

Jolly, Seth. 2002. "A Cause for Optimism? Federalism and Implications for Ameliorating Nationalist Conflict." Review of *Containing Nationalism*, by Michael Hechter. *apsa-cp* 13.2 (Summer).

From the Basque and Catalan regions of Spain to the Palestinian territories in Israel, to the Tamil areas of Sri Lanka, conflicts rage over national self-determination. In *Containing Nationalism*, Michael Hechter focuses on indirect rule as a mechanism to alleviate such nationalist tension. Though his model has definite policy implications for all governments dealing with nationalist movements, politicians and scholars should be cautious as further systematic testing is needed to justify the conclusions.

Hechter addresses three main questions in his study on nationalism. First, why is nationalism a phenomenon of the modern era? Second, what causes the variance in nationalist tension between and within countries? Finally, are there mechanisms to ameliorate nationalist tension (3-4)?

Though many scholars debate why nationalism emerged only during the last two centuries, Hechter contends the reason is simple: the empires of previous centuries "did not provide a strong motive for the development of nationalism. Missing was the demand for national self-determination" (25). Of course, as with any argument about nationalism, much depends on definitions. Hechter defines nationalism quite specifically: "*collective action designed to render the boundaries of the nation congruent with those of its governance unit*" (7). Note the use of the term 'governance unit' rather than state. The boundaries of the state do not necessarily matter as long as a nation controls its own governance unit (26). This distinction plays an important role in the development of the causal analysis.

Using this definition, it is not state-level sovereignty that matters. Rather, to borrow Arend Lijphart's language, it is segmental autonomy. As long as the agrarian empires such as the Ottoman or the Roman allowed indirect rule, nations had no need to pursue self-determination. Thus, the advent of direct rule introduced nationalism to the world (29). Direct rule for empires became a feasible option only in the last few centuries with innovations in fields such as transportation, communication, military technology and international trade (59). Therefore, we see the hypothesized causal sequence: given certain other necessary conditions, the introduction of direct rule leads to nationalism.

Unfortunately, though this hypothesis seems falsifiable, the reader is given neither in-depth case studies nor systematic quantitative analysis to ascertain its accuracy. Instead, there is a brief and simple look at the Ottoman Empire. The author discusses the advent of nationalist movements and contends that 'peripheral nationalism' follows sequentially from the introduction of direct rule by the central ruler. He argues, "the sequence of peripheral nationalism in the Ottoman Empire follows the timing of the imposition of direct rule. Direct rule was first imposed in the western provinces and last in the eastern ones. Wherever there was sufficient cultural homogeneity to foster territorial solidarity, peripheral nationalism followed suit" (76). While the argument seems plausible, there is not enough evidence to convince the reader. It is not clear whether other factors in the

western provinces led to a greater probability of nationalist tension. What if contagion played a role? More critical to Hechter's argument, what if the causal arrow runs not from direct rule to nationalism but from nationalism to direct rule? In other words, it seems plausible that an empire that noticed a nascent nationalist movement would be more likely to impose direct rule to try to stifle it. Time series statistical analysis or more detailed qualitative case studies (e.g., the British Empire and the French Empire) might help to support or falsify Hechter's theory vis-à-vis alternative hypotheses.

The second main question raised by *Containing Nationalism* concerns the variance in nationalism between and within countries. As Hechter notes, if self-determination is a 'universal good,' why is it not universally pursued by all nations (116)? Quite simply, collective goods are the answer. Some groups do not pursue nationalist goals because they would be worse off in an independent state. According to this argument, "demand for sovereignty is a function of its net benefits" (122-3).

Similarly, Alesina and Spolaore (*Quarterly Journal of Economics* 1997) consider the trade-off between the economies of scale and the "costs of heterogeneity" of large multinational states. The benefits of larger countries include cheaper per capita public goods, larger internal markets, less exposure to economic shocks and security (Alesina and Spolaore 1028). Alesina and Spolaore conclude that these advantages may be decreasing in regions experiencing economic integration (i.e. Europe), suggesting that nationalism should be highly correlated with economic integration (1042). Thus, expanding Hechter's argument, demands for sovereignty will increase when the benefits of autonomy exceed the benefits associated with larger state size.

The same logic holds for intra-national variance in demands for sovereignty. Those citizens whose livelihood is most dependent on the central state, rather than the region, should be less likely to support the nationalist cause (122-123). Both the Basque and Quebec cases support this idea, in that capitalists dependent on intrastate trade are less supportive of the nationalist movements. Further, within Spain, it explains why the nationalist movement is more violent in the Basque region while the Catalan movement receives more widespread support (204-205).

While the logic put forth by Hechter is compelling, the empirical evidence he presents is distinctly limited. Certain observable implications of the causal mechanism are both falsifiable and seemingly easily testable. In particular, survey data in Europe and North America should provide data to test the implication that groups most economically dependent on the state are less supportive of nationalism. In the Catalan region in Spain, a time series analysis should show that capitalists rejected nationalist ideas when their economy was dependent on the state but supported the movement when their economy diversified. In short, while the theory is plausible, further testing would strengthen the argument.

Finally, Hechter addresses the policy question: "What might contain the dark side of nationalism?" While he acknowledges there are several ways to ameliorate tension, he focuses on reducing the demand for self-determination and raising the cost of collective

action (18). Both, he argues, can be accomplished through indirect rule (28). As defined above, nationalism arises when there is a disconnect between the nation and its governance unit. If a state institutes federalism or indirect rule, then a nation has no reason to demand autonomy (36).

Using Ted Gurr's Minorities at Risk data, Hechter considers the correlations between federalism and nationalist tension to test his theory. As one might expect from the logic, the data suggest that there is in fact a positive correlation between centralization and rebellion (148). However, since this analysis is simply a bivariate correlation, it is merely suggestive of a causal link. A useful extension of this argument would be to test systematically the argument in a pooled cross-sectional time series analysis, including significant control variables such as historical conflict, socioeconomic variables, external threat, etc. Alternatively, more detailed qualitative case studies could flesh out certain cases to reveal better the causal sequence and other potentially significant variables. Without either of these types of analysis, the reader cannot assume the validity of the causal argument.

Hechter is certainly not the first to propose federalism or indirect rule as a solution to nationalist conflict. Among others, Arend Lijphart (1977) and Donald Horowitz (1985) include federalism as a potentially valuable tool in dealing with ethnic conflict in their respective models. Nonetheless, because of its extended analysis of issues of decentralization and regional autonomy, *Containing Nationalism* is a valuable addition to the literature on moderating nationalist tension.