12-1-1999

Review of: Symbol and Ritual in the New Spain: The Transition to Democracy after Franco by Laura Desfor Edles

Donald Share
University of Puget Sound, share@pugetsound.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://soundideas.pugetsound.edu/faculty_pubs

Citation
environmental concerns have been factored into the country’s successive economic development policies since 1972 as well as the content of the various environmental policies and programs introduced between 1972 and 1995. While he clearly describes the content of some of the main national environmental statutes, including the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act of 1974 and the Environment Protection Act of 1986, he fails to illustrate the legal limits of many of these statutes. Oddly enough, the review of environmentally related court cases that can shed light on these issues are relegated to a short appendix. Chapter 5 discusses the institutional impediments to environmental protection. It appropriately asks why democratic India, with comprehensive environmental protection laws and regulations on the books, has failed to implement effectively its green agenda. Dwivedi repeats the perennial mantra: inadequate institutional capacity, underpricing of publicly supplied resources, lack of administrative rationality, and all with major corruption. Yet, the question of how market-based incentives (or their absence) affect the environment is not examined. Also, it is well known that in India both the central (federal) and state governments exert considerable influence on the formulation and implementation of policy. The central authorities can legislate regarding subjects that fall under state jurisdiction (which includes an extensive list of “intellectual subjects” only with the agreement of the state governments. How the vicissitudes of center-state relations and, indeed, the politics behind the contentious turf battles between the two have affected the formulation and implementation of environmental policy is missing in Dwivedi’s rendition.

Chapters 6 and 7 look at India and international environmental issues. They are poorly organized, the arguments are sloppy and repetitive, and there are numerous glaring omissions. There is no discussion of the implications of international environmental laws, regimes, or institutions for India. For example, the 1992 Earth Summit resulted in the signing of two major treaties—the Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity—in addition to Agenda 21 (a program and set of green guidelines for the twenty-first century) and a statement of Forest Principles (on “intellectual subjects”) only with the agreement of the state governments. How the vicissitudes of center-state relations and, indeed, the politics behind the contentious turf battles between the two have affected the formulation and implementation of environmental policy is missing in Dwivedi’s rendition.

While acknowledging the diversity of this group of pactmen, Edles nevertheless constructs a straw-man category that is full of simplifications. For example, she argues that the ability of Spanish elites to adopt moderate behavior and these “three schools” is flawed but aims most of her attack at the elite/rational choice approach, which she then confusingly re-labels “the pact school approach to transition” (she calls its advocates pactmen). In this group she places, for example, Richard Gunther (“Spain the Very Model of Elite Settlement,” in John Higley and Richard Gunther, eds., Elites and Democratic Change in Latin America and Southern Europe, 1992), Kenneth Medhurst (“Spain’s Evolutionary Pathway from Dictatorship to Democracy,” in Geoffrey Pridham, ed., The New Mediterranean Democracies, 1984), Richard Gunther, Giacomo Sani, and Goldie Shabads (Spain After Franco: The Making of a Competitive Party System, 1986), Guillermo O’Donnell and Philippe Schmitter (Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies, 1986), and José Maraval and Julián Santamaria (“Political Change in Spain,” in G. O’Donnell et al., Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Southern Europe, 1986).


Donald Share, University of Puget Sound

These two works deal with Spanish political culture, but their methods and the value of their contributions to the literature on contemporary Spanish politics could not be more disparate. The Edles book is not at all about the new Spain, but about a period now more than twenty years old. Her reference to Spain’s democratization as “recent” (p. 4) is only the most obvious indication that the book is more than a bit outdated. On page 6, for example, Edles discusses the uniqueness of Spain’s transition to democracy. In the mid-1970s it appeared to constitute a unique form of regime change, but since then, Spain has been joined by quite a few generally similar transitions in places as diverse as Taiwan, Chile, Brazil, Korea, and South Africa.

In the second chapter Edles sets out to summarize and assail existing theories of democratization. In a confusing, simplistic, and incomplete overview, she distinguishes the political cultural/modernization, neo-Marxist/structural models, and elite/rational choice approaches to democratization. Her decision to lump the last two together is questionable, since it is not clear that either set of writings, let alone both, address the question of how market-based incentives (or their absence) affect the environment is not examined. Also, it is well known that in India both the central (federal) and state governments exert considerable influence on the formulation and implementation of policy. The central authorities can legislate regarding subjects that fall under state jurisdiction (which includes an extensive list of “intellectual subjects” only with the agreement of the state governments. How the vicissitudes of center-state relations and, indeed, the politics behind the contentious turf battles between the two have affected the formulation and implementation of environmental policy is missing in Dwivedi’s rendition.

Chapters 6 and 7 look at India and international environmental issues. They are poorly organized, the arguments are sloppy and repetitive, and there are numerous glaring omissions. There is no discussion of the implications of international environmental laws, regimes, or institutions for India. For example, the 1992 Earth Summit resulted in the signing of two major treaties—the Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity—in addition to Agenda 21 (a program and set of green guidelines for the twenty-first century) and a statement of Forest Principles (on “intellectual subjects”) only with the agreement of the state governments. How the vicissitudes of center-state relations and, indeed, the politics behind the contentious turf battles between the two have affected the formulation and implementation of environmental policy is missing in Dwivedi’s rendition.

While acknowledging the diversity of this group of pactmen, Edles nevertheless constructs a straw-man category that is full of simplifications. For example, she argues that the ability of Spanish elites to adopt moderate behavior and these “three schools” is flawed but aims most of her attack at the elite/rational choice approach, which she then confusingly re-labels “the pact school approach to transition” (she calls its advocates pactmen). In this group she places, for example, Richard Gunther (“Spain the Very Model of Elite Settlement,” in John Higley and Richard Gunther, eds., Elites and Democratic Change in Latin America and Southern Europe, 1992), Kenneth Medhurst (“Spain’s Evolutionary Pathway from Dictatorship to Democracy,” in Geoffrey Pridham, ed., The New Mediterranean Democracies, 1984), Richard Gunther, Giacomo Sani, and Goldie Shabads (Spain After Franco: The Making of a Competitive Party System, 1986), Guillermo O’Donnell and Philippe Schmitter (Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies, 1986), and José Maraval and Julián Santamaria (“Political Change in Spain,” in G. O’Donnell et al., Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Southern Europe, 1986).


Donald Share, University of Puget Sound

These two works deal with Spanish political culture, but their methods and the value of their contributions to the literature
transition. Drawing on the literature of cultural sociology and anthropology, she argues that the success of the transition is best explained by four key symbols (a new beginning, Civil War, national reconciliation/convivencia, and democracy). She argues that “these symbols contained strands of shared meaning, which became the specific tenets or ground rules of the politics of consensus,” and that they “became representative of the ritual process of transition” (p. 24). She asserts “the transcendence of these four core symbolic categories enabled the successful institutionalization of Spanish democracy” (p. 140). In the process Edles employs much jargon that sounds more exogenous than generally common sense concepts.

The major problem with this book is that Edles never persuasively demonstrates any causal connection between the existence of these four symbols and concrete political outcomes. She contends that political elites (at least as manifested in their statements and writing in newspapers) shared a common symbolic language during the transition, but that is as long ago as 50 years ago by many studies of democratization. Edles is unable to move from description to causality. Her method involved reading through a selection of Spanish newspapers during the transition and doing content or discourse analysis, and the results are reported in an entirely anecdotal fashion. The reader is given neither an indication of the relative frequency of types of evidence nor any systematic presentation of the data. The study is a tour de force, but Edles is unable to turn the symbols into historical moment fraught with possibilities of division and conflict” is not novel and just as easily could have been drawn from a more careful reading of much of the existing literature.

In dramatic contrast is The Cultural Dynamics of Democratization in Spain. McDonough, Barnes, and López Pina have been studying this and other transitions for several years and their research is all gathered in the 1993 book. This fascinating work is currently the best single book on Spanish public opinion, and it breaks new ground in many areas. The authors explore three interrelated questions that together give us the most comprehensive overview of contemporary Spanish political culture. First, the authors want to determine the nature and extent of political legitimacy in Spain. They present evidence to demonstrate that a profound and apparently durable depolarization of Spanish society has taken place. The authors are careful to point out that depolarization resulted from a combination of long-term structural factors and short-term elite behavior. Of particular interest is the argument that democratic legitimacy is based on some extent on perceptions of social fairness. The ability of the democratic state to deliver higher levels of social protection to its citizens has helped make democracy more legitimate. A second part of the book examines how Spain’s democracy was able to shift from its center-right founding coalition (1977–82) to the Socialists (1982–96). The authors essentially argue that interests as opposed to ideology or partisanship drove Spanish public opinion. Once the political work of the transition had been completed by the center-right, economic concerns (economic performance and social fairness) became paramount. The book does a fine job of explaining why the Socialists were able to implement apparently contradictory policies. During their long mandate the Spanish public demonstrated clear support for populism and statism but also for neoliberal aspects of the Socialist reforms. The contradiction—some would argue sophisticated—nature of Spanish public opinion provided ample leeway for Socialist policies that simultaneously sought to liberalize capitalism and expand the Spanish welfare state. The authors suggest that the Socialist growth-with-equity model had broad support in Spanish society, but their look at public opinion during this period does not entirely explain why massively high unemployment, the most troubling and persistent aspect of the economy under the Socialists, did not have more serious political ramifications.

The final section of the book attempts to account for Spain’s unusually low levels of certain types of political participation. The careful comparison of Spain to South America and Brazil of years ago by many studies of democratization, Edles is unable to move from description to causality. Her method involved reading through a selection of Spanish newspapers during the transition and doing content or discourse analysis, and the results are reported in an entirely anecdotal fashion. The reader is given neither an indication of the relative frequency of types of evidence nor any systematic presentation of the data. The study is a tour de force, but Edles is unable to turn the symbols into historical moment fraught with possibilities of division and conflict” is not novel and just as easily could have been drawn from a more careful reading of much of the existing literature.


Jana Everett, University of Colorado, Denver

This ethnographic study reconceptualizes working-class politics in order to explain the weakness of the Indian trade union movement. It also puts forward a theoretical framework for comparative political analysis that avoids some of the pitfalls of Marx’s idealized notion of a unified working class and of categories derived from particular European contexts. Since the 1970s, feminist theorists have sought to analyze the interrelationships among gender, class, and other social identities, such as ethnicity, religion, and caste, in order to explain women’s marginalization in working-class movements. For liberal and Marxist feminists the political process is the struggle for resources by already existing groups, whereas for postmodern and critical theorists such as Fernandes, the political process involves the discursive creation of and contestation over social categories and the boundaries between them. Fernandes presents an analytical framework