Response to Tolz and Green

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I would like to thank the two commentators, Vera Tolz and Elliott Green, for their careful reading of the book and their challenging and interesting critiques. Both commentators were asked to focus on a particular aspect of the overall argument of Nation Building, and they bring their superb expertise—on Russian history on the one hand, on contemporary politics in sub-Saharan Africa on the other hand—to bear on these specific questions. Before I respond in detail, I would like to briefly restate the argument of the book, which will allow the reader to understand better which parts the comments address.

A brief summary

The book identifies two sides of the nation building coin. On the political power side, nation building means that inclusive ruling coalitions have emerged, comprising minorities and majorities alike. On the identity side of the coin, citizens identify positively with the nation and find the idea of a community of solidarity and shared political destiny meaningful. As Figure 1 below illustrates, I argue that national identification follows from political integration: citizens are more likely to embrace nationalist discourse if they see themselves represented at the highest level of government.

In a previous book (Wimmer 2013), I have shown that inclusionary configurations of power are also the best recipes for guaranteeing peace. Conversely, when minorities (or in some cases even majorities) are excluded from national level government, civil wars and secessionists conflicts in the name of politically marginalised communities are likely to break out. I mention this related argument here because Vera Tolz addresses it directly in her comments.

If political inclusion across ethnic divides is crucial for guaranteeing peace, *Nation Building* asks, how do we explain why it emerged in some countries but not in others? Why has Switzerland been governed by a coalition of linguistically defined elites since its beginning as a modern state while in Belgium, a French ethnocracy survived well into the twentieth century? The book points at three crucial factors that make it easier to establish political ties across ethnic divisions, which in turn fosters inclusionary coalitions. The first factor
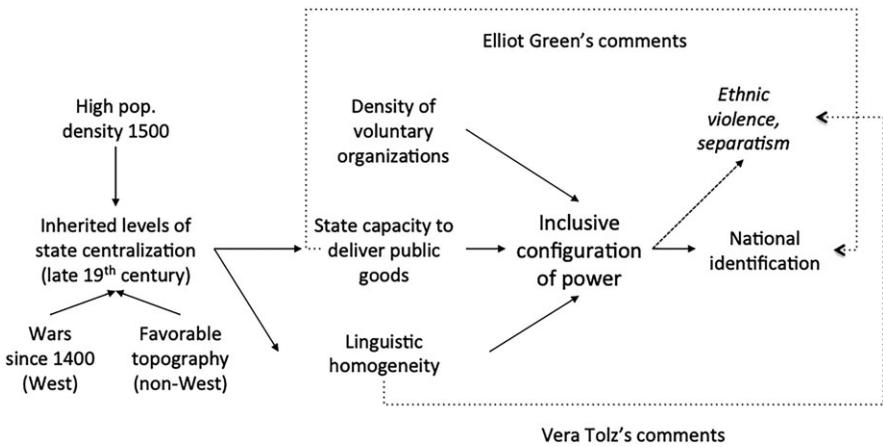
Figure 1. The argumentative architecture of the book

relates to the political economy aspects of political alliances. If a state can pro-
vide public goods – such as infrastructure, protection from arbitrary violence,
schooling and health care – across the territory of a country, citizens will find it
more attractive to seek an alliance with governing elites. The second factor re-
fers to the organisational aspect of political alliances. If these are based on civil
society organisations – which can in turn be folded into political party struc-
tures – alliances tend to cross ethnic divides more often, again leading to more
inclusionary coalitions. The final aspect is communication: a shared medium
of communication, mastered by majorities and minorities alike, reduces trans-
action costs for establishing political ties and, thus, fosters political inclusion as
well.

   The argument then moves further back into history, reaching into the pre-
war period and the nineteenth century. The book asks why certain states are
more able to provide public goods today and why some rule over populations
that speak a lingua franca or even a single language, while other populations
have remained more polyglot. The answer is that centralized states, which
emerged over previous centuries of political contestation and conflict, facilitate
public goods provision today and have also assimilated the population into a
dominant language.

   Kicking the can further down the historical road, the book finally explores
why such centralised states have emerged here (in China, for example) but not
there (e.g. in Somalia). It evaluates some classical theories of state formation
and finds that high population density, wars and a topography that prevents
peasants from escaping state building elites have all contributed to the forma-
tion of centralised states.

   In short, the book emphasises long-term forces of political development
that evolve over generations or even centuries, rather than the short-term ef-
fects of certain policies, as in most existing accounts of nation building.

National integration cannot be achieved, I show, by simply holding democratic elections, nor is it a matter of economic development. Conversely, neither the legacy of colonial divide-and-rule nor overlapping linguistic and religious cleavages represent major obstacles to contemporary nation building, as maintained by other theoretical traditions.

This theory of nation building is explored with a variety of methods and data. For each of the main mechanisms that leads to political inclusion, a paired comparison of country cases shows how these mechanisms operate in the historical process. Switzerland and Belgium illustrate the civil society mechanism. Botswana and Somalia show that public goods provision by a central government plays an important role in nation building. China and Russia exemplify that communicative integration (in the case of China: through a unifying script, rather than a uniform language) fosters political integration. The overall argument is then tested using large datasets covering almost the entire world over long stretches of time.

As this brief outline and Figure 1 show, neither Vera Tolz's nor Elliott Green's comments target the core of this theory of nation building. Vera Tolz raises the interesting point that China and Russia might not represent a good choice of cases because they diverge in other aspects besides their different levels of linguistic homogeneity. She then raises the question of how the communicative integration mechanism actually operates. Finally, focusing on the break-up of the Soviet Union, she questions the link between linguistic homogeneity and secession. In my argument, however, this link is not direct, but mediated by the configuration of power. Similarly, Elliott Green explores how public goods provision relates to national identification – while in my argument, again, this relationship is mediated by the configuration of power. The challenge of their critiques, in other words, is important, but they do not aim at the central claims of the book. In what follows, I respond in detail to each set of comments.

Response to Vera Tolz

Vera Tolz argues that China and Russia are not comparable cases. China did try to build a nation before and after the end of empire in 1912. Meanwhile, she maintains, Russia never did so but instead pursued a policy of imperial domination until the revolution of 1917, not unlike the colonial empires of the West. The Soviet Union then aimed to build nations, through the Leninist–Stalinist nationalities policy, at the level of the constituent republics, not the country as a whole. I would like first to concede that no two cases are exactly the same except for a crucial factor – in the case at hand, the degree of linguistic homogeneity. The ceteris refuse to be paribus in most case comparisons. However, I do not think that the specifics of Vera Tolz's critique are justified.

To clarify, my argument is not about the intentions of central governments, but about whether historical processes foster the emergence of trans-ethnic political alliances before and after the transition to the nation-state (1912 in China, 1917 in Russia). Nation building, in other words, can proceed behind the back of the main actors, as it were, and does not have to represent the strategic goal of governing elites (it certainly wasn't in the case in China or Switzerland, as detailed in the book). I concede in the final chapter of *Nation Building* that intentions of ruling elites might matter at the margin – as the example of Nyerere in Tanzania shows (Miguel 2004) – but they do not represent a main driving force.

This line of reasoning might, of course, be empirically wrong. As suggested by Vera Tolz, the divergent intentions of state elites could explain the success of nation building in China and the failure in Romanov Russia and later the Soviet Union much better than my argument about linguistic diversity. However, a closer look at the strategic intentions of subsequent Chinese and Russian governments leads to the opposite conclusion. Tolz does not mention the Russification policy pursued during the last decades of the Tsarist regime. It aimed at undermining the rising tide of minority nationalisms by fostering 'national' cohesion among all Christian subjects, the vast majority of the population of the empire. The use of non-Russian languages in primary school was outlawed and the influence of the Catholic clergy or non-Russian Orthodox churches drastically limited. The policy lasted from 1863 (the second Polish uprising) all the way to 1905 (the first Duma election). The Qing emperors pursued no such policy during the last decades of their rule. They did not even know the category of nation, which was introduced by their republican opponents, and never attempted to eradicate non-Mandarin languages. To be sure, in the early eighteenth century, a Qing emperor tried to make Mandarin classes mandatory for all government officials. But the policy soon lost its steam and was forgotten by the early nineteenth century. If nation building succeeded in post-imperial China despite the lack of a corresponding imperial policy and if it failed in Russia even though the Tsars very much aimed for it, then the intentions of ruling elites cannot represent a crucial factor for explaining nation building.

But what about the post-imperial period? I am afraid that I also disagree with Vera Tolz's characterisation of the Soviet Union. True enough, nation building policies were pursued at the level of the constituent republics – precisely because the political arena had already fragmented along ethnic divides during the late imperial period and the empire had to be re-conquered by the red armies after the civil war. But taming the nationalist spirits through the nationalities policy was only one side of the coin. On the other side, the regime fervently tried to instil Soviet patriotism in its citizenry – not under the term 'nation', to be sure, but referring instead to the 'peoples of the Soviet Union' – in order to generate a state-focused civic identity superimposed on the nationalities. In other words, the Soviets tried to build a multi-ethnic nation, similar to India, Switzerland and the various Caribbean island states. Under Khrushchev all the way to the Brezhnev era, the Soviet leadership even shifted

to an assimilationist strategy and tried to Russify the various minorities – again without much success. In short, the Soviet Union did attempt to build a coherent nation, first in a multi-cultural version and then in a straightforward assimilationist way. The unintended consequence of the nationalities policy, however, was that political alliance networks remained fragmented along ethnic divides and that the power structure, therefore, remained heavily tilted in favour of Russians. Meanwhile, a multi-lingual coalition controlled China's communist party, similar to the Kuomintang Party and the imperial governments before that. The structure of alliance networks, in other words, explains success and failure of nation building much better than the policies of ruling elites.

The second point of critique of Vera Tolz is that it remains unclear whether the communication mechanism operates at the level of elites or the masses. This is an important point that the book does, perhaps, not clarify enough. The answer depends on which phase in the process of political development we are focusing on. Before the advent of mass politics, all that matters is communication among elites. After the political mobilisation of the masses, for example through elections, these elites need to make claims that can be understood by the general population as well. Language heterogeneity both at elite and mass levels now matter. In Russia, the transition to mass politics occurred sometimes in the late imperial period and definitively with the Duma elections of 1905. I show, focusing on the case of the Jewish political organisation *Der Bund*, that speaking in the language of the general population was crucial in order to gain a following for the political movement and win votes. Political alliance structures thus fragmented even more as political movements started to cater to specific linguistic communities. In China, the first elections were held after the end of empire and the transition to the modern nation-state. What languages the masses spoke and which script they used, therefore, did not matter much before the Kuomintang regime. That elites, who spoke a great deal of different languages, could communicate in writing in the shared classical script, which is equally distant from all vernaculars, played an important role in creating multi-linguistic alliances before the transition to the nation-state. In turn, the multi-ethnic nature of political alliance networks helps to explain why China did not fall apart after the collapse of imperial authority.

Third, Tolz argues that there is no relationship between the degree of Russification of the population of a Soviet republic and whether this province sought independence from the Soviet Union earlier or later. As the summary graph shows, my argument is that linguistic integration fosters an inclusionary power structure, which, in turn, prevents secession. I do not argue that linguistic homogeneity directly – and without considering other factors that also influence the configuration of power – can explain secession or the lack thereof. Vera Tolz's well-taken points about the specific factors that were at play in Ukraine, Central Asia and Tatarstan all concern these power configurations – quite in line with the general thrust of my argument.

Still, my theory predicts an at least loose relationship between levels of linguistic assimilation and the timing of declarations of independence by the various Soviet republics. The less linguistic assimilation, the more political alliance networks should be confined by linguistic boundaries, the less provincial elites should be represented in the heart of Moscow's power apparatus, and the more likely secession should be. And indeed, Henry Hale (2000) supports this view in a statistical analysis of the timing of declarations of independence. The crucial independent variable is the percentage of the provincial population that speaks a regional vernacular other than Russian at home. This variable, in fact, is the most powerful predictor of when a republic declared independence – more consequential than economic dependence from Moscow, a history of previous independence, and so forth. The Central Asian republics that Elliott Green cites as evidence against my argument appear – in the larger scheme of things – as exceptions. A more systematic analysis of the matter fully supports my argument.

Response to Green

Elliot Green uses different data sources than the ones deployed in *Nation Building* to show that there is only a weak (when looking across countries) or even no relationship (when looking within countries over time) between public goods provision on the one hand and the strength of national identification on the other hand. Similar to Vera Tolz, Elliott Green tests a direct effect. As he acknowledges, my theory foresees an indirect effect, however: public goods provision enhances the formation of cross-ethnic alliances between state elites and the population, which should foster inclusive ruling coalitions, which in turn should enhance a positive evaluation of the national community (see again Figure 1). Since many other factors also influence the inclusiveness of the ruling coalition (such as linguistic homogeneity and civil society development), testing whether there is a direct effect is clearly not the ideal research design. Statistically speaking, exploring whether the relationship is mediated by the power configuration (controlling for other factors that affect it) would be more appropriate.

But still, as Elliott Green notes, my theory predicts a (however weak) direct correlation between public goods provision and positive national identification. And indeed, this is the tendency that his statistical analysis reveals: seven out of twelve coefficients of the public goods variables point in the right direction (more public goods, more national identification), even if only four of them reach standard levels of statistical significance. Only four public goods variables have coefficients that contradict my argument, of which only two are significant.

That one finds anything at all going in the direction of my argument is surprising, for two reasons. First, the theory explicitly states that only public goods provided by the central state foster nation building. Those provided by provincial governments, traditional authorities such as churches or

mosques, international companies, international NGOs, Chinese government contractors or the American military should not have such an effect. Elliott Green's data do not tell us anything about the sources of public goods provision: did Chinese contractors build the roads in these African countries? Did UNICEF introduce a sewerage system? In chapter 7 of *Nation Building*, I use very fine-grained data on Afghanistan that contains information on who sponsored public goods projects. I show that projects sponsored by foreigners have only marginal effects on how strongly individuals identify with the Afghan nation – while there is a very substantial effect if public goods are provided by the national government.

Second, and as Elliott Green states himself, he focuses on a different *explanans* than I do in *Nation Building*. He uses a question that asks whether an individual identifies primarily with the nation or with her ethnic group. In social psychological terms, this question is about the salience of national identity viz-a-viz other identities. I am exploring a different question that asks how proud an individual is of her nation. This question is not about salience, but about valence: whether you evaluate the nation in positive or negative terms. Answers to these two questions are entirely unrelated to each other, as I mention in the book and as Elliott Green notes. He, therefore, tests an interesting argument, but it is not mine. I see his contribution less as a critique than as an exploration of one of the themes of *Nation Building* into new terrain.

Green wonders why salience and valence are not going hand in hand. Following the theory outlined in *Nation Building*, I would argue that this is because some nationalisms are explicitly multi-ethnic. This is the case in Canada, in Switzerland, in India (at least before Modi), in many Caribbean countries and so on. In these cases, ethnic identities might be more salient than national identities, while national pride – the degree to which individuals see their nation in a positive light – is still very pronounced. In the Swiss case, local identities are, for the historical reasons outlined in the book, extraordinarily salient. Pride in the nation as a whole is nevertheless higher than in other countries because an inclusionary governing coalition emerged and nation building succeeded.

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