

Book Review

Maurice Pinard, *Nationalist Movements Explained. Comparisons from Canada, Belgium, Spain, and Switzerland*.
London: Routledge, 2020, 202 pp, 11 illustrations.
ISBN 9780367271459

Maurice Pinard's *Nationalist Movements Explained* and the Perils of Comparative Research

For any scholar of social movements and, in particular, the Quebec independence movement, Maurice Pinard is a venerable authority. In the 1980s, his studies broke new ground and contributed decisively to identifying the determinants of nationalist mobilisation and the electoral support for pro-independence parties. While in his previous monograph Pinard condensed more than 30 years of research in a social-psychological theory focusing on motivational factors,¹ in this book, he expands his theoretical framework and tests it more systematically on a series of nationalist movements in Belgium, Canada and Spain. He also includes Switzerland as a counter-case in which cultural, linguistic and religious cleavages did not lead to the rise of strong sub-state nationalist movements (with the exception of the ephemeral campaign for the creation of the Jura canton in the 1970s).

There is much to commend in this study, especially in the first and third chapters, which outline comprehensively Pinards' model and offer an interesting summary of the existing literature on nationalist contentious



Emmanuel Dalle Mulle, 'Book Review: Maurice Pinard, *Maurice Pinard, Nationalist Movements Explained. Comparisons from Canada, Belgium, Spain, and Switzerland*,' in: *Studies on National Movements* 6 (2020).

action. It is impossible to do justice to Pinard's framework in this short review, but, in essence, he singles out two clusters of determinants of nationalist mobilization: socio-psychological and structural. Structural determinants are not only embodied by long-term processes such as modernisation, urbanisation, industrialisation, secularisation, state-making and war, as well as cultural segmentation, but also by more volatile factors such as political opportunities. Structural determinants somehow set the ground for the socio-psychological factors that explain, at the micro-level, the drive for engaging in nationalist mobilisation felt by the active members of nationalist movements. It is this set of socio-psychological factors which, according to Pinard, accounts best for 'the emergence and development of the national question' (p. 5). Pinard especially emphasises motivational factors, notably: (a) felt grievances, that is, perceived deprivation to which people attach feelings of discontent or injustice; b) collective incentives; and, often neglected, c) expectancy of success.² To these motivational factors, Pinard adds framing processes, beliefs and values.

While some would criticize Pinard's theoretical insights for not being sufficiently parsimonious, they simply reflect the complexity of nationalist mobilisation, which is heavily influenced by contextual elements making the varying combinations of factors outlined by Pinard a richer explanatory matrix than many other theoretical models in the current literature. In addition, Pinard should also be commended for showing how some of the determinants he explores can have opposite effects on nationalist mobilisation depending on the interaction with other factors. For instance, extreme economic disparities may act as formidable sources of the discontent required to nourish felt grievances, but they can also constitute insuperable hurdles in the process of mobilisation of resources that any nationalist movement needs in order to grow and proliferate.

However, the book also has major limitations, two in particular. The first relates to the empirical evidence marshalled to support some of the claims made by the author. In Chapter Five, Pinard argues that nationalist mobilisation in the cases analysed has followed a pattern in line with the so-called 'cycle of protest' perspective and, more precisely, with the evolution of levels of private materialist and post-materialist values among US college freshmen between 1966 and 2013 (Figure 4.1 in the book). Pinard concludes that 'there are striking concordances between, on the one hand, the cycles of increases in personal materialism among college freshmen and of decreases in their self-fulfilment values and, on the other hand, the decline cycles of support for the nationalist parties which we have been considering' (p. 129). More precisely, 'the decline in support of a meaningful philosophy of life accompanied the decline in the cycle of protest movements of that period, suggesting that the first could have been a factor in the second' (p. 116). There are three problems with this argument. First, it is highly questionable to assume that trends in private values among US freshmen can be used as a measure for value changes in other countries. Second, some of the data challenge his conclusions. In the case of Quebec, electoral support for the *Parti québécois* (PQ) increased consistently from 1970 to 1981 coinciding almost perfectly with declining levels of private self-fulfilment values and increasing levels of private materialism. The same occurred in Catalonia, between 1980 and 1984, when *Convergència i Unió* (CiU) rose to the position of dominant party in the region. In Belgium, the data roughly fit Pinard's claim, but only if one accepts the very questionable idea that the *Vlaams Belang* (VB) can be excluded from the picture simply because it is an anti-immigration party, as Pinard does. This leads to the third problem. Pinard tends to take into account only one (dominant) party in most of the regions under study. This is problematic because, had he considered the total sum of votes of the two major nationalist parties in Flanders (*Volkspartij* and VB until 2001; *Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie*, N-VA, and VB after 2001) and Catalonia (CiU

and *Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya*, ERC), he would have found very different electoral trends from those he reports.

The second limitation of the book pertains to the comparative dimension of the study. Comparative research is a thankless job. Those who venture into it have to confront the extremely time-consuming task of getting acquainted with the very complex contexts of several cases, while accepting at the outset that they will never know these as well as scholars that specialise exclusively in such cases. Hence, they will always expose themselves to criticism that their case studies are not accurate enough. That said, one cannot help feeling that, apart from the parts on Quebec, this book could have displayed a better command of the context of each case. There are indeed a number of factual inaccuracies throughout the volume. Some do not really affect the overall argument, but others are more problematic. At the end of Chapter Five, for example, Pinard concludes that organisational tensions are likely to arise within successful ethno-regionalist parties thus causing their decline. He says 'strong nationalist ideologies easily produce internal tensions and competition, and in particular the emergence of new parties on their left, such as *Quebec Solidaire* in Quebec, the N-VA in Flanders, the ERC and *Candidatura d'Unitat Popular* in Catalonia'. Now, ERC was founded in 1931 and is one of the oldest parties of current Spanish politics. The N-VA is indeed a relatively new party, founded in 2001, but it stands clearly to the right of the disappeared VU.

To conclude, Pinard's book will certainly be useful to whoever wants to engage with his sophisticated theoretical insights and to those who aim at getting familiarised with the existing literature on nationalist contestation. However, readers should consider with a degree of scepticism some of the conclusion he draws.

Emmanuel Dalle Mulle

Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies Geneva

Endnotes

¹ See M. Pinard, *Motivational Dimensions in Social Movements and Contentious Collective Action* (Montreal, 2011).

² In a 1986 article written with Richard Hamilton, Pinard appropriately quoted Leon Trotsky arguing that if grievances were sufficient to explain mass protest, 'the masses would always be in revolt'. M. Pinard and R. Hamilton, 'Motivational Dimensions in the Quebec Independence Movement: A Test of a New Model', in: *Research in Social Movements, Conflict and Change*, 9 (1986), 258.