec, where traditional-historical groups (the so-called ‘old minorities’ or sub-state nations’) live.² Some of these territories have attracted migrants for decades, while others have only recently experienced significant migration inflow.

In sub-state territories, the presence of old minorities adds complexities to the management of migration issues. Indeed, it is acknowledged that the relation between ‘old’ communities and ‘new’ minority groups originating from migration (the so-called ‘new minorities’)³ can be rather complicated. On the one hand, interests and needs of historical groups can be in contrast with those of the migrant population. On the other hand, the presence of new minorities can interfere with the relationship between old minorities and majority groups at state level and also between old minorities and the central state as well as with policies enacted to protect the diversity of traditional groups and the way old minorities understand and define themselves.

In the past, the subject of the relationship between old communities and new minorities has been largely neglected by scholars. With few exceptions, minority and multicultural issues have been studied separately from the point of view of historical groups or migrant communities, focusing on the relationship between each of these two categories and the dominant state and highlighting differences

2 In this paper, the terms ‘old minorities’, ‘traditional-historical minorities’, or ‘sub-state nations’ refer to communities whose members have a distinct language, culture, or religion, as compared to the rest of the population. Many have become minorities through the redrawing of international borders, having seen the sovereignty of their territories shift from one country to another. In other cases, they are ethnic groups that have not achieved statehood on their own for various reasons and that have now become part of a larger country (or several countries). In many, but not all cases, their co-ethnics may be numerically or politically dominant in another state, which they therefore regard as their ‘external national homeland’ or kin-state (Medda-Windischer 2017). These communities are groupings of people at the sub-state level, ranging from officially recognized to self-proclaimed groups and from communities based on fictitious constructions and narratives to ‘imagined communities’ resulting from the ‘social construction of reality’ – following the classic Andersonian definition of national communities (Anderson 1983, Marko 2017).

3 The term ‘new minorities’ refers to groups formed by the decision of individuals and families to leave their original homeland and emigrate to another country, generally for economic and sometimes also for political reasons. Thus, they consist of migrants and refugees and their descendants who live, on a more than transitional basis, in a country different from that of their origin (Medda-Windischer 2010).

between the claims of old minorities, who carry on nation-building projects, and migrant communities, who are expected to integrate into the dominant society (Kymlicka 1995). When these two perspectives were combined, it has often been to sustain the so-called ‘threat hypothesis’, namely the belief that historical groups frequently perceive large-scale migration as a danger and harbour defensive and exclusionary attitudes towards migrants due to their ethnocentric understanding of identities or due to the fear that migrants will eventually integrate into the central state culture, further outnumbering the old minorities (id. 2001: 278–279, Jeram–Adam 2013, Medda-Windischer–Carlà 2015, Medda-Windischer–Popelier 2016, Jeram–van der Zwet–Wisthaler 2015).⁴

In the last decade, scholars have started to look more deeply into the relationship between old and new minorities (Medda-Windischer 2009). The ‘threat hypothesis’ has been opposed since various ethno-national groups actually manifest inclusive approaches to migration. In fact, scholars argue that attitudes expressed by old minorities towards migrants follow similar dynamics to those expressed by majority groups at the central state level (Carens 1995, Kymlicka 2001: 293, Schmid–Schlenker 2013).

Tensions between old and new minorities are not inescapable. Scholars have argued that these tensions can be avoided if traditional groups are given extended competence over migration issues (Kymlicka 2001).⁵ Indeed, control over migration is considered crucial to the capacity of old minorities to protect and maintain their identity and culture (Carens 1995). Yet, it has also been pointed out that the overlapping of national and local competences can bring disadvantages and incoherent policies and even threaten the development of multicultural and inclusive policies (Loobuyuk–Jacobs 2009: 114; Bousetta 2009: 97, 100–101). Alternatively, tensions can be reduced when old minorities develop policies to include the migrant population in their nation-building process (Zapata-Barrero 2005: 8). In this regard, scholars have also set criteria and provided suggestions on how old communities should deal with migration and how they can develop

4 An exception to the ‘threat hypothesis’ was Shafir’s (1995) pioneering work comparing migrant accommodation policies in Catalonia, the Basque Countries, Latvia, and Estonia.

5 Extending competence over migration to old minorities so that they can maintain their identity raises the vexing but still unresolved question of whether minority rights have an individual or collective dimension. For the former, the minority group itself is the beneficiary of the protection to be afforded, while for the latter the beneficiaries are the individual members of the group. A third position uses the formula of individual rights ‘collectively exercised’ and represents a *via media* between the rights of individuals and full collective rights. In the current debate on the individual or collective dimension of minority rights, a pragmatic position holds that as human experience is such that human beings possess both individual and social dimensions, there is no dichotomy between individual or collective dimension and therefore no need to choose. As Marko (1997: 87) puts it: ‘These two forms of rights not only can, but even must be used cumulatively when organising equality on the basis of difference.’ Ultimately, the real issue is whether the groups that human beings form are free and whether members of those groups are able to live in dignity, including with regard to maintenance and the development of their identity.

an inclusive approach to the migrant population. In particular, I argued elsewhere that international minority rights standards, primarily the UN Declaration on Minorities and the CoE Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities, should be extended to all minority groups, including those stemming from migration (Medda-Windischer 2009). Zapata-Barrero (2009b: 17) maintains that the approach to the migration of ethno-national communities should observe liberal and democratic principles so as not to detract from the legitimacy of the ethno-national desire to manage the matter itself. Instead, Kymlicka (2001) seems to argue that limited deviations from liberal practices favour the development of open forms of identity and the accommodation of migrant diversity.

Further analyses, including more case studies and different methods,⁶ have shown the variety and complexity of relationships between old and new minorities. In some cases, the presence of old groups seems to hinder the process of inclusion of the migrant population because when confronted with competing nation-building projects migrants often remain less attached to the old communities in the hosting society (Banting–Soroka 2012: 156–176). At the same time, migration is an essential issue for old minorities, parties, and their local governments for several reasons. On the one hand, migration can be a tool to criticize the central state for failing to protect the interests of old minorities (Hepburn 2009: 529). On the other, migration triggers important social, cultural, and political consequences, forcing old minorities to re-conceptualize and re-define their self-understanding and identity as well as to rethink the basis of their self-governments. In some cases, the presence of migrants can even encourage old minorities to switch from exclusive ethnic identities to multicultural attitudes in order to win their alliance (Piche 2002).

The main research question raised in this paper is to understand the factors influencing in sub-state territories a cosmopolitan, open, and inclusive approach towards migration in contrast to an exclusionary and defensive approach. This main question entails other related questions, namely which new challenges and prospects migration raises in sub-state territories.

By relying on the analysis of previous literature and empirical studies conducted on the topic, the paper is structured in two sections. The first section investigates the clusters of factors influencing the approaches displayed by old minorities towards migration by looking at the actors and dynamics involved and by exploring the approaches on migration in sub-state territories beyond the so-called ‘threat hypothesis’. This section reveals that migration in sub-state territories is not characterized by one single, unified approach; on the contrary,

6 The most studied cases are Quebec, Belgium and its territorial entities, Catalonia and Basque Countries in Spain, and Scotland. The methodology employed has extended from normative and theoretical reflections to empirical research based on qualitative comparative studies and sociological surveys (Schmid–Schlenker 2013, Banting–Soroka 2012, Jeram 2012).

sub-state nations display multiple and diversified approaches towards migration similar to nation-states. The second section analyses the nature of the new challenges that migration poses in sub-state territories as well as new prospects for the development of a pluralistic approach more conducive to social cohesion. The paper concludes with some final considerations and future directions.

Cluster of Factors Influencing the Relationship Migration/Sub-State Nations

The clusters of factors that explain the positioning of old minorities towards migration relate to demography, history, the economy, linguistic and cultural barriers, party landscape and electoral system as well as policy control over immigration (Hepburn 2014: 52–57, Shafir 1995, Medda-Windischer–Carlà 2015, Medda-Windischer–Popelier 2016, Jeram–van der Zwet–Wisthaler 2015). Some of these factors are locally rooted. These include concern about cultural reproduction linked to demographic trends, in particular a demographic decline and a low level of immigration (as compared to the national average), the historical context and the experiences with internal migration, the condition of the local economy and labour market, party ideology, local party competition, the strength of extreme right parties, the degree of local party polarization, the characteristics of nation-building narratives, old minorities' experience with processes of modernization, the type of national identity that characterizes them, the importance traditional groups ascribe to specific cultural elements, such as language, in the definition of their identity, and the extent of sub-national autonomous government powers (Hepburn 2011, Jeram–Adam 2013, Shafir 1995, Medda-Windischer–Carlà 2015, Medda-Windischer–Popelier 2016, Jeram–van der Zwet–Wisthaler 2015).

Besides these local factors, variables at national and international levels also play a role. Ethno-national approaches to migration also develop as a reaction to national migration policies and as attempts to distinguish the culture and values of the old minority and to present them as more open and inclusive than those of the dominant majority. It is also necessary to consider how the relationship between the traditional community and the central nation-state evolves as this may modify old minorities' approach to migration and their definition of the 'collectivity' and of who belongs to it (Juteau 2005, Gagnon 2009, Jeram 2012). Finally, relationships between old and new minorities are also linked to the vision that the former have of the European integration process, which can become a tool to frame local migration policies and demand local control of migration issues (Hepburn 2014, Zapata-Barrero 2009a).

An important factor explaining the approach of old minorities towards migration is the linguistic factor. The hypothesis that immigration is viewed positively by

old minorities ‘if immigrants make efforts to learn the regional minority language and negatively if immigrants speak/adopt the majority language of the state rather than the minority language of the region’ (Hepburn 2014: 54) is particularly relevant to situations in which minority protection claims are based on language or culture and in which national identity coincides with linguistic identity.

However, even if sub-state territories are constituted on the basis of language, it is feared that immigrants will be more likely to adopt the language of the majority state (Medda-Windischer 2016, Hepburn–Zapata-Barrero 2014: 7). The growing importance of English as a *lingua franca* is a further risk to language policy in sub-state territories: the justification for coercive language policies based on the need for social cohesion loses force if migrants can easily communicate in another language (Medda-Windischer 2016, Van Parjis 2012: 39, Marko–Medda-Windischer 2018).

There are sub-state territories where the integration of migrants – particularly through language policies – can be seen as functional and instrumental to (minority) nation-building strategy. In these contexts, integration policies are often not the result of real openness towards inclusive processes. Conversely, in other regional contexts where the minority languages have a strong status and prestige as linked to economic opportunities and prospects for upward social mobility, ‘old’ communities are less concerned with the promotion of minority languages that are already perceived by migrants as very important. In these cases, old minorities manifest less ‘anxieties’ over the integration of migrants as being a ‘threat’ to the status or prestige of the minority languages (Medda-Windischer–Carlà 2015, Medda-Windischer–Popelier 2016).

Stances towards migration may also differ according to the backgrounds of new minorities, particularly with regard to whether they have originated from kin-states. If a specific new minority group already shares important features of the regional identity, members of that group could be expected to integrate more quickly into the sub-national society and to identify with claims of autonomy. In Canada, Québec has made efforts to attract immigrants from French-speaking countries or with Latin backgrounds in order to raise the relative proportion of francophone people in the entire population (Gagnon–Sanjaume-Calvet 2016). In South Tyrol, the pro-independence party *Südtiroler Freiheit* favours a policy aimed at recruiting immigrants from countries with a similar linguistic and cultural German background (Carlà 2015). In contrast, other new minority groups may experience greater difficulty identifying with the sensitivities of the sub-national society (e.g. due to language problems). The Basque case reveals the fear that immigrants from Spanish-speaking countries might be more inclined to identify with the majority Spanish culture (Ruiz Balzola 2016).

In concluding this section, it can be said that it is not possible to identify a general and homogeneous approach displayed by old minorities towards migration: attitudes change between regions and, over time, following local,

national, and international dynamics. Furthermore, old minorities, like any social grouping, are not monolithic entities, but present a variety of specific aspects, and their attitude to migration is not an exception in this respect.

New Challenges and Prospects for Old Minorities in the Face of Migration

What, then, is the nature of the challenges that old minorities face due to migration waves? In other terms, how migration impacts and in which areas are sub-state nations compelled to react? And more importantly, what are the prospects for an inclusive and open approach towards diversity and migration?

Firstly, migration compels old minorities to (1) reconstruct sub-state or other national identity in order to embrace a plural society. Secondly, related to this situation, they are compelled to (2) conceptualize sub-state citizenship along the line of the concept of ‘regional citizenship’ due to supranational and decentralization trends. Thirdly, they are also prompted to (3) develop policies towards further participation and equality in diversity as bases for maintaining and furthering social cohesion.

1. The Reconstruction of Sub-National Identity

Old minorities need to construct sub-national identities in order to legitimize claims to special policies based on distinctiveness. In this regard, migration compels old minorities to rethink the construction of sub-national identity along the line of a dynamic concept.

The chief difficulty for old minorities resides in the harmonization of ethnic nationalism with a more cosmopolitan approach. This poses less of a problem for contexts in which systems established to protect old minorities are based on territory rather than blood, language, or descent, as in the Scottish case. In contrast, while ethnicity-based nationalism offers a strong narrative that justifies claims to minority protection, it is likely either to develop strained relations with immigration or to become entangled in the definition of ethnicity. For instance, in South Tyrol, ethnic nationalism has grown from historic roots, resulting in independence movements that tend to adopt an antagonistic or even xenophobic attitude towards immigration (Carlà 2015, Medda-Windischer–Carlà 2018). In turn, the Basque case unravels the struggle with the definition of sub-national identity and describes the evolution of identity markers from descent through language and political affiliation to territory (Ruiz Balzola 2016).

However, the traditional delineation of two types of identity discourse – one described as cosmopolitan or civic, the other as ethnic homogeneous – has been

referred to as a ‘false dichotomy’ (Yack 1996, Brubaker 1998, Shafir 1995: 17). There is in fact a tendency to overcome the alleged dichotomy between the so-called cosmopolitan-civic identity based on common values and/or common territory and ethnic identity based on blood, language, and descent. This is considered a false dichotomy because in reality the concept of identity is multiple and dynamic.

Ultimately – and without bringing forward subtle differences between ‘multiculturalism’ and ‘interculturalism’ (Meer–Modood 2011) –, a plural society induces old minorities to rethink sub-national identities, and ethnic nationalism, by harmonizing ethnic identity with a more cosmopolitan approach as to include migrants with different backgrounds. For example, in Catalonia, ethnic nationalism based on language as the major identity marker is combined with a policy encouraging new minorities to use the Catalan language in the public space (Medda-Windischer–Carlà 2015).

2. The Conceptualization of Regional/Sub-State Citizenship

While distinguishing themselves from the society at large through a concept of sub-national identity, sub-state communities are also forced to ‘construct a concept of citizenship based on legitimate and inclusive markers of belonging’ (Zapata-Barrero 2009b: 33, Medda-Windischer–Kössler 2017). This is due to two parallel trends: transnational and supranational trends and decentralization processes.

Legal constraints related to conferring rights and obligations largely follow from transnational and supranational sources. Fundamental rights, as inserted in European and international conventions, entitle migrants to equal personal, cultural, and religious rights as well as civil, social, and participatory rights. Along this line, the European Union has developed the concept of ‘civic citizenship’, based on the idea of considering the residence requirement as a criterion for gradually aligning the rights and duties of individuals with a migration background – including their access to goods, services, and instruments of civic participation – with those of the citizens of the country in which they live, improving their status towards equal opportunities and equal treatment (Piccoli 2017, Bellamy–Castiglione–Santoro 2004, Shaw 2007).

Parallel to this supranational trend empowering migrants through recognition of rights and freedoms, there is also a decentralization trend that invests sub-state entities with the power to grant rights, especially social and political rights, to their residents, including migrants. The decentralization of competences to sub-national authorities in such areas as social welfare, labour market, housing, and language use has made it conceivable to think of such notions as residence-based, regional citizenship for third-country nationals. Particularly relevant in this regard is the extent to which rights – following the classical Marshallian

conception of civil, social, and political rights – have been decentralized and how participation and belonging have been rescaled at the sub-national level (Marshall 1950, Hepburn 2010, Medda-Windischer-Kössler 2017, Maas 2013). This rescaling and the resulting regional autonomy prepared the ground for ‘regional citizenship’ because it made subnational entities one among multiple territorial points of reference for the exercise of rights (e.g. to social benefits, healthcare, education, or housing), for participation in political and social life, and for developing a sense of belonging.

3. Participation and Equality in Diversity

An additional challenge that migration raises in sub-national territories is the issue of participation and equality as bases to maintain and strengthen social cohesion. Old minorities are thus faced with the challenge to adopt policies aimed at providing migrants with opportunities to learn the minority language(s) and supporting the participation of migrants in various spheres of life (social, economic, cultural, and political dimensions). In this respect, it is crucial to stress that opportunities should not be easily converted into obligations. A preference for a ‘persuasion and argument’ model over a ‘sanction and force’ model is in fact to be supported (Jeram–van der Zwet–Wisthaler 2015, Baycan 2016). In Belgium, for instance, rigid language regimes established to protect the Dutch language against francophone linguistic dominance risk being perceived as obstacles to a polyethnic society (Medda-Windischer–Popelier 2016b). In this regard, the Basque case is peculiar in that the Basque language is perceived as a means of social integration even though it is a minority language even within Basque territory (Ruiz Balzola 2016).

Intimately linked to participation and opportunities, it has to be emphasized that diversity policies may not be sufficient *per se* to ensure equal concern, respect for all, and, above all, social cohesion, even though they are necessary conditions. The impoverishment and alienation of the immigrant youth, especially migrants of second and third generation, require also adequate anti-discrimination and equality policies. Policies and strategies designed to redress the unequal position of minorities and to combat formal and substantial forms of discrimination are just as essential as diversity policies. This may also include an open approach towards migrants’ languages not perceived as obstacles or threat to the knowledge of official languages but as important instruments for maintaining and strengthening their self-esteem and as tools for exchange and dialogue with the rest of the population.

Concluding Remarks

Among old and new minorities, there are great variations in terms of situations, actors, and dynamics. Each community has its own history, specific demographic trends, economic and political settings, specific markers of identity, relationship with the rest of the population and central state, and specific autonomous competences.

This paper has analysed clusters of factors influencing approaches displayed by old minorities towards migration as well as new challenges and prospects raised by migration in sub-state territories inhabited by traditional, historical groups. For developing an inclusive and open approach towards new diversities brought by most recent migration flows, considering the multiple factors and multifarious contexts, what is crucial is, on the one hand, active and creative policies, in contrast to mere *laissez-faire* approaches, to be adopted and effectively implemented, while, on the other hand, the political and social willingness, expressed by decision makers, the political élite, and the society at large, to consider diversity and different groups as integral part of society – the “collectivity” and who belongs to it – so that migrants are perceived as allies rather than enemies or ‘guests’.

This approach is not without difficulties. It is based on a vision of society in which different communities should interact with each other in a spirit of equality and openness, creating a rich, plural, and tolerant society. The process is thus burdensome for both parties. Minorities must learn to negotiate often in an unfamiliar or even hostile environment where their minority statuses make them vulnerable to marginalization and segregation. The majority group, on the other hand, must cope with diversity in its schools, workplaces, housing, public spaces, and neighbourhoods and must display tolerance and broadness. The vision is not easy to realize and has its own problems. Some groups might not be open and experimental and others might jealously guard their inherited identities. At the heart of any successful model lies, in the end, a sincere willingness on both sides – majority and minority – for continuous interaction, mutual adjustments, and accommodation.

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