

Violent and Nonviolent Ethnic Resistance

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Mobilization and Conflict in Multiethnic States, by Manuel Vogt, New York, NY, Oxford University Press, 2019. \$74.00 (hardcover), ISBN 9780190065874.

Why do ethnic minorities who have been cut out of power choose, in some contexts, to take up arms and, in other contexts, to take to the streets? This question might seem an obvious one to ask, and yet it has rarely been posed in quite these terms – in large part because ethnic politics research has concentrated far more on violent resistance than its nonviolent alternative. We have reams of pages on the roots of ethnic insurgency, violent secessionism, and ethnic civil war but far less on why and how marginalized ethnic groups might mobilize using unarmed strategies of civil resistance. Manuel Vogt’s impressive new book makes this point well – and offers a succinct and parsimonious explanation to answer the question of why an ethnic group might choose one path over another.

Vogt’s argument is rooted in historical legacies of state formation and colonialism – though not the ones normally emphasized in the scholarship. Rather than anchoring on the identity of the colonial occupier (i.e., French vs British), as most studies do, Vogt focuses on who held power at the moment of state independence. His main comparison, then, is between what he calls the colonial settler states of the Americas (as well as Zimbabwe and South Africa), where post-independence political control remained in the hands of white settlers, and the decolonized states of Africa and Asia, where sovereignty was granted to native populations. In the former cases, ethnic relations are defined by long-standing and stable ethnic hierarchies, with racial minorities and indigenous populations as permanent underclasses. But these cases also exhibit strong social integration, in the sense that all ethnic groups share many social and cultural practices (specifically, language and religion). In the decolonized states, ethnic relations are more fluid and less hierarchical but also more segmented, in that ethnic groups “live within the same polity as separate subsocieties, featuring distinct, relatively independent social systems” (9). In this sense, these two ideal types can be mapped to a neat two-by-two framework, with hierarchization on one axis and segmentation/integration on the other axis. Colonial settler states fall in one quadrant, with strong hierarchization and high integration, and decolonized states are in the opposite quadrant, with weak hierarchization and high segmentation. Vogt then argues that these structural differences in ethnic power relations shape whether ethnic mobilization is likely to take a violent or nonviolent form.

Vogt claims that his theory incorporates all three of the main variables that have been at the center of the ethnic conflict research agenda: grievances, capacities, and opportunities. Yet, in my reading, the explanation privileges the latter two variables over the former. Whereas subordinated racial groups in the hierarchically organized and socially integrated states of the Americas have plenty of acute grievances against the state, which might be expected to prompt rebellion, Vogt argues that in these contexts they have limited capacities and opportunities to do so. Specifically,

these groups have little access to the resources necessary for armed revolt, and the social integration of these societies both limits levels of cohesion *within* ethnic groups and raises levels of interdependence *between* distinct groups. For these reasons, armed resistance remains out of reach for most ethnic groups in these states, with unarmed civil resistance for greater inclusion in the polity a more appealing and viable alternative. In contrast, ethnic groups in the horizontally segmented states of postcolonial Asia and Africa have more than enough autonomy and independence to organize violent campaigns should they feel their interests are threatened.

Vogt supports this clear and parsimonious argument with a wealth of original data, using an impressive multimethod research design. The book is, in fact, a model for how multimethod research should be done, with the collective product greater than the sum of the individual parts – each of which are, nevertheless, quite impressive on their own. The cross-national chapters, using a combination of EPR data and originally collected data on ethnic integration/segmentation and ethnic organizations, demonstrate that the theory can indeed explain broad patterns in ethnic mobilization across space and time. Then, Vogt unpacks the mechanisms and processes implied by the theory with four rich case studies, based on original interviews and fieldwork, in Guatemala, Ecuador, Cote d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast), and Gabon.

There is a great deal to like about this book. The argument is elegant and the multimethod approach is exemplary. It also serves as an important bridge between the scholarship on violent (ethnic) conflict and nonviolent civil resistance, which have all too often been studied in isolation. And it points to some novel normative and policy takeaways, the most important of which is that ethnic mobilization can, depending on the context, be either the basis for emancipation and political equality or a source of deadly violence and political destabilization. In countries where ethnic hierarchies are rigid and long-standing, ethnic mobilization ought therefore to be cheered and encouraged. But in the decolonized states where it is prone to devolve into bloody civil conflict, all efforts should be made to prevent ethnic groups from mobilizing.

Any book with a scope as broad and sweeping as this one will surely leave some questions and tensions unresolved. Several questions in particular relate to Vogt's argument about the colonial settler states, where ethnic mobilization is found to take a more nonviolent form. Vogt repeatedly describes these states as being in a condition of "equilibrium," a term that he first uses in the Introduction: "in stratified societies, stable between-group hierarchies and a high degree of social integration produce an 'equilibrium of inequality' that deprives the marginalized groups of the capacity for armed rebellion" (10). But is an "equilibrium of inequality" not a near-contradiction in terms? Surely it implies a degree of social stability and harmony that is belied by the histories of these countries. In fact, as we know all too well, the racial hierarchies that persist across the Americas have only been successfully maintained through heavy investment in systems of racial capitalism and institutionalized discrimination, with state violence as the primary tool of enforcement. That so much violence has been needed to sustain these systems is evidence, in and of itself, that they are hardly stable or in a state of equilibrium. Indeed, Vogt recognizes these states' heavy reliance on coercion for maintaining social control, noting, for example, that "violence is omnipresent in stratified societies" (189).

None of this necessarily undermines the purchase of Vogt's argument; after all, one of the mechanisms that supposedly hampers violent mobilization in these states is high levels of state coercion. But the use of terms like "equilibrium" and "integration" are nevertheless important because they come with normative connotations that may not accurately reflect conditions in these places. They suggest that these countries are fundamentally less violent than those of postcolonial Asia and Africa. But really what this book shows us is not that ethnic politics are less violent in the Americas, but that the *nature* of ethnic violence differs across the two contexts. In the postcolonial world, it takes the form of inter-group conflict over state control, whereas in the Americas it manifests in institutional and systematic violence perpetuated by the state.

A related question concerns how and when the racial hierarchies that define colonial settler states were established in the first place. Vogt argues that these hierarchies were cemented in place at

the moment of independence and that they subsequently created little space for marginalized groups to organize violent resistance. And yet there *are* important historical examples of violent liberation campaigns against settler colonial projects – but they all occurred *as part of* independence struggles and therefore fall beyond the scope of Vogt's theory and analysis. For example, what are we to make of the Haitian revolution, in which enslaved people successfully rose up and forced out the French colonizers? Or what about the Algerian war of independence, which forced the French to terminate a century-long project of settler colonialism? The violent resistance of Palestinians to Israeli settler colonialism is another case that Vogt's theory somewhat struggles to make sense of. And if we loosen our definitions only slightly and simply look at violent nationalist resistance to foreign occupation and settlement across the world (e.g., in places like Ireland and Poland), we see countless examples of oppressed groups overcoming the kind of structural barriers that are at the center of Vogt's theory. How did they manage to do so? Perhaps it is unfair to expect a book that already covers so much terrain to also consider these violent independence struggles. But it is a question that nonetheless hangs over the book, and Vogt might at least have discussed how or why these cases are beyond the scope of his explanation.

Another tension that remains unresolved in the book is whether there is something important about the particular *content* of ethnic difference (e.g., race, language, religion, tribe, caste, region, etc.). As is the norm in the ethnic politics literature, Vogt lumps all these forms of difference under the common heading of "ethnic," and forwards a theory of ethnic mobilization writ large. But nearly all of the cases defined by nonviolent ethnic mobilization are ones in which race is the primary ethnic cleavage, whereas the countries where violent conflict occurs are stratified by language and/or religion. Is this important? Is there something about racial difference that conduces to the kind of stratified hierarchies that make nonviolent resistance more likely? Or is race perhaps a social identity that is easier to mobilize for nonviolent ends than violent ones? Put another way, do we have examples of stratified ethnic hierarchies and nonviolent mobilization where the primary ethnic cleavage is not racial but linguistic or religious?

A related concern, this one more methodological than theoretical, is that perhaps these differences in cleavage structure are baked into some of Vogt's measures themselves. Because his measure of integration is based on shared language or religion, it automatically codes societies in which racial divisions are paramount as more integrated than those in which linguistic or religious cleavages dominate. What would the world look like using an integration measure based on levels of racial homogeneity? Perhaps then the postcolonial world would look more integrated and the Americas more segmented.

Vogt's book is primarily based on a comparison of two groups of states, with two different experiences of European colonialism – the colonial settler states of the Americas and the decolonized states of Asia and Africa. But, of course, there is a third group of states in the world where European colonialism never occurred but that nonetheless have considerable ethnic diversity. Vogt calls these cases "titular nation states, in which state formation was promoted by a core ethnic group that is now recognized as the titular group of the respective state" (40). Prominent examples include China, Turkey, Russia, Iran, and Thailand. Again, perhaps it is asking too much of a single book, but I wished Vogt had spent more time on this group of countries, especially given how important they have been historically. He does incorporate them into his cross-national analyses in Chapter 4, but, if anything, these results raise more questions than they answer.

Vogt claims that these states are "cross-pressured in terms of the structural conditions for conflict" (44). In fact, based on Vogt's theory, I would expect these states to be the *most* unstable and violence-prone when it comes to ethnic mobilization. Vogt argues that these are countries built on ethnic domination, like the colonial settler states, but that lack the kind of social integration that helps to diffuse violent conflict. In other words, according to his framework, they are hierarchical but also segmented. I would expect that in states like this we would see particularly high levels of ethnic violence, because unjust ethnic hierarchies breed strong grievances and ethnic segmentation provides plenty of autonomy for violent mobilization. And, indeed, empirically we do see many

examples of violent ethnic mobilization in these countries – e.g., by Kurds in Turkey and Iran, Uyghurs in China, Chechens in Russia, and Malays in Thailand.

The sign of a great piece of scholarship is that it is stimulating and provocative – even about questions that it does not directly address. Vogt’s book clearly meets this very high bar. It is a wonderful piece of scholarship, sweeping in its scope without sacrificing anything of the precision and rigor that we expect of contemporary social science research. It poses an original question, and forwards a compelling and parsimonious theory that adeptly makes sense of more than a century of ethnic mobilization across the world, bridging literatures on violence and nonviolence, ethnic politics, and state building. It will surely be a must-read for generations of scholars interested in understanding and ameliorating the particular problems of multiethnic societies.