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Review of Angel Smith, The Origins of Catalan Nationalism, 1770-1898

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Smith, Angel. *The Origins of Catalan Nationalism, 1770–1898*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. viii + 304 pp.

This timely book, published just a year before the Catalan Parliament voted to begin a political separation from Spain, offers a constructivist perspective on identity formation. As such, it is a welcome addition to a literature that too often upholds a version of historicist teleology that is found even in the work of noted scholars like Jaume Vicens Vives. Smith plainly states that "there was no inevitability" in the process of constructing Catalan national identity (92). In a stroke, the book adds another nail in the coffin of modernization theory and undermines Marxist orthodoxy that emphasizes the role of the bourgeoisie. Smith adroitly cautions against anachronistic interpretations—in the first chapter, he insists that we not view early nineteenth–century actors through the lens of subsequent historical developments, specifically the rise of modern Catalanism (*catalanitat*) between the 1860s and 1880s (37). Thus the term regionalism, or provincialism, is used to describe Catalan sentiment expounded during the Enlightenment and the first half of the nineteenth century, rather than nationalism. How representations of a unique people and culture, from religious iconography to patriotic poetry, turned into a galvanizing national identity is the central issue explored by Smith.

At the end of the eighteenth century, Catalonia was home to 8.5% of the inhabitants of the Spanish Monarchy, but it contributed a far greater percentage to the economy relative to its share of the population. It also urbanized at a much more rapid rate than the rest of the country, with only about a third of its residents engaged in agriculture by the 1870s. Likewise, Catalonia today has 7.5 million residents, about 16% of Spain's overall population, who contribute 19% of the nation's overall economic output. And fewer work in agriculture than the overall average—2.2% compared with approximately 3% for the entire nation. The region obviously has been, and still is, an economic engine. Contrary to what some might believe, people showed pride in their Spanish and Catalan heritage, exhibiting what Josep Fradera describes as dual patriotism, throughout the period studied. For instance, Catalan business interests adopted a "protectionist–cum–nationalist discourse" in advocating for tariffs by the mid–nineteenth century (60).

Smith identifies three key ingredients of Catalanism—grievances, laws, and the lore and legend of the medieval past. Marginalization of the peripheral regions of Spain took many forms, including civil service exams held only in Madrid. In the late eighteenth century, and again from the 1830s through the 1860s, Catalans held few posts in the central government, and even fewer were named as government ministers. Commemorations, such as the *Dos de Mayo* celebration, and symbols like the flag also seemed to eschew the north and myopically focus on Castilian origins of the nation. In addition, Smith makes the claim that intellectuals by and large looked to Castilian roots for a representative tradition in the early nineteenth century. Thus they were able to argue that convoking the Cortes meshed with centuries of tradition and did not symbolize a rupture with the past. Yet Smith does not highlight the fact that

many thinkers, including clerics at the time, also looked to the Cortes of Aragón as a foundation for a future liberal government and did not hearken exclusively to Castilian history. Regardless of the historical precedent, most of the liberals who came together in Cádiz to write the first Hispanic constitution in 1812 advocated for a centralized government with a uniform legal system rather than the heterogeneous alternative.

Separate law codes certainly had divided the kingdoms of Castile and Aragón until Philip V revoked Catalan foral privileges in the aftermath of the War of the Spanish Succession in the early eighteenth century. Furthermore, early feudal charters, notably the *Usatges*, continue to be oft–cited examples from the Middle Ages of a seemingly timeless tradition of Catalan democracy. Contemporary Catalan politicians even hearken back to the Assemblies of Peace and Truth (Pau i Treva), efforts to curb religious violence between Saturday evenings and Monday mornings in the tumultuous eleventh century, as other signs that Catalans have been at the vanguard of political modernization for close to a millennium. This is precisely the nexus at which folklore and myth meshed with nineteenth–century Romanticism to form an anachronistic nationalist discourse. Nostalgia also added fuel to the emerging push toward decentralization, supported by some on the right, including Carlists, and by intellectuals on the left who began to advocate for a kind of federal republicanism.

Smith emphasizes language and culture as central components of Catalan identity as well. A codified Catalan grammar first appeared in 1815, the same period in which other peripheral nations–in–the–making were establishing linguistic traditions (for example, the first Ukrainian grammar was published in 1819). Simultaneously, many elites associated Castilian with high culture and relegated Catalan, a language some compared to Provençal, to the world of comedy, satire, and burlesque. This dovetails with the analysis of Eugen Weber, who describes French as the language of respect and prestige, especially as contrasted with patois, in nineteenth–century France. According to Smith, schools essentially had stopped teaching Catalan by the 1830s. In 1841, the poet Joaquim Rubió i Ors lamented that some of his fellow Catalans were embarrassed to speak their mother tongue, a language one Catalan intellectual had even described as vulgar. The Church played a role in advocating for the use of Castilian by publishing a bilingual catechism and decreeing that all correspondence be written in Castilian or Latin, and business leaders predominately used Castilian through the end of the century. Despite this, Catalan continued to be spoken by the majority in French and Spanish Catalan regions, including Roussillon, and became the only language used in the renowned medieval poetry competition, called the Jocs Florals, that was revived in 1859.

What pushed Catalans from embracing a fluid, pluralistic cultural identity toward advancing the ideal of national sovereignty, words that seldom had been used during the flowering of Catalonia's *renaixença*, or renaissance? First, Spanish paranoia and intransigence, especially during the extended years of martial law in Barcelona between 1844 and 1858, played an important role.

Second, with the fall of the Liberal Union government in 1863, efforts to incorporate Catalan interests, especially its business lobby, had failed. The end of Spain's First Republic by 1874 signaled that federalism, with greater peripheral political representation, especially from Catalonia, also appeared to be a dead end. This provided the opportunity for the rise of a more muscular Catalanism that drew on cultural, political, economic, and racialized themes. Valentí Almirall became the leading voice of the time, drawing on racial and linguistic theories that differentiated Catalans, with their Celtic origins, from the decadent Castilians, who suffered from an influx of Semitic blood and Moorish influence. He criticized bullfights, *manolas* (traditional Andalusian dresses), and even Spanish guitar playing. The cumulative effect of this would be to radicalize the movement. Even so, Smith says, for a number of reasons Almirall "cannot be regarded as a Catalan nationalist" (159). For those studying Catalonia today, it's interesting to note that Almirall could not imagine an independent Catalan nation in part because of its integral economic ties to Spain.

The iteration of a program for Catalan autonomy came in the aftermath of a new debate over a uniform civil code in the late 1880s. Lawyers steeped in racial thinking and corporatism developed the 1892 *Bases de Manresa* plan. This mix of reactionary thought and nationalism laid an uneven foundation for future nationalist projects, though it stopped short of pushing for outright independence. Smith definitively concludes that "Catalan nationalism emerged from within the Catalan Right," and it would have to wait until after the Spanish–American War to become a mass movement (212).

Overall, this comprehensive text is a must–read for students and scholars of Spanish history and for those interested in the roots of political controversies in contemporary Spain.

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