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**Nations and Nationalisms in Global Perspective:
An Encyclopedia of Origins, Development
and Contemporary Transitions**

Vol. 2: Spanish national identities and nationalisms

Frederic Barberà ©

Image: Conversi, Daniele. *The Basques, the Catalans and Spain. Alternative Routes to Nationalist Mobilisation*. London: Hurst & Company, 1997. Page XX.

* Please replace “Catalan area transferred to Aragon in 1833” (mistaken info) with “Catalan-Speaking Area in Aragon”. This change has the author’s approval.

Map: Conversi, Daniele. *Ibid.* Page XVIII.

Chronology:

1875 – Establishment of a parliamentary monarchy through the Restoration Settlement.

1895 – Sabino de Arana created the political bureau of the Basque Nationalist Party.

1898 – Spanish-American war. It resulted in Spain’s loss of Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Philippines and some minor Pacific islands.

1901 – First victory in the local elections of the *Lliga Regionalista*, which broke the electoral monopoly of Spanish political parties in Catalonia.

1914 – Creation of the *Mancomunitat* of Catalonia, an institution with limited autonomy formed through the union of the four Catalan *diputacions*, or provincial councils. In 1925 it was dismantled by the dictator Primo de Rivera.

September 1923 – The *coup d’état* carried out by general Primo de Rivera installed a dictatorship which lasted until 1930. Repression of Basque and Catalan nationalism.

April 1931 – Establishment of the Second Spanish Republic. The attempt of a *coup d’état* by general Sanjurjo (1932) paradoxically speeded the process of approval of the Catalan statute of autonomy (1932). The Basque statute of autonomy was passed in 1935.

1933 – Creation of *Falange Española*, the Spanish fascist party, by José Antonio Primo de Rivera, son of the dictator.

July 1936 – Outbreak of the Spanish Civil War.

April 1939 – General Franco’s victory. He installed a military dictatorship that lasted until 1975. Catalan and Basque autonomy were suppressed and Spanish was imposed as the only official language in a new National-Catholic Spain conceived as a greater Castile.

Essay:

1. *Situating the nation*

From the 1880s onwards, Spain underwent a process of crisis as a nation-state which was related to the political emergence of two main peripheral nationalist movements in Catalonia and the Basque Country. Following the failure of the First Spanish Republic (1873-4) and its short-lived monarchic sequel, the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy in 1875 was modeled on the British bicameral system, with liberals and conservatives as political parties. Its goal was to provide Spain with political stability, thus putting an end to civil war in 1876 and favoring industrial growth. However, political corruption based on the intervention of local bosses or *caciques*, and political centralism (which ignored demands for autonomy within Spain and overseas) soon proved it to be dysfunctional. This political system also frustrated the ambitions of the Catalan industrial bourgeoisie of modernizing Spain and becoming her hegemonic political actor. On the other hand, this parliamentary monarchy offered no room for two important political options that had gathered strength after the fall of the monarchy (1868): republican federalism and anarchism. Instead, the official policies of the Restoration were based on three pillars: the Crown, with a vacuum of power following the death of Alfonso XII (1885), the army, used to intervene in politics throughout the 19th century, and the Catholic Church, with an active influence on state affairs and great control over elite education. This tight structure was supported by an agricultural oligarchy from central and southern Spain opposed to social change, decentralization, and genuine democracy.

Possibly the greatest paradox in this traditional Castilian-centered Spain lay in that the only two industrial areas were far removed from the center. These culturally and politically distinct territories had lost their political liberties and institutions, the Catalans in 1714, and the Basques only in 1876. The Catalan industrial bourgeoisie proved incapable of influencing state politics and acquiring the political predominance

required by their economic might. This frustrated the ambitions of a class which already in the 1860s had demanded protectionist measures for their textile manufacturers. In 1898, with the loss of the main Spanish colonies of Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines in the Spanish-American war, it became clear that the state could not even defend the Catalan colonial markets. A section of that disenchanted bourgeoisie was behind the emerging Catalan regionalism, which drew on the federalist ideas of Valentí Almirall's *Lo catalanisme* (1886). The first electoral success of their political formation, the *Lliga Regionalista* (1901) led to a new period of consolidation of Catalan nationalism. In the Basque Country, the liberalizing economic measures passed after 1876 by the restored monarchy allowed the export of mineral resources, but this sank the traditional small industry in favor of a large steel industry, where the major Spanish banks originated. For the children of that alienated petite bourgeoisie, like Sabino de Arana, the founder of the Basque Nationalist Party, economic liberalization brought political corruption and persistent centralism, while being linked to the loss of Basque traditional culture and values.

In 1921 the Spanish liberal conservative José Ortega y Gasset interpreted the formation of Basque and Catalan nationalism as a result of the weakness of the common Spanish project. For Ortega Basque and Catalan culture would have been subjugated by Castile if there had been an early process of incorporation. Yet in Catalonia the development of a cultural *Renaixença* (revival) had preceded the formation of nationalism. Indeed some historians point at that revival as an immediate cause leading to Catalan nationalism; although other scholars highlight that the mid-19th century patriarchs of the *Renaixença* not only did not challenge the Spanish status quo, but endorsed it by limiting their cultural production in Catalan to specific areas. The Catalanization of all spheres of cultural and scientific life proved instead to be a task for

the following generation. In the Basque Country, Arana himself acknowledged the precarious state of the Basque language. The early revival of Basque culture was mostly circumscribed to poetical contests like the Floral Games, while their more popular sequel included traditional sports, oral poetry and singing.

The colonial disaster of 1898 epitomized the rejection on the part of Catalonia and the Basque Country of an inefficient, corrupt and centralized state, prompting an urge to set new administrative and economic frameworks that would accommodate non-Castilian aspirations. On the other hand the 1898 disaster also epitomized the willingness to reconstruct a Castilian-centered Spain which once held together a large empire and had now been humiliated in the international arena. A trend of thought, *regeneracionismo*, intended to modernize the country through education, the improvement of infrastructures and the creation of wealth, but without challenging the concept of Spain as a greater Castile. This set of goals was mostly incarnated in the far-reaching program of Joaquín Costa. In the decades to come, his reformist agenda found followers within both the right and the left, from republicans in the moderate left like Manuel Azaña, to anti-democrats like José Antonio Primo de Rivera, and liberals like Ortega y Gasset. Given its modernizing project, some scholars also consider Catalan nationalism as belonging to a broader stream of *regeneracionismo*.

2. Instituting the nation

The three institutions on which the parliamentary monarchy relied, the Crown, the army and the Catholic Church, dated back to imperial times. This traditional framework could hardly be overturned by the weak and short-lived federal Republic of 1873. Instead, it continued to exist under General Primo de Rivera's dictatorship (1923-30), and peaked under Franco (1939-1975). Franco's military rebellion overthrew the Second Spanish Republic (1931-1939), thus frustrating an attempt to modernize,

decentralize and socially transform Spain. These two military dictatorships appropriated the traditional idea of a unified Spain conceived as a greater Castile, her language, institutions, myths and heroic past. Yet those dictatorships also embodied in their programs, the legacy of *regeneracionismo*, if only in part.

For some historians, Primo de Rivera's economic program coincided to a great extent with that of the Catalan *Lliga Regionalista*. It was no coincidence that the dictator, an admirer of the *Lliga*'s economic agenda, was Captain General of Catalonia at the time of his coup in 1923. Indeed the *Lliga* was present in the amalgamation government formed in 1917 after the general strike, alongside the Crown, the old institutional parties (liberals and conservatives) and the army. After 1917, the *Lliga*'s presence in Spain's *national government* and its hesitant attitude concerning class issues (i.e. the protection of their factories with the help of state police) had halted their demand for further autonomy. Facing a similar dilemma, several years later the *Lliga*'s leader, Francesc Cambó, contributed to financing Franco's war effort during the Civil War (1936-1939). In the late 1950s Joan Sardà, a reputed economist from the *Lliga*, became a key figure in the economic modernization of Franco's Spain.

Yet the institutionalization of Catalan culture launched in the early 20th-century by Enric Prat de la Riba had a deep social impact and remained a constant feature of political life until the 1930s. Thus after 1906 from Barcelona's *diputació*, and from the *Mancomunitat* after 1914, Prat de la Riba's conservative *Lliga Regionalista* launched an ambitious program of cultural development which endorsed the creation of a network of cultural infrastructures. These included the *Institut d'Estudis Catalans* (1907) and the *Biblioteca de Catalunya* (1914). The standardization of the Catalan language played a central role through the publication of Pompeu Fabra's *Normes ortogràfiques* (1913) and *Gramàtica catalana* (1918). This process, which aimed at the full public presence

of a language that was a suitable vehicle for culture, shows the crucial importance of language in Catalan nationalism.

A new intellectual movement, *Noucentisme* (from “Nou-cents”, meaning “Nine-Hundred”), emerged based on a rationalist cult of the urban world and a new aesthetic neoclassicism. This movement further enhanced cultural life and national pride in a territory whose capital city, Barcelona, was already culturally thriving. *Noucentisme* had replaced *Modernisme*, which in turn had frontally rejected the literary amateurism and historicist nostalgia of the *Renaixença*, and had attained the professionalization of a new generation of writers. Artists and architects later branded by critics as *modernistes* also thrived taking advantage of a new wave of urban expansion. Some of them like Antoni Gaudí succeeded in marrying Catalan tradition with universal innovation. Although the *Mancomunitat* was suspended by Primo de Rivera in 1925, Catalan cultural life continued to expand. Paradoxically, the repression of Basque and Catalan national identity further ignited political activism.