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Review of Pamela Beth Radcliff, *Modern Spain. 1808 to the Present*

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Radcliff, Pamela Beth. *Modern Spain. 1808 to the Present*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017. 358 pp.

Pamela Radcliff is a historian of twentieth-century Spain, whose works on 1930s political mobilization, women's politics, and 1960s and 1970s civil society have greatly contributed to our understanding of the country's past. With the book under review, the American historian enters the selective club of scholars capable of writing single-authored general histories of modern Spain. Before Radcliff, Raymond Carr in the 1980s, Francisco Romero Salvadó in the 1990s and Charles Esdaile and Mary Vincent in the 2000s had all embarked on the difficult task of surveying Spain's modern history for English-speaking students with positive results. Radcliff's *Modern Spain* is a welcome addition to this field, as the book provides a fresh perspective on the country's two last centuries.

The novelty of *Modern Spain* partly lies in its structure. The book focuses on four main areas, namely politics, economics, society and culture, and how they interact with each other. Radcliff argues that no area was the driving force of historical activity, as different realms were prime historical motors at different times and the balance of elements changed from one society to another. Accordingly, economic, social and cultural developments are separated from political narrative and analyzed in different chapters taking a long-term perspective. Thus Chapters 6 and 7 deal with economic, social and cultural changes in the 1830-1930 period and Chapter 12 also takes a long view to explore these non-political realms between the 1930s and 1970s, whereas the rest of the chapters follow a more traditional chronology set by political events.

The book is also innovative in that every chapter is introduced by a comparative section, which situates different political regimes and historical developments in relationship with the rest of Europe. These comparative sections are not only useful to the reader but also a central part of the author's concept of the book. For Radcliff, the task of the monograph "is to chart the complex interaction of local, regional, national, European and international developments that produced Spain's specific version of modern history" (xiv). From this standpoint, the comparative perspective becomes "an indispensable feature of national histories in a global age," in a sharp contrast with those narratives promoting an insular vision of Spain's modern history (xiv). The European comparison is also used to challenge the "failure narrative," that is, the old historiographical position which claimed that Spain had failed to follow a 'normal' path to modernity.

The book is divided into four parts. Radcliff begins by exploring the era of the liberal revolution (1808-1868), continues with an analysis of the emergence of mass politics (1868-1923) and then moves to study the social, economic and cultural changes from 1830 to 1930. The last section of the book delves into the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera, the Second Republic, the Civil War, the Franco dictatorship and the current constitutional system, covering a long chronological span between 1923

and 2016. Throughout the book the author displays a comprehensive knowledge of the historiographical debates about diverse themes in nineteenth and twentieth century Spain. The emergence of a constitutional culture in the 1810s; the reasons behind the nineteenth-century agricultural expansion; the functioning of the Restoration regime and its collapse in 1923; the nature of the Franco dictatorship; and the 1970s transition to democracy are among the most important scholarly debates considered in *Modern Spain*. It is precisely when dealing with the transition to democracy that Radcliff is at her best. The author's analysis of the 1970s recognizes the powerful effects of popular political engagement and grassroots mobilization on conditions leading to democratization, in contrast to much of the literature that until recently saw the process as mainly elite-driven. *Modern Spain* also questions the very existence of a Spanish model of transition to democracy that could be emulated elsewhere and, therefore, the very idea of a universal blueprint of democratization.

Radcliff does not shy away from more controversial debates, such as the nature of the Second Republic. She acknowledges that navigating this topic is a convulsive undertaking and argues that both left-wing and conservative interpretations have incorporated their reading of the Second Republic into opposing grand moral narratives on the history of democracy in Spain, which hampers the possibility of reaching any sort of academic consensus. Considering the historiography of the Second Republic in political terms is entirely justified. After all, the democratic regime has re-emerged as a key political episode among historians in recent years and unleashed a "memory war" in the broader society. However, including the neo-Francoist version of the Popular Front era as part of the academic discussion unintentionally grants the dictator's propagandists a professional status as historians that they actually lack. Regarding the discussion on why democracy did not consolidate in 1930s Spain, Radcliff contends that there is "no single turning point or fatal decision, but instead a complex story of both missed opportunities and impossible conundrums" (161). This reading of the reasons behind the failure of the Second Republic is logical and fair, yet slightly vague. Perhaps Radcliff's account would have benefitted from a more defined analysis in which the author clarified what specific factors led to that convoluted story of democratic failure.

Despite these quibbles, the book is an instructive synthesis of the history of Spain over 200 years. *Modern Spain* not only debunks the old 'failure narrative' but also complicates the larger European narrative, by undermining the very idea of a European model. The monograph merits a place among the best single volume analyses of the thorny history of contemporary Spain and will be very helpful for undergraduate and postgraduate students alike.

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