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Review of Pedro Rújula and Javier Ramón Solans,
eds. *El Desafío de la Revolución. Reaccionarios,
Antiliberales y Contrarrevolucionarios (Siglos XVIII
y XIX)*

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Rújula, Pedro and Javier Ramón Solans, eds. *El Desafío de la Revolución. Reaccionarios, Antiliberales y Contrarrevolucionarios (Siglos XVIII y XIX)*. Granada: Comares Historia, 2017. 356 pp.

Pedro Rújula and Javier Ramón Solans have edited an excellent volume examining the persistence of absolutist political ideas and the emergence of modern conservatism in Europe between the French Revolution and the late nineteenth century. *El desafío de la revolución. Reaccionarios, antiliberales y contrarrevolucionarios (siglo xviii y xix)* presents the liberal revolution from the perspective of its opposition, demonstrating how resistance to liberalism shaped the development of political ideologies, social movements, and national identities. Although the principal focus of the book remains steadfastly Spanish in nature, the contributors offer perspectives and comparisons drawn from other European states, Spanish American colonies, and newly independent nations.

In their introduction, Rújula and Ramón Solans examine the “paradoxes of reaction” and point to the prevalence of the “revolutionary paradigm” that has dominated writing on the political history of postrevolutionary Spain since its invention by liberals themselves. This paradigm has served to reduce narrative interpretations of complex historical events in an overly simplistic fashion, omitting the role of reactionaries, antiliberals, and counterrevolutionaries and relegating them to the status of the defeated. Consequently, Rújula and Ramón Solans seek to properly historicize the political conflicts that marked the end of the *antiguo régimen* and the birth of modernity in Spain. As Rújula and Ramón Solans argue, the liberal myth of a deep rupture with the past has obscured a well-reasoned appreciation of historical continuities and, in particular, conservative contributions to modern Spanish political culture.

To scholars who are familiar with the great historiographical debates of the 1980s that fundamentally altered the significance and larger study of the French Revolution, there ought to appear a striking similarity. Like the Furetian assault on the “Jacobino-Marxist Vulgate,” Rújula and Ramón Solans likewise seek to undermine a conventional treatment of the liberal revolution in Spain that dates to the nineteenth century and predominates today. Their central focus in this regard dispenses with the importance of class, already the subject of work by other scholars, and turns instead to the role of political culture. Put another way, Rújula and Ramón Solans attempt to historicize the concepts of modernity and reaction in a manner that sees them as neither mutually independent from one another nor isolated from other influences.

The volume’s first article, written by Rújula and titled “The Challenge of Revolution in Spain,” examines three important historical moments when popular support for the Bourbon monarchy in Spain impeded the arrival of liberal ideas from abroad and stymied the work of reformers and revolutionaries. In particular,

Rújula considers the ease whereby conservatives were able to recruit for the Spanish army in 1793 during the War of the Convention against revolutionary France, mobilize resistance to the French occupation in 1808 during the War of Independence, and animate a sense of popular support for absolutism in 1814 during the restoration of Fernando VII. Each of these moments serves as a reminder that there was nothing neat or linear about the rise of liberalism in Spain. Throughout much of the early nineteenth century, liberal elites in Spain confronted a populace that was opposed to rapid change and which supported the preservation of the Old Regime.

The first section (Chapters 2-5), “Bourbon Monarchies in the Twilight of the Old Regime,” considers the fate of Bourbon regimes in Peninsular Spain, Spanish America, and southern Italy. Following an opening chapter by Rújula, the section continues with a chapter by Ivana Frasquet that explores the persistence of conservatism in the nascent states of Latin America. She reminds the reader that independence for new states in Latin America often marked the preservation of conservative rule and cautions against confusing those events with a supposed liberal victory. As she makes clear, independence proved the only possible means to preserve traditionalism at home in the face of liberal successes in Europe. A chapter by Jean-Philippe Luis presents contradictions in Spanish Treasury policy during the reign of Fernando VII between 1814 and 1833. Rather interestingly, he argues that Treasury officials pursued semi-progressive policies to confront financial crisis from within an ultra-conservative political regime. Although creative in their approach to resolving the situation, these same officials failed to appreciate that the crisis was symptomatic of larger structural problems inherent to the regime. The section concludes with a chapter by Silvia Sonetti on the collapse of Bourbon rule in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. Acknowledging that Neapolitans increasingly came to see the Bourbon regime as an intransigent force incapable of building consensus, she persuasively argues that traditionalists found themselves supporting liberalism as a last resort.

The volume’s second section (Chapters 6-10), “Mobilization: From the Local to the International,” examines the extraordinary scope of social mobilization ranging from the local to the transnational. In the section’s first chapter, Álvaro París Martín attempts to explain widespread support for the persecution of liberals during the second restoration of 1823-1833. París Martín explains that the category of *negro* (liberal) was created as a kind of “other” by a public acting outside of royal sanction in a manner that built upon earlier liberal strategies of mobilization. Thus, conservative successes in this period ironically owed, in part, to the earlier strategies of liberals. The second chapter, co-authored by Andoni Artola, Javier Esteban Ochoa de Eribe, and Koldo Ulibarri examined the writings of José Pablo Ulibarri (1775-1847). Writing in the early nineteenth century, Ulibarri offered Basque as a pure language worthy of conservatism, as opposed to Castillian, which

he branded as the language of the devil due to its association with liberalism. In the third chapter, Gregorio Alonso traces the efforts of the Spanish nuncio and others to raise a sizeable number of recruits to protect the temporal power of the pope in 1850. Their failure represented the weakness of political support for clergy and papal aspirations. In the fourth chapter, Alexandre Dupont builds a convincing case for framing European conservative movements in the latter half of the nineteenth century in a linked, transnational frame. Interestingly, Dupont argues that the emergence of a kind of “conservative international” after 1848 reflects a conscious appropriation of liberal strategy by conservatives and an evolution of the conservative ideal. The section’s final chapter, by Carmine Pinto, frames the afterlife of Fernando II’s regime during the 1860s. Although the Bourbons were unable to restore an independent Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, Pinto makes clear that the movement, nonetheless, proved a considerable political challenge to political unity and the success of the Risorgimento.

The third section (Chapters 11-16), “The Battlefield of Ideas,” explores the role of language in framing the development of conservative intellectual ideas. It draws heavily on the legacy of Javier Fernández Sebastián, whose name is referenced in Chapters 12 and 13. To open the section, Carolina Armenteros examines the work of five French political theorists: Marie-Charlotte-Pauline Robert de Lézardière (1754-1835), Joseph de Maistre (1753-1821), Jacques Benjamin Bins, Count of Saint Victor (1772-1858), François-Dominique de Reynaud, Count of Montlosier (1755-1838), and François-René de Chateaubriand (1768-1848). Her analysis makes clear that these figures attacked the legacy of Louis XIV owing to his destruction of political liberty. Although well-known conservatives, these men identified as staunch anti-absolutists who sought to restore a kind of conservatism unadulterated by the likes of Louis XIV. In the second chapter, Gonzalo Capellán de Miguel presents the life of Swedish Jesuit Lorenzo Ignacio Thjulen (1746-1833), author of *Nuovo vocabulario filosofico-democratico* (1799). Capellán de Miguel argues that Thjulen provided a common vocabulary whereby conservatives were able to counter liberal discourses. Subsequently, Fernando Durán López examines another interesting personality in Miguel María Panés y González Quijano, Marquess of Villapanés (1751-1825), perhaps the strongest voice of opposition to liberalism in the Cortes of Cádiz. Durán López persuasively argues that efforts to silence or censor the writings of Villapanés triggered early and important discussions over freedom of the press in Spain. A chapter by Marie Salgues turns to the subject of the theatre. She argues that theatre served as a vital link between the monarchy and the public, and an important avenue to effectively rewrite history. Gonzalo Butrón Prida’s chapter studies *El Restaurador* (1823-1824) as a case study to examine how the absolutist press mobilized popular support for the restoration of the monarchy in 1823. To close the section, Antonio de Francesco used popular French-language publications

of the 1870s and 1880s to frame how interpretations of the French Revolution were cast in a counterrevolutionary context. His chapter speaks to the role of the liberal revolution in the larger political debates of the nineteenth century.

Section four (Chapters 17-20), “Catholicism and Modernity: A Paradoxical Relationship?” challenges the notion that modernism and secularism were interchangeable and examines attempts to reconcile the two. A chapter by Antonio Calvo Maturana presents the unique story of Sebastián Sánchez Sobrino, an “enlightened reactionary.” The case of Sánchez Sobrino disproves the presumed causal relationship between Enlightenment thought and political liberalism and serves as a reminder that the Enlightenment in Spain had important Catholic undercurrents, which do not fit within narratives of secularism. A subsequent chapter by Daniele Menozzi attempts to make sense of Vatican policy towards liberalism through an exploration of public declarations. Ultimately, she explains that the Church failed to appreciate the sacred place of the nation as an alternative to traditional Catholicism. In the volume’s penultimate chapter, Roberto Di Stefano takes the reader to Argentina to present one of three possible routes towards secularization. Although Roman Catholicism was not declared a state religion in Argentina, a special relationship prevailed there along a “Galican” model that served as an alternative to either total separation or complete fusion. Finally, Raúl Mínguez Blasco closes the volume with a fascinating look at gender and Church strategy. He argues that Church officials confronted the reality that men were essentially lay figures, and that women could prevent the spread of secularism by preserving Christian worship in the home. To this end, Mínguez Blasco claims that a “feminized Catholicism” took shape towards the end of the nineteenth century as a kind of “modern” response to the threat of modernity.

The place of Spain could have been more evident throughout the volume. Although not invoked in the title, the editors clearly reference Spain and Spanish political culture in their introduction. Not including the introduction, the volume includes 19 chapters. Edited volumes of this length certainly stretch the structural and organizational limits of even the best editors. The section headings are helpful in this regard and serve to present useful topical foci. All the same, attention to several areas of historical scholarship appears lacking. For instance, no chapter devotes space to Portugal despite its proximity to Spain and common Iberian experiences during the same period. Likewise, an exploration of British political currents is largely absent with the exception of Frasquet’s chapter, despite the significance of London as a meeting place for Spanish liberals in exile. Several chapters invoke the word historiography and present quite original contributions to scholarship on individual nation-states and the field of conservative studies. Two chapters, by Carmine Pinto and Silvia Sonetti, present the collapse of the Bourbon monarchy in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. While comparisons of mid-

nineteenth century Italian and Spanish political culture certainly warrant consideration, clear connections are not always apparent.

Readers seeking a definite typology of conservatisms or a kind of ideological family tree will be disappointed. The use of terms like “reactionary,” “antiliberal,” and “counterrevolutionary” are not clearly defined or connected to larger, transnational political currents. Scholars often subsume these ideological strands of thought into the general category of political conservatism. At least insofar as the title is concerned, the presumed intent of the editors was to note that there existed a complicated and diverse array of sometimes contrasting political ideas on the right as opposed to a single and monolithic movement. This point is a fair one and a much-needed corrective to the standard revolutionary narrative that the editors seek to correct. However, it could be stated more clearly.

So where does the study of nineteenth-century Spanish political culture head from here? The diversity of topics presented in this volume suggests that there exists ample room for further study. In particular, a clearer sense of how modernity and conservatism operated in Spain during the early nineteenth requires extended attention in monograph form. Only with a much clearer understanding of domestic political culture will connections with other parts of Europe make clearer sense. In the interim, Rújula and Ramón Solans have established an exciting, new path for future scholarship.

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