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Review of Sandie Holguín, *Flamenco Nation: The Construction of Spanish National Identity*

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Holguín, Sandie. *Flamenco Nation: The Construction of Spanish National Identity*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2019. 361 pp. + 34 ill. + 5 maps

For many, flamenco is Spain's national dance par excellence and an artistic form intrinsically tied to the country's identity. *Flamenco Nation* inquires how this association between flamenco and national identity emerged, developed, and consolidated. The book explores the polyvalent meanings of flamenco both in Spain and abroad as a way to shed light on the building of modern Spanish national identity. Sandie Holguín rightly notes that national identities are “not constructed solely by self-serving nationalist elites” and underlines the need to focus on the popular classes and the interplay between regional, national, and international forces to understand the dynamic role of flamenco in Spain's nation-building (8). By combining these bottom-up and horizontal approaches the book provides a comprehensive study of how flamenco and the cradle of its birth, Andalusia, became primary representatives of all the regions of Spain.

Flamenco Nation is chronologically divided into four parts. The first section explores the invention of flamenco as a modern form of song and dance in the period 1789-1875 and analyzes how flamenco became a popular, interclass, interracial spectacle, notwithstanding the opposition of many morality groups who failed to curb the audience's appetite in the Restoration era (1875-1923). The second part studies Catalan and Andalusian nationalists' varied responses to the rise of flamenco in the years up to the Civil War. Here Holguín shows how Catalan nationalists increased the promotion of *sardanas* and *orfeós* precisely as a reaction against the popularity of flamenco in Catalonia. In Andalusia regionalists were divided by the appeal of flamenco but, by the 1930s, it was taken as a maker of Andalusian identity. This second section also includes a chapter on how Spanish elites aimed to have a flamenco-free representation of their country abroad and how they failed—as Europeans and North Americans remained very fond of the Orientalized portrayal of Spain provided by flamenco shows. The third section of the book deals with the Franco dictatorship. The first years of the dictatorship witnessed a frontal attack on flamenco led by the Catholic Church, while Falange fostered different regional folk singing and dancing groups as a way to counteract the perceived dangers of flamenco. Yet from the late 1950s, the Franco dictatorship changed course and began to promote flamenco as a key feature of Spaniards' national identity, in an attempt to bolster the Spanish tourist industry. The coda of the book analyses the way in which the dynamics between globalization and regional autonomy in democratic Spain have transformed flamenco practices. Nowadays the dance is hyper-commercialized, protected by UNESCO, and officially promoted by the

Andalusian regional government. At the same time, grass-root groups have used flamenco performances to protest against the unpunished Francoist atrocities in Seville and to criticize the conservative government bailout of the banking system with taxpayers' money.

Holguín does not shy away from the controversial issues of race and gender in the formation of the modern Spanish nation. Traditionally linked to Gypsy culture, flamenco was seen as an interracial entertainment. For Europeans, the Gypsy component of flamenco strengthened the idea of Spain as the exotic Other. Foreign visitors also gendered flamenco singers and players as male and dancers as female, producing narratives which suited men's tastes and fantasies. For some Spaniards, the Gypsies became the internal Other, a different race of extravagant culture and nomadic life who never integrated into the Spanish nation. Moreover, in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth-century, some critics understood flamenco as the symptom of a national degeneration linked to the breakdown of gender and racial categories. The Spanish nation was in crisis and flamenco performances showcased the decline of the patria.

Interestingly, the *anti-flamenquistas* of the twentieth century ended up losing their culture wars. Both the 1920s dictatorship of Primo de Rivera and the Franco regime, from the late 1950s, fostered flamenco as a national trait in an attempt to attract tourists and, hence, money. The price was the 'Andalusization' of the country and the perpetuation of a profoundly Orientalized Spain. For millions of French, British, and North American tourists, representing Spain as exotic, racialized, and backwards reinforced their very sense of national superiority.

There are some claims in *Flamenco Nation* that perhaps require some clarification, such as the assertion that the Catalan *Lliga Regionalista* called for independence from the rest of Spain in the first decades of the twentieth century (113), but, overall, this is a thoroughly-researched and well-written book. *Flamenco Nation* is a major contribution to the literature on nation-building and culture in Spain. It will be of interest to all those willing to learn about the historically constructed nature of nations and identities.

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