



Dowling, Andrew. *The Rise of Catalan Independence: Spain's Territorial Crisis* (Routledge, 2018), 193 pp. ISBN: 9781138587700

Andrew Dowling's *The Rise of Catalan Independence: Spain's Territorial Crisis* provides a rich analysis of the evolution of Catalan nationalism and the economic and political factors explaining the rise of the independence agenda in recent years. A thoughtful work of political sociology, Dowling's book presents the economic crisis as the most significant factor and devotes special attention to pro-independence civil society organisations and dynamics.

Chapter one provides an authoritative account of the historical evolution of Catalan nationalism. Dowling characterises the Catalan movement for most of its existence as a bifurcation – a state project for Spain and a cultural project for Catalonia – which the weak and ineffectual Spanish nation-building project allowed to flourish.

In chapter two, Dowling elaborates on the centrality of language and culture for the movement. The author discusses how (most) cultural activists and political leaders redefined Catalan nationalism inclusively in the 1960s. From Òmnium Cultural to the Congress of Catalan Culture, the predominant idea was to assimilate Spanish-speaking migrants settling in and around Barcelona through their adoption of the Catalan language. This goal was facilitated by the conditions of Francoism, which ensured a broad-based coalition across Catalan society supportive of the restoration of the position of the Catalan language. A second phase for the movement began in 1980 and is characterised by the institutionalisation of Catalan identity through the Generalitat. This phase sees a greater questioning of

the Catalan language policy by a renewed Spanish nationalism adopting the vocabulary of individual rights.

Chapter three focuses on party politics and takes the reader from the dominant Pujolist nationalism of the 1980s and 1990s to the growth and consolidation of ERC from the mid-1990s, the centre-left tripartite coalitions (2003–2010), and the reform of Catalonia’s Statute of Autonomy (2006–2010). Dowling places an emphasis on shifting party strategies and, perhaps most interestingly, reconfigurations of Catalan nationalist ideology. For example, regarding the latter, there is an emphasis on the way ERC was rethought as a progressive party and shifted its territorial strategy from federalism to independence. Crucially, with the consolidation of ERC came the normalisation of the independence agenda for the first time since the 1920s.

Chapters four and five, arguably the strongest, seek to explain the rise of the independence agenda in recent years. Dowling suggests that, while the independence movement was growing prior the economic crisis, the latter is a key factor accelerating the saliency of the Catalan question as well as adding a new layer of dispute. The economic crisis resulted in a political crisis in Spain, a delegitimisation of the model of government established in the late 1970s, and a loss of credibility of the Spanish state as an actor capable of providing social stability and living standards. Crucial here is the fact that the economic crisis has been framed nationally in Catalonia and, as a result, social discontent has been mostly channelled through the prism of identity and sovereignty. The fiscal deficit is blamed for poor infrastructure and low productivity and secession is framed as offering Catalan society the opportunity to become prosperous.

When it comes to the independence movement itself, Dowling frames the analysis originally using the prism of social movements and political emotions. The author suggests that independence can be interpreted as a societal response to perceived injustice, unfairness and the failure of recognition. The context here, of course, is the economic crisis and the failed reform of the Statute. Dowling characterises the movement as a predominantly middle-class mobilisation to restore

their status and economic interests. The author suggests that this mobilisation, similarly to the new social movements, has functioned as a restorer of social trust and political engagement. It has transformed negative grievance to positive affirmation by dignifying collective identity – equating their goals with democracy and justice – and inspiring mass scale popular mobilisation. Dowling also suggests that the independence movement’s economic framing is similar to that of the Lega Nord and the main strands of Flemish nationalism: the superior, industrious northerner subsidising wasteful, often welfare-dependent southern regions.

Overall, this is a valuable contribution to the literature examining Catalan nationalism and sub-state nationalism, as well as independence movements more generally. The main strength of the book is that it successfully combines an emphasis on cultural activism with attention to shifting economic and political conditions, which makes for a nuanced and interesting read. Indeed, contrary to many contemporary studies of the Catalan case, *The Rise of Catalan Independence: Spain’s Territorial Crisis* goes well beyond the exclusive focus on party elites and the dynamics of party competition. Dowling’s analysis is insightful and draws relevant comparisons with the Basque Country, Scotland and other similar cases as well as references to theories of nationalism and social movements. Condensing the evolution of Catalan nationalism and the quest for independence in a short readable book also deserves praise.

Despite its strengths, some shortcomings require mention. Firstly, while the analysis is exhaustive, most of the arguments about the evolution of Catalan nationalism and Catalonia’s party politics are hardly original. Indeed, there is not much new in the book until the reader reaches chapters four and five. Secondly, while the emphasis on the economic crisis is welcome and original, the reason why we must see it as the single largest determinant in the rise of the independence agenda is not always spelled out clearly and convincingly. Finally, it is unfortunate that a book of this kind does not cover the momentous events in October 2017, from the referendum to the UDI, although that is fully understandable as the book was published only a couple of months after these events.

These are small criticisms of what is overall an interesting and accessible contribution to the study of the Catalan independence movement. *The Rise of Catalan Independence: Spain's Territorial Crisis* will find its audience among scholars and upper-level students interested in Catalan nationalism and independence, territorial politics and civic and social movements.

Dr Daniel Cetrà

University of Aberdeen and Centre on Constitutional Change, Edinburgh