Book review: Divided Nations, by Juan Diaz-Medrano

Josep M. Colomer

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Review
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large absence of theory and the overabundance of descriptive narratives. *East German Dissidents and the Revolution of 1989* is a welcome effort to apply existing political and sociological theory to the case of the collapse of communism in East Germany. Joppke presents an impressive and exhaustive synthesis of the literature on communist regimes and makes an admirable attempt to understand East German society on these existing terms. Unfortunately, this often results in long lapses into the jargon of whatever work he is examining. Similarly, he has a penchant for the jargon of the Cold War (e.g., “Not yet quite beaten, the communist hydra seemed to rear an ugly new head” [p. 171]).

Joppke has studied antinuclear movements in West Germany and the United States extensively. It is odd that Joppke limits his introduction of concepts from the examination of social movements in advanced industrial societies. Joppke relies primarily on the theoretical innovations of Ken Jowitt, Vaclav Havel, and Albert Hirschman, who either developed their insights from careful study of the former communist systems or have already specifically adapted them to the case of the GDR (see Albert Hirschman, “Exit, Voice, and the Fate of the German Democratic Republic,” *World Politics* [45, no. 2 (1993): 173–202]).

Joppke’s interviews with the major actors in several of the social movements of the GDR provides the reader with an interesting window on how the former activists now perceive their earlier actions on the fringes of East German society. Since *East German Dissidents and the Revolution of 1989* relies heavily upon German language sources not available in English, it should be warmly greeted by students of the revolutions of 1989 without German language backgrounds for the wealth of details it makes available.


Josep M. Colomer

*Higher Council of Scientific Research, Barcelona*

This book does not try to explain the existence of nationalist movements but rather their different characters. It asks, Why do some nationalist movements use violence for achieving their goals? Why do some separatist movements seek independent statehood while other movements limit themselves to autonomist or more moderate aims? Díez Medrano tries to answer these questions through a broad, albeit relatively brief, historical panorama of the development of the Basque and Catalan nationalist movements in Spain during the 19th and 20th centuries. In presenting his interpretation, the author gives a rather traditional emphasis to the role of socioeconomic structures but also points out the influence of political processes. In particular, the book tries to explain the contrast between
the relative success of violent, separatist, and anticapitalist forms of nationalism in the Basque movement in comparison with the predominance of democratic and autonomist trends in Catalan nationalism.

Regarding the role of socioeconomic structures, Díez Medrano does not adopt a conventional perspective on ethnic conflict between center and periphery but rightly focuses on the intensity of intraregional class conflict (which the book's title, Divided Nations, refers to). Specifically, the author not only notes that the Basque country and Catalonia have enjoyed different levels of development in relation to the rest of Spain, he also tries to model their different patterns, using new data to establish the Basque specialization in capital-goods production and the Catalan specialization in consumer-goods production. These different patterns of development would have engendered distinct social structures, with the Catalan bourgeoisie and intelligentsia having greater autonomy from the Spanish economy, and would have offered distinct possibilities of forming regional political coalitions. As a consequence, whereas the Catalan nationalist movement would have been formed at the initiative of local bourgeoisie attracting the intelligentsia and the peasantry, the stronger implication is that the role of Basque industry in the Spanish economy would have only allowed the emergence of nationalist attitudes among social groups displaced by industrialization.

According to Díez Medrano, the different opportunities to form political coalitions offered by different patterns of development could also explain the different patterns of politics in opposition to the Franco regime (1939–75) and during the later democratic period. Certainly, there was greater diversity in the Catalan anti-Francoist movement—in which the Communists, the Christian Catalan nationalists, and other minor groups, including some separatist nationalists, were active—than in the Basque political opposition, where the violent separatist ETA had an almost monopolistic position since 1960. Díez Medrano holds that the relatively advantageous position of ETA is in the origin of the support it has found during the multiparty democratic period due to secondary socialization processes.

In fact, Díez Medrano tries to explain political outcomes (different types of nationalist movements) as derived from two intermediate alternatives (class conflict and political supply), which are both presented as derived from a single factor: the pattern of economic development. It is not clear that this scheme can avoid structural determinism, as the author claims to do. But the main problem is that the different variables the author compares are from rather distant historical periods. On the one hand, the Basque country and Catalonia followed different patterns of development in the 19th and early 20th centuries but later on their structures have been “identical” (according to the word that the author repeats many times). On the other hand, the diffusion of violent and separatist forms of nationalism started in the Basque country in the 1960s, in contrast to the more moderate orientation of Basque nationalism during the first half of the century. What thus would be the relevance of
different patterns of development in the first half of the century for explaining the similarity of the two nationalist movements at that time? And how can “identical” socioeconomic structures in the second half of the century account for the new, different political orientations of the two nationalist movements?

The reader can have the impression that, in spite of the good intentions of the author, a more important role should be given to political entrepreneurship in order to explain the recent development of different political strategies in the two nationalist movements. The influence of ideas, which the author despises, would also find its place in that perspective. Díez Medrano pursues, in fact, a few good trails of this influence, but he does not incorporate such factors into the general explanation. Also noneconomic structural variables, such as the very different linguistic distance between the Spanish language and each of the other two languages, Basque and Catalan, should help to explain the higher degree of internal conflict in the Basque country. Meanwhile the task is not completed. Díez Medrano’s book may be considered a positive, albeit partial, contribution to building a complex explanatory framework in which “anonymous,” structural socioeconomic variables can be appropriately combined with human political decisions.


Andrew G. Walder

*Stanford University*

This book is distinguished from the many other eyewitness accounts of China’s 1989 protest movement in several respects. Neither a China specialist nor a journalist, Calhoun was a visiting professor at Beijing Foreign Studies University, where he taught many students who became involved in the movement and accompanied them frequently to Tiananmen Square. Not content simply to watch from the sidelines, he discussed the movement with English-speaking students in many conversations, occasionally marched alongside them chanting their slogans, and at one point conducted small nonrandom opinion polls among participants and bystanders. Most important, Calhoun is also a highly respected analyst of social movements and author of interesting theoretically oriented works of social history. Because he has this combination of first-hand observation and sociological talent, I anticipated a fresh analytic perspective on these events that would transcend the limits of the Sinocentric and highly culturalist interpretations of so many area specialists. When Calhoun states early on (e.g., p. 20) that he aims to provide a more satisfactory explanation of the growth and direction of social movements.