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Review of: Hamilton M. Stapell, *Remaking Madrid: Culture, Politics, and Identity after Franco*

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Stapell, Hamilton M. *Remaking Madrid: Culture, Politics, and Identity after Franco*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. xii + 276 pp.

Hamilton Stapell's *Remaking Madrid* is a study based around an interesting and counter-intuitive premise, asking whether or not Madrid, often taken to represent the geographic, administrative, and symbolic center of the Spanish nation, created its own sense of regional identity separate from the national. The book centers itself on the years of the Transition (in particular 1979-86) and, particularly, on the figure of Madrid mayor Enrique Tierno Galván. In particular, the author lays out a convincing and well-supported argument that Tierno's government made a conscious and systematic effort to re-make the collective image that both outsiders and, more importantly, *madrileños* themselves had of the city as a fundamental component of a new, democratic, post-Franco society. Tierno saw the problem as explicitly one of identity, believing that "the identity of Madrid was getting lost, dissolving, and it remained more as a reference on an identity card or more as an official designation than as something that was deeply linked to the people that dwell or had been born or that lived together peacefully in the city of Madrid" (Tierno, quoted p75).

*Remaking Madrid* proposes a model of cultural change and urban renewal that is both top-down, a result of conscious policy decisions by the Tierno administration, and bottom-up, stemming from a grassroots and relatively spontaneous cultural revival, as exemplified by the early years of the *movida madrileña*. The work does, however, spend more time focused on the actions, motivations, and policies of the government than on grassroots cultural movements. Indeed, the work is perhaps most significant in its deconstruction of many of the mechanisms by which Tierno's government re-engineered, simultaneously, *madrileños'* conceptions of themselves and outside perceptions of the capital. Stapell focuses on how the administration attempted to clean (literally and figuratively), on one hand, the physical space of Madrid, and, on the other, re-shape the city's cultural space. The book argues that the two were very much two facets of a single project to create new, democratic citizens that actively engaged and participated in public life, contrasted with the *demobilization* of Madrid's now-lively street life under the Franco regime. To Tierno, "together, these two separate aspects – the physical and the symbolic – formed a more complete regional identity project" (99).

In order to physically re-make Madrid, the Tierno administration focused

on the greening of the city through cleaning the streets, creation of green spaces, pollution controls, and the dredging and cleaning of the Manzanares river. At the same time, the administration sought to deepen *madrileños'* identification with their neighborhoods and the city as a whole through the decentralization of civic administration and the creation of *Juntas del Distrito* that would both create local, direct points of contact between the municipal government and its citizens and serve as useful channels for local feedback.

However, Stapell argues, this was not simply a civic administration embarking on a project of urban renewal. Tierno's vision for Madrid paired this political decentralization with a cultural decentralization, constructing a cultural and recreational infrastructure both in the center of the capital and as a part to rehabilitate some of the more run-down neighborhoods in the city. The cultural exhibitions, books, regional TV, and periodicals founded or (in part) funded by the administration promoted a very specific connection to Madrid (as distinct from Spain as a whole), rooted in a sense of active participation in civic and cultural life and a concept of peaceful coexistence. Central to this was the Tierno administration's resurrection of many of the city's traditional festivals, most importantly San Isidro, and its official promotion of the *movida madrileña* after 1983. As Stapell argues, "the purpose [of the promotion of culture] was not....to increase the appreciation for fine art or opera; instead the objective was to transform *madrileños* in a way that would allow them to identify themselves as democratic citizens" (89). Stapell's evidence in favor of the connections between the (originally) grassroots cultural explosion in Madrid and Tierno's idea of a democratic popular culture are convincing. Although not initially part of the administration's plan, Stapell argues that it came to serve a critical role in the re-fashioning of *madrileño* identity, even more important than any lasting impact of the *movida's* individual artistic works. As he states, "it is less important whether or not Madrid was actually the cultural capital of the world at that moment. What is more important is that many *madrileños*, especially those who participated in the *movida*, believed that it was. As a result, for the first time in many years, Madrid symbolized cultural vibrancy, rather than political repression" (111). Thus in spite of its largely apolitical nature, the *movida* formed a critical part of the political project to create a new sense of place in Madrid that contrasted sharply with the Franco era.

While *Remaking Madrid's* argument for the reasons behind cultural change during the Transition and their link to an overarching goal of increasing democratization of the city are convincing, the major weakness of the book lies in its presentation of quantitative evidence to prove such change occurred. The data from opinion polls conducted by the *Centro de Investigaciones Sociales* (primarily cited in Chapter 6) Stapell calls upon were collected somewhat

sporadically and to a large extent towards the end of the period in question (between 1986 and 1990), making a comparison with the state of society under the Franco period or even at the beginning of the 1980s somewhat problematic. Additionally, the work does not manage to convincingly show that the re-engineering of *madrileño* regional identity was, in fact, the primary cause for the surveys' suggestion that a more open, democratic, and cosmopolitan citizenry characterized Madrid by the end of the 1980s. Finally, the categories solicited by the polls were vague and open to various interpretations by the respondents, causing further difficulties in interpreting the results. However, in spite of the inherent problems with such opinion polls, the overall evidence and argument presented by the book are convincing.

Central to Stapell's argument is a fundamental rethinking of the implied essentialism of the center-periphery model of national and regional identity, arguing that "official Spanish national identity and the 'center' are not naturally or inexorably linked" (191). He raises some very important questions about the nature of regions and regionalism and the spread during the 1980s of nationalist and regionalist ideologies to areas of Spain where they were not historically present in any significant political form (4, 16). The new Madrid uniquely needed to position itself not against a *place*, but against a *time* (its own collective memory of itself under franquismo). In summation, *Remaking Madrid* is worthwhile for its contributions to the body of theory on nationalism and regionalism, although it stands out most remarkably as a case-study of cultural and political engineering. For a brief period in the early 1980s, Madrid served as a kind of laboratory for an attempt to forge consensus through cultural expression, popular participation, and civic pride, "positively changing the habits and self-perception of all *madrileños* after the experience of the dictatorship" (191).

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