

Syd Morgan (with Enric Ucelay-Da Cal)

INTRODUCTION

NATIONALISTS AND THE PROBLEM OF OVERCOMING INVISIBILITY: CATALONIA AND WALES

The articles in this second volume of *Studies on National Movements* form a collection of essays with its genesis in a question asked by Catalan to Welsh colleagues: ‘Why do we know so much about Scotland and so little about Wales?’ They suggested exploring this perplexity at one-day seminars held in both territories. The first was organised by GRENS (Grup de Recerca en Estats, Nacions i Sobiraniaes) at the Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona on 12 November 2013 under the direction of professor Enric Ucelay-Da Cal. Swansea University’s European Institute of Identities reciprocated on 2 April 2014.¹ Dr Da Cal presented a briefing note for participants. To place the essays in the context given to their authors – and for its own value – it is published here:

NATIONALISTS AND THE PROBLEM OF OVERCOMING INVISIBILITY:
CATALONIA AND WALES²

Since the rise of mature print culture in the second half of the nineteenth century, both the Catalan and Welsh nationalist movements have been forced over time to confront the problem of their relative invisibility. In the news media, in magazines, even in



Syd Morgan (with Enric Ucelay-Da Cal), ‘Introduction. Nationalists and the problem of overcoming invisibility: Catalonia and Wales’, in: *Studies on National Movements*, 2 (2014).

<http://snm.nise.eu/index.php/studies/article/view/0212i>

books, at least for over a century, readers have been bombarded day by day by discussions of 'England' or 'Spain', or by notions of 'Britishness' or 'Hispanidad / Hispanismo'. All such are commonly received, and just as commonly accepted without questioning, as conventional wisdom.

Therefore, the first objective of these two sub-state nationalist movements, like so many others in the world around them, has been to obtain the fact of perception: their possible political clientele must first realise that they incarnate 'something else', different as a collective to the publicly recognised government and territory, of which they allegedly form a part. The primary and oldest weapon in the sub-nation arsenal has been the writing of History specific to a historic space, which might have once been an 'independent' entity, but which is not so any longer. The implication is, of course, the prophetic idea of a 'once and future' nation, which has existed and may reappear.

But many other arms have been used by sub-state nationalist movements to gain 'awareness', 'raise consciousness', and heighten sensibility among their fellow 'nationals'. These themes – from academic racism in its heyday to ever-revived folklore and music – are a reflection of current fashions at any one time, and of change over a longer run. Once a following among others of similar nationality, language or sense of selfhood is achieved, there is the need to undertake a task of 'nation building' outside government institutions, which are always an expression of what has been aptly termed 'banal nationalism', and is capable of constant pressure.

Also, foreign opinion must be courted and convinced, even converted, to the new cause. Outside specialists, especially in literary studies, who may become adepts, can help make a movement synonymous with the territory it claims to represent, an identification which means the triumph of visibility over anonymity and blindness. Both Catalan and Welsh nationalisms, in their different ways, express this fight against invisibility. This is the common thread that, as investigators and students of either nationalism, we can share together, in common and useful discussion or debate.

Andrea Brighenti's hypothesis for constituting visibility as a single field in the social sciences can help us to analyse these papers. From his observation that 'recognition' and 'control' are two opposing outcomes of visibility, we can, by extension, deduce that *non*-recognition – in the cases of these national territories – can be a means of their control by other agencies. Visibility theory allows us to 'see' this since it lies at the intersection of aesthetics and politics.³ It allows us to consider the particular problem of Wales in a thick theoretical context. It is fitting that the papers published in this collection take an inter-disciplinary approach to the visibility of specific territories, each with their own characteristics.

Although the writers largely explore the territories in isolation, there are major lines of comparison, which confirm the value of this transnational approach and suggest areas for future research. Looking at these thematically, the effect of *imperialism* on sub-state nationalities is a common motif, whether the imperial ideal absorbs the nation in question by partial accommodation of its demands (Brooks) or their being part of the project (Jacobson). 'Great Power' states are seen to have the particular capacity to absorb political actors from their minority nations, often but not exclusively from their bourgeoisie (Brooks, Farinelli, Jacobson). Contrary to that tendency, global anti-imperialism is a value shared between the two nations. The decline of the Spanish Empire (Esculies, Jacobson, Puhle) against the contemporaneous expansion of the British Empire (Morgan, Tudur) are seen as powerful instruments, with both territories exhibiting characteristics of *internal colonialism* (Jacobson, Tudur). Valued insight can also be gained by drawing on experiences of *race* (Williams). Powerful multi-national states create *dual identities* and relational loyalties that vary over time (Brooks, Jacobson, Williams). This leads to national movements having a 'foot in both camps': Barcelona and Madrid, Cardiff and London (Puhle). While this has been a chronic characteristic of Catalan politics – originating in *pactisme* (Puhle) – Welsh nationalism did not exhibit this 'compromise' until post-World War II. In Western Europe, imperialism and *liberalism* go hand in hand. In Wales, individual rights triumphed over sub-state nationalisms (Brooks, Williams) and to some extent in Catalonia (Esculies, Jacobson). Amongst

other ideologies, anarcho-syndicalism existed amongst Barcelona 'blue collars' (Esculies) and Welsh miners.

Both territories clearly exhibit the influence of the Romantic cultural revival on the subsequent growth of nationalism, the *Renaixença* (Farinelli, Jacobson) and *Cymru'n Deffro* (Tudur) with their influence on the importance of national languages and literature. But the consequences were quite different as a result of other factors, including the respective reactions to modernism (Brooks) – although 'rural backwardness vs. industrial modernism' is also seen as a 'crude and misleading binary opposition' (Williams). One under-explored difference between the Catalan and Welsh national conditions is the cluster of territorial integrity, national *boundaries* and *legal* identities. 'Catalonia' and the 'Catalan community' are referenced with a certain elasticity, existing across state borders (Farinelli), whereas 'Wales' is the territory precisely determined by an English law of 1535 (Morgan). This difference, perhaps, influences both nations' approaches to diaspora, with Wales being portable over distance (Tudur) but Catalanism much more complex and negotiated (Farinelli). Their different linguistic and familial connections make an instructive transnational comparison. Catalonia has a historic legal identity (Jacobson, Farinelli), and thus greater visibility, with embedded values, whereas Wales was legally – and militarily – absorbed into England (Morgan), a process incrementally reinforced over centuries. Challenging this formed the basis of modern Welsh nationalism (Tudur). History, language and religion connect Catalonia with a wider, 'normal' Europeanism (Puhle) but is a characteristic of Welsh nationalism primarily in opposition to overwhelming Britishness (Morgan, Williams).

The First World War, claimed by some historians to be the seminal event of the 20th century, had enormous influence on both territories, whether they were within belligerent states (Wales and the British Empire) or not (Catalonia and Spain).⁴ In both, new forms of nationalism emerged – though at quite different stages of development – transitioning to state building from its earlier form of Home Rule within existing states (Jacobson, Morgan). Welsh nationalism, influenced by Ireland, reached the latter stage a generation before Catalonia, whereas the 'new nationalism' consequent upon Wilsonian principles of self-determination had an

energising effect during the inter-war years in both Catalonia (Esculies) and Wales (Morgan).

The changes in identity brought about by industrial and urban developments are a shared theme in these papers, but with different consequences. Welsh nationalism is perceived to have rejected urbanism (Tudur) which may be one cause of its underdevelopment. Catalan nationalism burgeoned within the expanding city of Barcelona (Esculies). Much of 'Welsh urbanism' took place in English cities, to some extent cutting it off from the national territory (Brooks). The influences of new urban settlements within Welsh coalfields, especially the vast southern linear conurbations, are only explored tangentially (Morgan). Migration is intimately connected to industrial urbanisation, with two principal effects: the internal migration of Catalan and Welsh rural dwellers into the new centres and in-migration from other national territories, principally but not exclusively from the rest of Iberia and the British Isles respectively (Esculies, Morgan, Puhle) with, seemingly, different effects. The 'long migratory process' observed in Catalonia (Esculies) is not reflected upon in Wales, nor is the often violent reaction of the Spanish state to the emergent national movement (Esculies, Puhle) paralleled in Wales.

As a further example of its usefulness to the Welsh situation, visibility theory recognises that communication systems are not neutral – despite media technology allowing that potential – so consideration of the comparative hierarchical ranking of territories may be a valid analytical tool. Enhanced media exposure is not just a banal question of image but an integral part of evolutionary internal social processes. A further characteristic is that visibility asymmetries are the global norm, leading to, particularly in the case of Wales, possible acceptance that it is not exceptional but 'normally different'.⁵ Notwithstanding that, the present, hierarchic visibility of different nations will be perceived differently by socio-political groups who regard them either as territorially endogenous or peripheral to other polities. In these cases, the latter would be London and Madrid. Since 'visibility breeds identification', the more visible these territories are, the more dangerous they are to their alternative 'centres of loyalty', especially as they could become a model for others.⁶ Using that analogy, invisibility can be seen as a weapon of the status quo.

As an example of territories with incomplete social structures or weak institutions, the present writer has examined the political significance of media structures.⁷ The case study posits the existence of a ‘national paradox’ in which a sub-state government and legislature with increasing competences function within a fractured and contracting territorial media environment. It could be referenced as an apposite example of Thomas Jefferson’s aphorism about the relative importance – visibility – of newspapers and government.⁸ As a modern phenomenon, it confirms the theory that ‘shaping and managing visibility is a huge work that human beings do tirelessly’; that it is ‘never simply a technical matter [but] inherently practical and political’. Beyond the ‘eye-to-eye’, Brighenti says that ‘communication technologies enlarge the field of the socially visible.’⁹ The Welsh case can be seen an example of the opposite, in that technological advances and changed ownership models have caused the contraction of earlier, specifically Welsh media. Its governance exists, but is so, to many of its electorate, ‘without being an object’ or is not (sufficiently) ‘articulated’, conditions which visibility theory views as politically determined. It can be represented as hardly existing in its own (territorial) public space, although technology allows it free rein within private spaces. The lack of exposure of the proceedings of the National Assembly for Wales may even cause its politics to ‘recede into invisibility’ in a formal sense. In the case of these two territories located within more extensive states, this lack of ‘recognition’ is also critical for relationships between minority and mainstream groups within each territory, and outside. These papers confirm the existence of ‘thresholds of visibility’ by demonstrating that, while Catalonia and Wales exhibit general differences in visibility, these thresholds vary across different fields and sectors of society – history, politics, languages, literatures and geographies.¹⁰

Beyond the spheres dealt with in these papers, visibility studies can have other applications. For example, in our globalised, electronic world, territorial visibility – or its opposite – can be influential in sustainable socio-economic development. The emerging field of ‘economies of identity’ strongly interacts with questions of territorial visibility. Globally, it can be an essential requirement for success. Beyond traditional tourism, the much more complex trends of shorter vacation periods combined with

greater frequency; demands for higher quality levels; trends towards more physical and intellectual activities; and, especially, interest in culture, history and local environments – all of these call for bespoke territorial differentiation and the global dissemination of that knowledge in order to compete successfully in increasingly fragmented markets. This visibility (and its essential branding) is a key factor in people being able to exercise market choices in a growth sector. As touristic images are ‘representations of the political and cultural identifications and as ideological discourses of [...] collective identities’, at a commercial and governmental level, applications of the concept of visibility have further potential for societal impact.¹¹

Each paper illustrates that visibility / invisibility is a nuanced and enhancing tool of analysis which can then open up new research possibilities, especially the value of comparative studies of the bilateral type attempted here. They advance earlier work on the visibility of sub-state nations and point the way towards the potential of comparative studies and inter-disciplinary approaches using visibility as a tool, including hierarchies of visibility, the variable impact of historical social movements and the role of academic research in enhancing visibility through public controversy. For such new research, political science using data bases assembled from surveys will help validate the work. Such comparative research can be spread much wider, of course, potentially embracing other politico-cultural spaces such as sub-state nations within Western Europe, the realms of Celtic culture and territory, and the broader Atlantic World. Finally, these papers lead to the conclusion that authors from Wales are more overtly conscious of visibility / invisibility *per se* than Catalan contributors because of the condition of Wales compared to Catalonia. That seems to be the simple answer to Ucelay-Da Cal’s original set of questions.

Endnotes

¹ For both programmes, see <<http://cataloniawalesseminar.weebly.com>> [last accessed 10/2/2016].

² Briefing note by Enric Ucelay Da-Cal (Barcelona, 2013).

³ A. Brighenti, 'Visibility. A category for the social sciences', in: *Current sociology*, 55/3 (2007) 323-342 (324).

⁴ G. Kennan, *The decline of Bismarck's European order: Franco-Russian relations 1875-1890* (Princeton, 1981) 3-10; F.L. Carsten, *War against war: British & German radical movements in the First World War* (Berkeley - Los Angeles, 1982) 11.

⁵ Brighenti, 'Visibility', 325-326.

⁶ Brighenti, 'Visibility', 324 and 333.

⁷ S. Morgan, *Questions of political communication in Wales* (Cardiff School of Education Research Papers, 5) (Cardiff, 2009).

⁸ In 1787, when arguing the case for an informed citizenry, Jefferson wrote: 'Were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter' (T. Jefferson, *The works of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. P.L. Ford (New York - London, 1904) vol. 5, 253).

⁹ Brighenti, 'Visibility', 327.

¹⁰ Brighenti, 'Visibility', 328-329 and 331-332.

¹¹ X. Pereiro, 'Touristic images and narratives of identification between the North of Portugal and Galiza (Spain) in the touristic promotional literature', in: R.C. Lois-González, X.M. Santos-Solla & P. Taboada-de-Zuñiga (eds.), *New tourism in the 21st century: culture, the city, nature and spirituality* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 2014) 154-176 (154).