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Geographies of Nationalist Mobilisation

JOHN AGNEW

D. Conversi, *The Basques, the Catalans and Spain: Alternative Routes to Nationalist Mobilization*. London: Charles Hurst; Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1997. ISBN 0-87417-278-0.

M. Hechter, *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development*, with a new introduction and a new appendix by the author. New Brunswick NJ and London: Transaction Publishers, 1999. ISBN 0-7685-0475-1.

G.H. Herb and D.H. Kaplan (eds.), *Nested Identities: Nationalism, Territory, and Scale*. Lanham MD and Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999. ISBN 0-8476-8467-9.

The study of ethnonationalist and regionalist movements suffered for many years from the urge to squeeze all movements into single and, often, single-factor explanatory frameworks designed for one type of case, or even a single one, but extended to cover all. Internal colonialism is the classic example, invented to fit the case of movements from poorer regions suffering because of exploitation by a richer region but quickly proposed as a universal explanation for all regionalist movements. All that was needed was to insert the word 'perceived' in front of exploitation and the extension was complete. Fortunately, the most recent studies have by and large rejected this type of approach. Rather, they choose to emphasise the role of historically and geographically specific factors in the rise of different movements. If anything not enough attention is now paid to the contextual factors emanating from geographical scales beyond that of the territories associated with the different movements. Having rejected the overemphasis on extra-regional links in internal-colonial and other structural accounts the tendency is either to retreat into an idiographic emphasis on the local details of each case or to revive dubious notions of singular local or regional political cultures formed in the distant past and revived anew in each generation.

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Daniele Conversi's book is an exception to this rule. Not only does it provide a detailed analysis and comparison of the two most important ethnonationalisms from Spain, the Basque and the Catalan, it does so in a theoretical framework that relates the boundaries of political identity and movement creation in each case to the 'larger' story of the Spanish state and its position within the European state system. The book has three major strengths which together make it compulsory reading for political geographers interested in nationalism and ethnic conflict. The first is its elaboration of two models of identity formation, each of which fits one of the two cases. Conversi uses an analogy drawn from Brubaker's (1992) book on citizenship in France and Germany to summarise the two cases. In the Basque case ethnic identity has drawn on a *jus sanguinis* (blood or race) model, whereas in the Catalan one it is more a *jus soli* (civic, language, assimilation) model. Second, Conversi sees immigration from neighbouring regions and the possibility for assimilation as crucial both for how ethnic boundaries form and for the course that the ethnonationalist movements take. If immigrants can be active participants in movements because the local language is not too distant from their own (as Catalan is for Castilian speakers but Basque is not), or an oppositional ideology to the present state attracts immigrant recruits (as with some immigrants to the Basque Country), then the boundaries are less rigid, movements become more inclusive and there is less potential for racial and segregationist approaches that encourage violence. Third, and finally, the violence of one Basque faction, ETA, in contrast to other Basque movements and all Catalan ones, is explained in terms of the absence of clearly defined borders between Basque and Spaniard, the deep hatred of Spain (more than love of the Basques) in the founder of modern Basque nationalism, Sabino Arana y Goiri (1865–1903); the repression visited upon Basque language and society by the Franco regime after the Civil War; and the long history of autonomy of the Basque Country. Conversi will have no truck with the logic of the 'inherent violence of Basque society' that has masqueraded, like the 'amoral familism' and backwardness of southern Italy (Putnam 1993), as a profound social-science explanation.

The most important insight in the study follows from these points. It is that the opposition to present-day institutional arrangements that is present in all ethnonationalist movements can be articulated in two different ways. One is through an 'appraisal of one's own identity', the other is by means of negative 'comparison with an external enemy' (p.262). If the Catalan nationalist mobilisation has been based largely on the former, then the Basque one conforms closely to the latter. Conversi ties these two models closely to the history of the territories in which they developed and the wider linkages of the territories to the Spanish state and its historical

development. In so doing he offers a precise integration of local and state-centred forces at work in the creation of the two movements and their associated identities.

This is a major piece of work in political geography, even though its author confesses sociology as his discipline. It builds crucial empirical detail onto the framework laid out in his 1995 paper (Conversi 1995). It also provides yet more proof of the budding emergence of a group of like-minded scholars engaged in the fruitful integration of the geographical and the sociological imaginations.

Internal Colonialism, now reissued in paperback with a new introduction and a new appendix that respond to some of the criticisms of the original version published in 1975, was a pioneer text in the study of the 'making of the British state' through a focus on the incorporation of and resistance from the so-called Celtic fringe of Scotland, Ireland and Wales. As political sociology it is a brilliant synthesis of Max Weber and Karl Marx, incorporating the former's notion of status groups (nations) applied to the subjugation of the Celtic peoples who thus find themselves in the sociological position of the latter's working class subordinated by the dominant English. It is as history that it is problematic, glossing over the divergent experiences of the different Celtic groups (not least the appropriateness of the term 'Celtic' itself when applied to many of the people included), the not dissimilar economic subordination of many English regions by London, and the socially marginal character of many of the political movements in the 'fringe' throughout much of their history.

Chapters on the 'Expansion of the English State' (Chapter 3) and 'Servitor Imperialism and National Development in an Age of Empire' (Chapter 8) are particularly strong in maintaining the central thesis while providing convincing empirical evidence. Much weaker are the more quantitative chapters, particularly Chapter 7, 'The Persistence of Sectionalism, 1885–1966', which tend to overstate the fit between the findings and the thesis. Many of the results do not square with the interpretations offered, suggesting, against the general thesis, that only Wales matches the predicted model of ethnic mobilisation and many parts of England are as disaffected from the Conservative Party (interpreted by Hechter as *the* English party) as are parts of the Celtic fringe. Hechter remains relentlessly structural in his approach to nationalist mobilisation, and this limits his ability to deal with the geographical anomalies that inevitably muck up simple sociological nostrums (from Northern Irish Protestants to the Highlands/Lowlands division in Scotland and the non-Welsh-speaking, Labour voting Welsh people who, though anti-Conservative, are anything other than Welsh nationalists). The reissue is welcome, however, not just as a reminder of the limits of a sociological

imagination under-informed by geographical knowledge, but also of a genuinely pioneer effort to confront the extra-regional and state-building sources of nationalist mobilisation in a part of the world long thought by orthodox social science to have moved 'beyond' ethnic particularism into the rational confines of modernity.

The edited collection by Guntram Herb and David Kaplan provides a more global range of case studies and a distinctively geographical perspective on nationalist mobilisation. Two theoretical chapters by the editors lay out the volume's perspective, respectively, on the relations between nation and territory and national identity and geographical scale. Much of the novelty in the book comes from Kaplan's linking of political identities, including national ones, with the 'zones of increasing extent' (p.31) or geographical scales with which people associate themselves but which are cross-cut by state boundaries, migrant diasporas, and state-nation disjunctures. Kaplan suggests that the growing 'compartmentalisation' of identities in relation to different issues with different spatial scope, imperial legacies, and emergent levels of political-economic organisation points to the historical contingency of national identities rather than their permanence. The best empirical chapters, by Murphy on the idea of European identity, Yiftachel on regionalism among Arabs in Israel, and White on the identity of Transylvania between Hungary and Romania, address Kaplan's themes in detail.

The book as whole, however, is organised somewhat peculiarly and many of the chapters do not really engage with the book's overarching theme of 'nested identities'. The breakdown of studies into macro-scale, meso-scale, and micro-scale, mirroring different frames of reference for the geographically nested quality of political identities, could make sense if the studies categorised in this way actually did adopt such distinctive perspectives. Alas, the studies here largely do not fit well into their slots. Most authors simply write about political identity at a single scale and some could as well be in other categories than the ones they are in. Examples of the first would be Elbow's chapter on the Caribbean and that of Knowles on Wales. Examples of the second would be Manogaram on Tamil separatism in Sri Lanka (under the meso-scale), and White on Transylvania (under the micro-scale) whose allocations could easily be justified if reversed. More seriously, only Murphy, Yiftachel, White, Lynn and Bogorov on Russia, and Honey on Nigeria deal centrally with the question of nested identities and the contingency of established national identities in relation to those at other scales.

There is much of interest in many of the chapters, notwithstanding their often problematic connection to the book as a whole. For example, Elbow provides a fascinating account of failed attempts at creating a wider sense

of regional political consciousness in the Caribbean and Knowles offers a well-informed overview of attempts by nineteenth century Welsh nationalists to 'start over' in the New World, well away from the corrupting influence of the English. I also particularly enjoyed Unwin's evocative chapter on the ups and downs of Estonian nationalism and Lynn and Bogorov's wide-ranging account of various Russian political factions and their relationships to various geopolitical 'ideas' of Russia.

From a theoretical point of view, Conversi's book and Kaplan's chapter in *Nested Identities* are suggestive of fresh geographically-informed directions in which the study of nationalism might go. The reissue of Hechter's classic book and some of the chapters in the Herb and Kaplan collection suggest, however, that not everyone is yet 'with the programme'. Until we have more studies of the calibre of those of Conversi, Murphy, Yiftachel, and White, convincingly demonstrating the geographical contribution to the constitution of political identities, I suspect that we will not.

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