

## Nationalism, nation and territory: Jacint Verdaguer and the Catalan Renaixença

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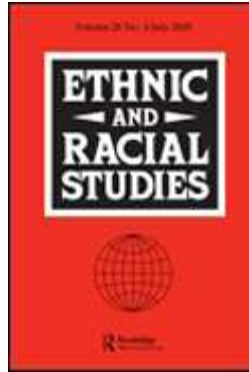
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**Nationalism, National Identity and Territory: Jacint Verdaguer and the Catalan Renaixença**

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# NATIONALISM, NATION AND TERRITORY: JACINT VERDAGUER AND THE CATALAN *RENAIXENÇA*

## Abstract

This paper seeks to explain the historic importance to Catalan nationalism of the nineteenth-century poet and priest, Jacint Verdaguer. In order to do so, rather than focus on his contribution – and that of the wider cultural revival, the *Renaixença* – to the development of the Catalan language as the basis for national political mobilisation, this paper argues that we cannot fully understand Verdaguer's importance without reference to his role in constructing a geographical narrative linking nation and territory. At the same time, given that national meanings are always contested, the paper proposes a dialectical approach to nationalism that situates the work of writers within the context of power struggles between social groups. Consequently, Verdaguer's centrality to Catalan nationalism is ultimately explained by his role in producing a geographical narrative capable of attracting important sectors of rural Catalonia to the hegemonic project of the industrial bourgeoisie.

## Key words

Nationalism; Nation; Territory; Catalonia; Verdaguer; Historic Bloc.

## Introduction

The year 2002 saw the centenary of the death of one of the most remarkable figures of Catalan literature, Father Jacint Verdaguer, wayward priest and epic poet. He was, and is, considered by many to be the crowning glory of the *Renaixença*, the cultural and literary movement inspired by Romanticism that led to a renewed Catalan cultural awareness and that, in turn, provided the basis for the reawakening of Catalan political consciousness. During his own lifetime Verdaguer achieved widespread fame, primarily for his literary achievements that included his ‘appointment’ as Catalonia’s national poet, although his eccentric lifestyle would also make him the subject of popular myth.

In order to commemorate the centenary of his demise the Department of Culture of the Generalitat de Catalunya (the regional government of Catalonia) organised *l’Any Verdaguer*, a year-long series of activities based on the works of the author, such as readings, debates, lectures, exhibitions and so forth. Such was the success of *l’Any*, that the organisers were forced to prolong it for six months. In the light of this enduring popularity, this article seeks to address the question of how we are to understand the centrality of Verdaguer, and the *Renaixença*, for Catalan nationalism.

The majority of contemporary accounts of Catalan nationalism have focussed on language as a central pillar around which nationalist mobilisation has taken place (see, for example, Balcells 1992; Conversi 1997; Fontana 1998; McRoberts 2001; Guibernau 2002), which reflects the stress placed by Catalan nationalists themselves on the centrality of this element of national identity. Thus, from this perspective one way of understanding Verdaguer's importance to Catalan nationalism is to stress his role in the forging of a language of literary and hence

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3 social prestige that provided a unifying element of national consciousness.  
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6 However, a growing body of literature has emerged mainly from the  
7 disciplines of human and political geography stressing the spatial dimensions of  
8 nations and nationalism and, more specifically, the relationship between nations  
9 and territories known as national homelands. From this point of departure, this  
10 paper argues that Verdaguer and the *Renaixença* in general make a key  
11 contribution to the development of a geographical narrative linking the Catalan  
12 nation to 'its' homeland, although, in itself this does not explain why Verdaguer  
13 became such a revered figure among Catalan nationalists.  
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24 This can only be done, the paper argues, by placing cultural production  
25 within the context of power relations, and in this respect, building on a dialectical  
26 approach to nationalism developed by Jim Mac Laughlin (1986; 2001), the paper  
27 places the work of Verdaguer within the complex interrelationship between  
28 political, social and economic actors and processes operating in nineteenth-  
29 century Catalonia. Consequently, Verdaguer's historic importance to Catalan  
30 nationalism is explained by his ability to construct a spatial understanding of the  
31 Catalan nation that privileged rural Catalonia and its inhabitants as the spiritual  
32 reserve of the nation, which allowed for their incorporation into the hegemonic  
33 project of the urban, industrial bourgeoisie.  
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## 52 **Nations, Nationalism and Territory**

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54 Geographical considerations lie at the heart of how nations and nationalisms  
55 operate. Politically, the most significant claim that nationalism makes on behalf of  
56 the nation is that the latter should be 'masters of their own homelands' (Kaiser  
57 1994, p. 3), that is, the nation should exercise political power, usually in the form  
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3 of state sovereignty, over a given territory<sup>1</sup>. Such territorial claims – claims to  
4 material belonging – made in the name of the nation are based on purported  
5 symbolic belonging, whereby, on the one hand, the nation's defining  
6 characteristics – national identity - are held to be a result of its relationship with a  
7 given territory, while the territory in question cannot be conceived without  
8 reference to its relationship with the nation. In this way the nation is effectively  
9 territorialised and the territory nationalised and thus becomes the homeland, with  
10 both nation and homeland coming into being through this relationship of mutual  
11 belonging. In the words of Steven Grosby, the nation's very existence 'is  
12 predicated upon the existence of a collective consciousness constituted by a belief  
13 that there is a territory which belongs to only one people and that there is a people  
14 which belongs to only one territory' (2002, p. 27).

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National homelands are understood as territories with relatively fixed borders that display a relatively high degree of internal sociological homogeneity, and are clearly distinguishable from other territories. At the same time, they are larger than individual localities, such as cities, towns and villages, and while individual members may identify with other spatial scales, be they local, regional or even supranational, identifying with and loyalty to the national scale takes precedence over all others (Grosby 2002).

National homelands come to be the 'cultural container' (Taylor 1999) of the nation to which identity is attached, and is at once the source and the reflection of the nation's unique identity. In English nationalist discourse, for example 'quintessential national virtues' are said to be reflected in the English landscape of country lanes, hedgerows and cottages (Lowenthal 1994, p. 20), while insularity has protected the English from the (European) continental afflictions such as

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3 'rabid dogs and dictators alike' (Tebbit quoted in Lowenthal 1994, p. 22). At the  
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5 same time, apparently a-spatial, cultural elements of national identity, such as a  
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7 shared language or history, come to be understood as mediating elements in this  
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9 relationship, and are thus spatialized. For Fichte, the German language was so  
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11 important, since, unlike its Romance counterparts such as French, it  
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17 derived entirely from Germanic elements, originally coined to  
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19 describe the world still inhabited by Germans. This language,  
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21 therefore, was immediately transparent and comprehensible to all  
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23 German speakers, placing them in immediate relationship with their  
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25 environment and with each other (Geary 2002, p. 25).  
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### 33 **Nations and Territories as Constructs**

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36 The relationship between nation and territory is generally considered by  
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38 nationalists to be 'immutable', stretching back to the mists of time (Penrose  
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40 2002), and primordial in the sense that national attachment to and control of a  
41  
42 given homeland forms part of the natural world and the human condition. Despite  
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44 the practical problems involved in putting this principle into practice (historically  
45  
46 very few states have been coterminous with a single nation), it constitutes the  
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48 organising principle of the world system of states and has become the 'common-  
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50 sense' way of interpreting geopolitical space. Thus, while conflicts over  
51  
52 competing national claims to territory are generally condemned as atavistic (Billig  
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54 1995), the underlying principle – that nations and territories somehow belong to  
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56 each other – has generally remained unchallenged. Indeed, in our daily language  
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3 we effectively elide and reify territory and nation when talking of how '*Britain*  
4 faces unprecedented challenges' or how 'Catalan is the language of *Catalonia*'.  
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8 This common-sense understanding of the geopolitical world is also, I  
9 believe, implicit in the majority of mainstream approaches to the subject of  
10 nations and nationalism from disciplines such as history, anthropology, sociology  
11 and political science, although this is not to say that territorial considerations are  
12 entirely absent. Ernest Gellner, for example, understands nationalism as 'a theory  
13 of political legitimacy, which requires that ethnic boundaries should not cut across  
14 political ones' (1983, p. 1), that is, the boundaries of the state as a territorial  
15 political unit should coincide with those of the nation, a cultural community;  
16 accounts based on uneven economic development and internal colonialism use  
17 spatial categories such as national peripheries and internal national colonies (see,  
18 for example Hechter 1975; Nairn 1977); one of the most enduring categorizations  
19 of nations and nationalisms uses the category of 'territorial nations' as a synonym  
20 of 'civic' – as opposed to 'ethnic' - nations (Kohn 1944; Brubaker 1992); while  
21 one of the key elements of national identity for many authors has been the  
22 'possession or occupation of a historic homeland' (Smith 2004, p. 18; see also, for  
23 example, Stalin 1975). Yet such accounts generally fail to explain why and how  
24 nations come to be related to 'their' territories, and as such the former are, in  
25 effect, presented as spatial 'givens', since these accounts fail to challenge the  
26 nationalist proposition regarding the mutual belonging between these two  
27 categories.  
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55 However, over the last two decades or so there has been an increasing  
56 degree of awareness, mainly but not exclusively, among human and political  
57 geographers of the importance of the spatial dimension of nationalism and the  
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3 nation<sup>2</sup>. The emergence of this body of literature is due – at least in part – to more  
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5 critical approaches to geography that, *inter alia*, have challenged the dominant  
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7 idea that spatial categories such as nations are 'natural and eternal features of the  
8  
9 geopolitical landscape' (Kaiser 2001, p. 323), and have stressed the constructed,  
10  
11 historically-contingent nature of nations and homelands. Thus, Anssi Paasi  
12  
13 territorial units such as national territories are seen as 'historical products – not  
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15 merely in their physical materiality but also in their socio-cultural meanings.  
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17 Hence territories are not eternal units but, as manifestations of various  
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19 institutional practices, emerge, exist for some time and disappear' (1995, p. 3).  
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25 In this sense several scholars argue that national homelands can only be  
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27 found in the Modern Age, since before that time there was little correspondence  
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29 'between territories, regions or kingdoms, and ethnic groups who occupied them'  
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31 (Geary 2002, p. 37), and even where attachment to the land was common among  
32  
33 the population, this was limited to the 'immediate place of living' such as valleys,  
34  
35 uplands or lowlands. The 'imagining of an overall "country", in which lived-in  
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37 localities are united within a wider homeland, does not seem to have been typical  
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39 in pre-modern Europe' (Billig 1995, p. 74)<sup>3</sup>.  
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43 Equally, from the point of view of elite perceptions of territory, Peter J.  
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45 Taylor (1999) argues that the nationalisation of territory has its origins in the 1793  
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47 French Constitution that obliged the state to defend every corner of the national  
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49 homeland, in contrast to preceding conceptions of state territory that allowed for  
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51 parcels of land to be transferred between states as the outcomes of wars. However,  
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53 it was not until the late nineteenth century that popular identification with national  
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55 territory became widespread in states such as France (Weber 1976), Germany  
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57 (Kaiser 2001), Italy and Spain (Mac Laughlin 1986) coinciding with a general  
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3 trend in the West whereby states markedly increased their power to penetrate, both  
4 socially and spatially, their respective societies (Mann 1993). It is at this time that  
5 national cultural identities and political obligations take on the very same spatial  
6 contours as state sovereignty itself.  
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12 A further point here is that, even if the mutual relationship of symbolic  
13 belonging that brings nations and homelands into being could be considered to be  
14 a naturally-occurring phenomenon, for some it is far from 'natural' that territorial  
15 belonging should necessarily imply territorial control, as nationalists themselves  
16 claim. Such a proposition would appear to be premised on the idea that the nation  
17 somehow displays a collective, in-born territorial instinct. Yet as Robert D. Sack  
18 (1986) so powerfully argues, such a 'territorial instinct' is not a socio-biologically  
19 determined impulse, but rather it is a strategy that can be and, more importantly,  
20 has been switched on and off at different points in time and space, and it is  
21 through such historically-contingent strategies, and only through them, that  
22 territories come into being.  
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## 42 **National Territorial Construction**

43 This spatial alignment of national identities and loyalties with political power did  
44 not, of course, arise spontaneously. Since at least the mid nineteenth century, both  
45 state-sponsored and non-state nationalisms have made conscious efforts to  
46 produce and reproduce the national territory and the territorial nation, thus  
47 promoting the idea that their respective nations and territories – both real and  
48 potential – belong to each other in symbolic and thus material terms, a process  
49 that can be referred to as national has been referred to as national territorial  
50 construction. The literature on the subject generally breaks this process down into  
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3 two complimentary ones: one the one hand, 'the national construction of social  
4 space' (Williams and Smith 1983) or 'the national territorialization of space'  
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6 (Kaiser 2001) involve projecting national meaning onto space in order to  
7  
8 construct national homelands; on the other, 'national territorial socialization'  
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10 (Paasi 1996) or 'territorial nationalization' (Kaiser 2001) refer to how national  
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12 territories themselves and their associated components, such as boundaries, are  
13  
14 used to socialise the national population as members of a differentiated, exclusive  
15  
16 territorial group. Given the ultimate objective of this paper, I shall focus here on  
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18 the former, that is, means used by both state and non-state nationalisms to  
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20 construct the national homeland, although in practice both processes are at work  
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22 simultaneously.  
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30 Historically, one of the most important means used in this respect has been  
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32 the presence of national institutions themselves. Initially, we can understand the  
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34 territorial expansion of these institutions, their presence and accompanying  
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36 symbols, such as national flag, as a means of claiming territory in the name of the  
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38 nation. Over time, if national hegemony is established, their presence becomes  
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40 'unnoticed', part of the landscape, and thus all the more powerful as means of  
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42 reproducing the nation spatially.  
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47 The education system that emerged in the second half of the nineteenth  
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49 century can also be understood as making a vital contribution to the process of  
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51 national territorial construction. It was the newly institutionalised academic  
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53 disciplines such as sociology, political science, economics and geography that not  
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55 only had their 'origins in the practical interests of the state' (Agnew 1987, p. 74),  
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57 but also developed a methodological nationalism, whereby nation and state were  
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59 conflated and this spatial level came to be considered the only appropriate one for  
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3 the study of society, to the detriment of the local, sub-national regional and even  
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5 global level (Hooson 1994). In addition, geography was one of the subjects  
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7 introduced into all school curricula when compulsory schooling was established in  
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9 late nineteenth-century Europe, precisely as a means of promoting a sense of  
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11 national identity among citizens, since 'the future citizen had to learn to link an  
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13 abstract idea (the nation) with a concrete and tangible reality, that is, the physical  
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15 and spatial setting of the nation' (Hooson 1994, p. 7. See also Nogué i Font 1991;  
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17 and Johnston *et al.* 1988).  
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22 Other academic disciplines also contributed to the process: historians  
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24 effectively spatialized national history by conflating the history of the nation – of  
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26 the Britons, for example – with that of the national territory – of Britain - thus  
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28 reinforcing nationalist claims concerning the ancient nature of the nation's bond to  
29  
30 the homeland. Similarly, what Geary calls 'ethnoarchaeologists' rallied to the  
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32 cause by presenting their findings not only as 'proof' of the links between the  
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34 present nation and its ancestors, but also to justify nationalist claims over territory  
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36 (2002, p. 35).  
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41 At the same time, a whole host of nationalist-inspired writers, landscape  
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43 artists (Lasserre 1993; Osborne 1988), poets (Billig 1995) and composers (Rose  
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45 1995; Storey 2001) would all contribute to this process of national territorial  
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47 construction by identifying the extent of national homeland and praising its beauty  
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49 as a whole or that of special places or regions within it that were considered the  
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51 spiritual reserve of the nation.  
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## 59 **The Dialectics of Territorial Nationalism**

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As we shall see in the second half of this paper, Verdaguer and the wider

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3 *Renaixença* the major contribution of to Catalan nationalism is that they construct  
4 a symbolic relation between the Catalan nation and the national homeland.  
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6 However, in itself this does not explain their historic importance for Catalan  
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8 nationalism. Contrary to nationalist thinking, national territories and their  
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10 corollary, territorial nations, do not have 'meanings that are natural' (Cresswell  
11  
12 2004, p. 27), waiting to be identified and brought to life by figures of literary  
13  
14 genius, but rather ones that are contested. Consequently, in order to understand  
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16 why a particular national narrative achieved centrality for early Catalan  
17  
18 nationalism, we must place it within the context of power struggles between  
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20 different social groups, which in the case of nineteenth-century Catalonia leads us  
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22 to analyse the attempts by one group, the industrial bourgeoisie, to achieve  
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24 leadership or hegemony. Hegemony, according to Gramsci (1971) is achieved by a  
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26 group in society when they achieve not only dominance – control over the means  
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28 of coercion of the state - but also the consent of subordinate groups who are  
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30 essentially persuaded that the interests of the leading group are those of society as  
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32 a whole.

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41 This Gramscian understanding of hegemony provides the conceptual and  
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43 theoretical basis for a dialectical approach to nationalism developed by Jim Mac  
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45 Laughlin (1986; 2001) who understands nationalism as a political movement  
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47 aimed at establishing the hegemony of the bourgeoisie in late nineteenth- and  
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49 early twentieth-century in Europe. The relationship between nationalism and the  
50  
51 bourgeoisie is, of course, contentious (see, for example, Anderson 1988; and  
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53 Hroch 1985), although, in the case that interests us here, that of Catalan  
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55 nationalism, the industrial bourgeoisie were very clearly involved with  
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57 nationalism from its beginnings in the nineteenth century, and, notwithstanding,  
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3 the theoretical and methodological advantages of the dialectic approach outweigh,  
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5 I believe, possible objections to the substantive argument.  
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8 Following Raymond Williams (1973), Mac Laughlin contends that any  
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10 contemporary Marxist account of nationalism must come to terms with 'the  
11  
12 complex Marxist problematic of base and superstructure' (1986, p. 306). This is  
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14 'problematic' in the sense that certain readings of Marx have insisted that the  
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16 economic base is essentially determining, since it represents a force that is  
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18 external to human beings and yet 'prefigures' 'predicts' and 'controls' outcomes  
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20 (Williams 1973, p. 4). However, as Gramsci himself showed in his work on Italian  
21  
22 history, 'economic factors by themselves seldom explain the complexity of socio-  
23  
24 political or indeed regional reality' (Mac Laughlin 1986, p. 314). Thus, while the  
25  
26 economic base – the means and relations of production – ultimately set the limits  
27  
28 for substantive outcomes, if we are to explain historical phenomena – in this case  
29  
30 specific forms of nationalist mobilisation – we must focus on 'the role of human  
31  
32 agency, political leadership, organizations, ideologies and superstructural  
33  
34 institutions in the historical process' (Mac Laughlin 1986, p. 314) and this must be  
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36 done in specific historical and spatial contexts, since it is here that structure and  
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38 agency ultimately come together and interact in a dialectical way. Consequently,  
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40 he rejects the economic determinism and reductionism inherent in structuralist and  
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42 neo-Marxist accounts of nationalism, since they reduce nationalism to the end  
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44 product of changes in the economic bases of society.  
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53 Mac Laughlin also takes issue with what he calls idealist or autonomous  
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55 accounts of nationalism by scholars such as Anthony Smith for effectively  
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57 reifying the perceived cultural attributes of the nation and for attributing historical  
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59 agency 'not to human but to structural elements, and the middle-class  
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3 intelligentsia, depicted as a mere trajectory of underlying ethnic and cultural  
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5 forces, is seen to operate in a socio-economic, political and ideological vacuum'  
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7 (Mac Laughlin 1986, p. 310).  
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10 Overall, a dialectical approach to nationalism allows us to understand the  
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12 latter neither as the inevitable result of the rise to power of the a given social  
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14 group, nor as an autonomous force, but rather as the terrain on which political and  
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16 ideological struggles take place between groups, within the limits placed by  
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18 economic structures and changes therein. From this perspective, then, the second  
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20 half of this paper article analyses the geographical narrative proposed by  
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22 Verdaguer and argues that his centrality to nineteenth-century Catalan nationalism  
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24 rests on his ability to promote the ideological hegemony of the industrial  
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26 bourgeoisie by symbolically incorporating important sectors of rural society into  
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28 an historic bloc. This avoids the problems associated with many accounts of  
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30 Catalan nationalism of this time that are either reduce Catalan nationalism to the  
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32 *manifestation* of the rise to power of the Catalan industrial bourgeoisie (Solé-Tura  
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34 1970; Kark 2007), or reify the Catalan language culture and consequently stress  
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36 the role of the intelligentsia in creating a cultural movement capable of  
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38 (re)awakening the nation (Balcells 1992; Conversi 1997; McRoberts 2001;  
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40 Guibernau 2002).  
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### 51 **The Origins of the *Renaixença***

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54 *La Pàtria*, a poem by Bonaventura Aribau, is generally considered to be the  
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56 starting point of the *Renaixença*, since it was one of the very first poems for  
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58 decades written in Catalan to be published. However, from a territorial perspective  
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60 the poem is also of undoubted interest. In the poem Aribau begins to outline some

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3 of the key themes of the *Renaixença*, namely a love of the *pàtria*, whose natural  
4 beauty is praised and even personified, and the close relation that he establishes  
5 between the *pàtria* and the Catalan language: ‘Aribau identifies language and  
6 *pàtria* in a symbiosis that the *Renaixença* would only accentuate. If the *pàtria* is  
7 recovered in the heart, so is its language’ (Pi de Cabanyes 1984, p. 48).

15 When the literature of the *Renaixença* was institutionalised in the Jocs  
16 Florals<sup>4</sup> of 1859, held, significantly, in Barcelona ‘it was works on the home or  
17 the Catalan mountains<sup>5</sup>, based on the primary identification between Catalonia  
18 and traditional country life, that marked the territorial expansion of the poetry of  
19 the Jocs’ (Fradera 1992, p. 163). The insistence on an idyllic rural life and the  
20 ‘bon pagès’ (good farmer)<sup>6</sup>, were not just about the juxtaposition of tradition with  
21 the moral and material degeneration associated with modernity, but also permitted  
22 the *Renaixença* to fuse elements of national identity, such as traditions, language  
23 and so forth with the homeland, the Catalan *terra*. After all, who is closer to the  
24 earth than the ‘good farmer’? This was no more evident than the spectacular  
25 apparition of Jacint Verdaguer, who in 1865 presented himself at the prize-giving  
26 ceremony of the *Jocs Florals* in country attire, complete with a *barretina*, a  
27 traditional floppy red cap worn by shepherds in Catalonia.

### 49 **Verdaguer’s *Canigó***

51  
52 Verdaguer himself was from a village close to Vic, considered to be the capital of  
53 rural Catalonia and whose diocese was at the centre of an ideological movement,  
54 *vigatanisme*, an important cultural and intellectual school of thought, inspired by  
55 the works of Catholic philosopher Jaume Balmes (1810-1848), In terms of its  
56 ideological content, *vigatanisme* was like many other traditionalist tendencies of  
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3 the time, in that it extolled the virtues of country life and traditional social  
4 hierarchies (including the monarchy), and stressed the centrality of the Catholic  
5 Church in all aspects of daily life. Consequently, it opposed the modernisation of  
6 the Spanish state, though not necessarily Spain itself, and the modernisation of  
7 Catalan society (see, for example, Torras i Bages 1981). In addition to Verdaguer,  
8 other activists such as Canon Jaume Collell, writer and editor of the widely-  
9 circulated newspaper, *La Veu de Montserrat*, (the Voice of Montserrat), made it  
10 possible to reach out beyond the strictly local ambit to all of Catalonia and, most  
11 importantly, to Barcelona (Ramisa 1985).  
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25 Of all Verdaguer's work, it is perhaps his epic *Canigó* that represents the  
26 greatest contribution to the process of the territorial construction of national  
27 identity. Published in 1886, at an overall level *Canigó* is a mixture of local  
28 legends and myths of the mountain that had formed part of 'Catalan' territory until  
29 the Treaty of the Pyrenees saw it was handed over to France in 1659. These tales  
30 are skilfully intertwined by the author with the Romantic historical version of the  
31 birth of Catalonia and the expulsion of the Moors. The main characters are the  
32 result of this mixture: Guifré de Cerdanya is a Count who wages war against the  
33 Moors, and kills his nephew, Gentil, lover of Flordeneu, due to the latter's  
34 betrayal of the homeland; Gentil's father, Tallaferro, a warrior like his brother, is  
35 joined by the third brother, Oliba, the abbot bishop, who leaves *Canigó* to found  
36 the monastery of Ripoll, which, as we shall see, is of enormous importance in  
37 defining the kind of territorial identity of Catalonia that Verdaguer proposes in  
38 *Canigó*.  
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57 In *Canigó* national territorial construction takes place on two levels: on the  
58 one hand, the geographical extent of the national homeland or *pàtria* is identified  
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3 and its beauty praised, while on the other, a historical interpretation of the *pàtria*  
4 is introduced, based on the role of God and the Church. Turning to the first  
5 process, perhaps the most eloquent statement of the territorial intentions of  
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11 *Canigó* is reflected in the dedication at the beginning of the work to ‘the Catalans  
12 of France’, which thus establishes the mountain of *Canigó* as part of the Catalan  
13 homeland, as indeed it was for several centuries before being ceded to France in  
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In the fourth book, *Lo Pireneu*, Flordeneu and Gentil look out from their  
mountain perch over ‘all the lands that my heart loves’: the Pyrenean mountains  
of Minstrels, Puigmal, Noufonts, the Cadí range and Pedraforca, along with the  
woods, forests, waterfalls and mountain. The Pyrenean heights are like

A great tree whose powerful branches/ reaching out from Valencia to  
Roses, weaving together the hills and peaks/ on which there hang, like  
everlasting flowers/ the white hamlets and villages/ and closer to the  
heavens, the hermitages/ that seem, up on high, to be their steps  
(Verdaguer 1997, p. 80).

For Verdaguer, like many other nationalist writers at the time, the  
extension of Catalan territory coincides with the medieval conquests of Jaume I,  
today known as the Països Catalans, the Catalan Countries<sup>7</sup>. But Verdaguer does  
not stop at merely pointing out such places, but running through this passage, and  
many others of the work, are many geographical, geological and botanical  
references that give account of the immense natural beauty of the Catalan lands.  
These references are skilfully blended with local legends to create a highly  
mythical, idealised vision of national territory, and established mountainous

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3 Catalonia, *la Catalunya muntanyenca*, with Vic as its capital, as the spiritual  
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5 reserve of Catalonia.  
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8 However, as important as the Romantic vision of the Catalan homeland  
9  
10 might be, *Canigó* offers a second level of analysis which goes beyond the 'mere'  
11  
12 recognition of the territorial extension and its natural harmony, to include a  
13  
14 religious interpretation of its construction, entirely in keeping with Verdaguer's  
15  
16 own beliefs and those of his fellow *vigatans*. In this sense, we observe how  
17  
18 geography and history are essentially fused, as the Catalan homeland becomes the  
19  
20 stage on which the Christian 'Reconquest' takes place against the Moorish  
21  
22 invaders. Thus  
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29 in the second phase, the poem takes on an historic reach. The war of  
30  
31 the Count and his family against the invaders would become a war of  
32  
33 reconquest, of liberation and consequently of the constitution of a  
34  
35 national homeland over a territory (Torrents 1995, p. 250).  
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41 The expulsion of the Moors in symbolic-historical terms from Catalonia is fused  
42  
43 with the expulsion of the spirits from the mountain of Canigó, and thus Catalonia  
44  
45 comes into being:  
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51 Glory to the Lord! Now we have our homeland/ how high it is, how  
52  
53 strong its awakening/ behold how it rests on the Pyrenees/ its head in  
54  
55 the sky, its feet in the sea/ [...] Oh homeland, victory gives you its  
56  
57 wings/ like a sun of gold your star arises/ throw westwards the chariot  
58  
59 of your glory/ arise, with God's impulse, oh Catalonia, onwards/  
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3 Onwards, through the mountains, land and sea, do not stop/ the  
4  
5 Pyrenees are already too small for your throne/ for being great today,  
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7  
8 you shall awake/ In the shadow of the cross (Verdaguer 1997, p. 234).  
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13 Had Verdaguer stopped at this point, '*Canigó* would have remained an epic  
14  
15 composition of adventures of war and love of spirits and knights' (Torrents 1995,  
16  
17 p. 250) in the geographical setting of the Pyrenees and the historical lands  
18  
19 conquered by Jaume I in the distant, medieval past. However, Verdaguer converts  
20  
21 *Canigó* into an 'allegory of the origins of the Catalan nation projected on to the  
22  
23 *Renaixença* of the Restoration period of the end of the nineteenth century'  
24  
25 (Torrents 1995, p. 249), and in this respect, the figure of Oliba takes on capital  
26  
27 importance, in that his appearance allows Verdaguer to move the geographical  
28  
29 centre of the work to Ripoll, which in the Romantic-inspired construction of  
30  
31 Catalonia had become the symbol of the origins of Catalonia, since it is here that  
32  
33 the remains of the founders of the Catalan dynasty are kept. Thus, *Canigó* tells of  
34  
35 how, in atonement for the death of Gentil, Guifré orders the construction of the  
36  
37 monastery of St Martí on the mountain of Canigó, whose ruins inspired Verdaguer  
38  
39 to begin the epic, and, more importantly from the point of view of the narrative,  
40  
41 inspire the Count's brother, Oliba, to construct a monastery at Ripoll. The  
42  
43 symbolic importance of the monastery for Verdaguer and his peers was double,  
44  
45 since not only did it represent the resting place of the founding dynasty of  
46  
47 Catalonia, but was also the centre of a campaign, led by the Morgades, Bishop of  
48  
49 Vic, to have it recovered from state ownership for the Diocese of Vic after its  
50  
51 destruction in 1835. On regaining the property for the Bishopric in 1884,  
52  
53 Verdaguer dedicated Book 11 to Morgades, establishing a clear parallel between  
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3 the foundation of the monastery and of Catalonia nearly a thousand years before,  
4  
5 and their reconstruction under Morgades, the Church and God at the end of the  
6  
7 nineteenth century. In turn, Morgades would later recognise Verdaguer's own  
8  
9 contribution to the reconstruction of the nation under God, crowning him with the  
10  
11 laurels of Catalonia's national poet.  
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15 However, having fallen foul of the Church and of Bishop Morgades,  
16  
17 Verdaguer removed the dedication for the second edition of 1901, and added an  
18  
19 epilogue, *Los Dos Campanars (The Two Bell Towers)*, which far from having been  
20  
21 written in the intervening years, had in fact formed the basis of Verdaguer's first  
22  
23 approach to *Canigó*, but had been removed when the work took on a different  
24  
25 direction in terms of both narrative and ideology. Whatever the personal reasons  
26  
27 involved for the changes to the second edition, such changes undoubtedly  
28  
29 strengthened the relation established between the nation, its homeland and God,  
30  
31 by reinforcing the eternity of all three. Thus, while *Los Dos Campanars* gives an  
32  
33 account of how the monasteries of Canigó had long since fallen into ruins, the  
34  
35 message is clear: 'What one century constructs, another brings it down to the  
36  
37 earth/ but the monument of God always remains;/ and neither storm, driven snow,  
38  
39 hatred or war/ will bring Canigó to earth/ nor tear down the lofty Pyrenees'  
40  
41 (Verdaguer 1997, p. 243). Catalonia's past, present and future, like the homeland  
42  
43 itself, will not depend on the longevity of man-made monuments such Ripoll, but  
44  
45 on God and his eternal creations, the mountains.  
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### 56 ***Canigó* and Class Politics**

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59 From the preceding analysis, it becomes apparent that with *Canigó* Verdaguer  
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produces an epic poem that is not only a work of great literary merit, but also one

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3 which brings together and goes beyond many of the themes that his fellow  
4  
5 *Renaixença* writers had been exploring for some time. On the one hand, *Canigó*  
6  
7 provides a founding myth for Catalonia and its people that could be transposed  
8  
9 onto nineteenth-century Catalonia and the 'refounding' of the Catalan nation. On  
10  
11 the other, however, while this temporal dimension is undoubtedly important, it  
12  
13 cannot be understood without reference to the spatial dimension that runs so  
14  
15 strongly throughout the work. Particularly with the changes introduced in the  
16  
17 second edition of *Canigó*, the Pyrenees and rural Catalonia in general are at once  
18  
19 a symbol of God's presence and the spiritual reserve of the Catalan nation.  
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24  
25 While this kind of Romantic-inspired conception of the nation was by no  
26  
27 means unique in Europe at the time, the pertinent question in the Catalan case is  
28  
29 why did Catalan nationalism, a movement closely associated with the interests of  
30  
31 the Barcelona industrial bourgeoisie (Solé-Tura 1970; Vilar 1979; Fradera 1992;  
32  
33 and Marfany 1995) who stood to gain most from the process of capitalist  
34  
35 modernisation, seek to construct the Catalan nation around conservative, 'ruralist'  
36  
37 and anti-capitalist values? (Fradera 1992).  
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42 Of course, this situation is only a paradox if we approach it from an  
43  
44 economic determinist perspective that effectively reduces nationalism and its  
45  
46 manifestations to the expression of dominant material forces. A dialectical  
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48 approach, on the other hand, by understanding nationalism as the terrain on which  
49  
50 economic, political and ideological struggles take place, allows us to explain the  
51  
52 political and ideological compromises involved in forming historical blocs around  
53  
54 the hegemonic pretensions of a specific class. This can be clearly seen in the case  
55  
56 of nineteenth-century Catalonia, where the industrial bourgeoisie was faced with a  
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58 most difficult task of developing industrial capitalism while ensuring social order  
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3 and stability. The liberalisation process of the Spanish state, which included the  
4  
5 introduction of capitalist property relations in the agricultural sector, made the  
6  
7 Catalan countryside into a dangerous place for most of the nineteenth century.  
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9 Revolts were common, as were full-scale wars: between 1826 and 1874 four  
10  
11 different wars, fought in the name of Carlism, erupted within Catalonia.  
12  
13 Nominally, the Carlists wars were wars of succession, although the Carlists were  
14  
15 fiercely traditionalist, advocating the official status of Catholicism within the  
16  
17 Spanish empire and the defence of the *fueros*, the political and economic  
18  
19 privileges that the Basque Country and Navarre still enjoyed and that Catalonia  
20  
21 had lost in 1714, and consequently were against economic and political  
22  
23 modernization. Whatever the degree of conflict in Catalonia, be it war or merely  
24  
25 'political brigandage' (Carr 1990, p. 340), the consequences were equally harmful  
26  
27 for the industrial bourgeoisie: their factories and other productive infrastructure  
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29 located outside urban centres became targets for the sectors of the population  
30  
31 discontented with the process of modernization.  
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39 Rural unrest was accompanied by urban conflict. The socio-economic  
40  
41 situation of many urban social sectors, particularly in Barcelona, was notoriously  
42  
43 bad. Such misery was directly proportionate to the radical nature of working-class  
44  
45 politics; in Barcelona, particularly in the textile industry, strikes were frequent,  
46  
47 machines were wrecked and even urban guerrilla warfare erupted (Carr 1990).  
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50 However, while such conflicts were not unique to Catalonia at that time, a  
51  
52 further problem arose: the Catalan industrial bourgeoisie was unable to rely on a  
53  
54 supportive, powerful, modernised state to ensure relatively peaceful management  
55  
56 of such conflicts. On the one hand, the Spanish state was dominated by land-  
57  
58 owning and commercial interests, unsympathetic to the problems of an emerging  
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3 industrial society (de Riquer i Permanyer 2001), and on the other, the inherent  
4  
5 weaknesses of the state apparatus meant that the use of force was often the only  
6  
7 way in which the state would intervene in the management of class conflicts, and  
8  
9 only when it could muster sufficient force (Fontana 1998).  
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13 In this context, the Catalan industrial bourgeoisie could only achieve  
14  
15 hegemony by constructing alliances or historical blocs with other groups in  
16  
17 society, and this could only be done by making political and ideological  
18  
19 compromises towards them. The groups in question were conservative sectors of  
20  
21 society that had supported Carlism, such as urban artisans and the rural world of  
22  
23 small-holders, clergy, old-fashioned bureaucrats, tradesmen whose skills had been  
24  
25 outdated by industry, lawyers, and the minor nobility who were unwilling or  
26  
27 unable to take advantage of the emerging capitalist order (Fontana 1998, p. 271).  
28  
29 Their importance to the hegemonic project of the bourgeoisie was two-fold: on the  
30  
31 one hand, their defence of private property meant that they were the 'ally par  
32  
33 excellence of the industrial bourgeoisie against the urban masses' (Fradera 1985,  
34  
35 p. 24); on the other, their incorporation into the hegemonic project of the  
36  
37 bourgeoisie represented a way of pacifying rural Catalonia.  
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43  
44 Verdaguer's personal contribution to this building of bridges between these  
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46 two worlds should not be underestimated. On the one hand, running through his  
47  
48 *work* is a duality that makes this bridging possible: his writing about rural life and  
49  
50 the mountains was essentially from an urban, Romantic perspective that glorified  
51  
52 landscapes that had always been looked on with suspicion and dread by those  
53  
54 living close by. Yet at the same time, his work constructed a vision of the nation in  
55  
56 which those rural sectors were given a privileged position as the spiritual reserve  
57  
58 of the nation. On the other, Verdaguer's personal trajectory is of undoubted  
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1  
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3 importance: his origins and proximity to *vigatanisme* coexisted with his life  
4  
5 among the Barcelona bourgeoisie, where for many years he was chaplain to one of  
6  
7 the leading members of the industrial bourgeoisie of the time, the Marquis of  
8  
9 Comillas.  
10

11  
12 Verdaguer, then, both promoted and reflected the coming together of what  
13  
14 were, a priori, two antagonistic worlds, a process that saw *vigatans* becoming  
15  
16 increasingly active in the political movements and initiatives associated with  
17  
18 bourgeois nationalism, such as Centre Escolar Catalanista, Lliga de Catalunya,  
19  
20 Unió Catalanista, Centre Català, and the Memorial de Greuges. This political  
21  
22 incorporation included a geographical dimension, whereby *vigatanisme* moved  
23  
24 from its traditional home in Vic to Barcelona itself, where key *vigatans* such as  
25  
26 Canon Jaume Collell and Narcís Verdaguer founded a new newspaper, *La Veu de*  
27  
28 *Catalunya* (Ramisa 1985, pp. 168-9).  
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### 38 **Conclusion**

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40 The historic centrality of Jacint Verdaguer to Catalan nationalism can be  
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42 explained, from a dialectical perspective, by his ability to construct a geographical  
43  
44 narrative that at once *contributed to* and *reflected* the rise to power of the Catalan  
45  
46 industrial bourgeoisie based in and around Barcelona. As this group sought to  
47  
48 consolidate its political and economic power, so it encountered important sources  
49  
50 of opposition: from the generally weak and unsympathetic Spanish state, and from  
51  
52 rural and urban resistance to the centralisation of political power and the  
53  
54 introduction of capitalism. The vision of the relationship between nation and  
55  
56 territory that emerged through the work of writers such as Verdaguer, together  
57  
58 with his personal biography, were key factors in the construction of a historic bloc  
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3 between the industrial bourgeoisie and the property-owning classes of rural  
4 Catalonia against rural and working-class resistance.  
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8 In this way, dialectical approaches to nationalism not only shed new light  
9 on Catalan nationalism but also, I believe, have broader implications for the study  
10 of nationalism in general. Nationalism is inextricably tied up with ideology, and as  
11 such we must be able to come to terms theoretically with key questions surrounding  
12 this concept, such as its relationship with broader political struggles and  
13 underlying structural changes in the relations of production, and the role of  
14 individual agency in cultural and ideological production. From a dialectical  
15 approach, writers such as Verdaguer are not reduced to the status as mere pawns  
16 of the ruling classes, nor are they understood as privileged conveyors of  
17 underlying ethnic forces somehow divorced from the socio-economic context in  
18 which they operated. Rather, by stressing the dialectics of human agency and  
19 structures, of politics and ideology on the one hand, and economic structures on  
20 the other, cultural production can be appreciated in terms of its aesthetic value and  
21 yet understood within the context of broader power struggles occurring in specific  
22 spatial and temporal contexts.  
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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Territories, according to Robert Sack, are delimited areas or spaces that come into being 'when its boundaries are used to affect behaviour by controlling access, for example to resources or power' (1986, p. 19).

<sup>2</sup> Several authors have highlighted the importance of territory for nationalism in general (see, for example, Johnston, Knight and Kofman 1988; and Anderson, J. 1988; Kaiser 2001; Yiftachel 2001); Jan Penrose (2002) has discussed the role of territory in nationalist thought from Rousseau and Herder onwards; while Margaret Moore (1998; 2001) has analysed, from a normative point of view, nationalist claims over territory. At the same time, numerous studies exist that emphasize the spatial dimension of national identity (see, for example, Osborne 1988; Lasserre 1993; the contributions in Hooson 1994; Kaufmann 1998; Kaufmann and Zimmer 1998; Nogué and Vicente 2004).

<sup>3</sup> Not all scholars agree on this point. Steven Grosby, for example, argues that examples can be found in Antiquity of peoples drawing their collective identity from territories which is explained from a putative primordial perspective, that is, people *attribute* certain life-giving qualities to their attachment to the land (2002, p. 192).

<sup>4</sup> The Jocs Florals can be considered the Catalan equivalent of the Welsh-language festival, the Eisteddfod

<sup>5</sup> In the original Catalan, the word 'muntanya' – 'mountain' in the singular, is used, and would find its idiomatic equivalent in the English term 'countryside'.

<sup>6</sup> The idea of the *bon pagès* is inspired in *pairalism*, a traditionalist school of thought that sought to portray an idealised, harmonic picture of rural life and of the social and economic relations that formed part of it.

<sup>7</sup> The extent of the Catalan homeland has been a much-debated issue within nationalist circles. By the late nineteenth century, Enric Prat de la Riba talked of 'Greater Catalonia', including Valencia and the Balearic Islands, while another key figure of Catalan nationalism, Antoni Rovira i Virgili, makes explicit reference to the spread of the *Renaixença* to such regions. Of course, if the Catalan

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nation is defined in historical – dating back to medieval times – and linguistic terms, then it is quite logical to think of the homeland in these extended terms. However, such logic has come up against powerful opposing forces: lack of popular identification/support in these regions for els Països Catalans; political and economic elites with strong ties to the Spanish state centred in Madrid; and the 1978 Constitution that explicitly prohibits the federation of Spanish regions. Consequently, while the Països Catalans continues to be the spatial frame of reference of minority nationalist groups, both inside and outside Catalonia, more moderate, mainstream nationalist have renounced the political project of this extended homeland, although they continue to stress cultural and linguistic ties.

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