

## Sophie Zhang - Spain and Greece, December 2018

This winter I travelled to Spain and Greece, visiting the cities of Seville, Grenada, Cordoba, Barcelona and Athens, in order to gain a deeper understanding of national identity, nationalism and populism in the two countries, a key theme of my POL4 paper on nation state formation, as well as some of the Enlightenment ideas I explored in POL8. I am very grateful for the support I have received from Pembroke College, my Director of Studies and the B. M. Rowe trust fund for this travel project.

In Spain, I found that art and religion played a vital role in shaping national identity. Whilst visiting the Cultural Centre for Flamenco in Seville, I learnt the importance of flamenco and popular poster art in fostering patriotism in the first half of the twentieth century, around the time of the two world wars. Similarly, when I visited the National Art Museum of Catalonia in Barcelona, I learnt about how the *Modernisme* art movement in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century cultivated and shaped Catalanian identity. My visit to Barcelona taught me about the subtle ways that the Catalanian independence movement asserted itself in daily life, despite the government crackdown on the movement after the controversial independence referendum in 2017. Many homes displayed Catalanian flags, political banners and yellow ribbons were painted across the roads (calling for the release of Catalanian political prisoners).

Another area where nationalism and national identity played out was in the realm of architecture and religion. Architecture is an important way for religion to be embodied and expressed, and therefore in the Andalusian region of Spain, where both Islamic and Christian leaders have ruled, it is no surprise that buildings have historically been a great site of religious and national contestation. For example, the Mesquita in Cordoba was originally built as a mosque, but was later repurposed by religious rulers to become a Catholic place of worship. In contemporary times, this mosque-cathedral has also been the site over which religious claims have been contested. Furthermore, it was interesting to learn how quickly Spanish national identity changed after the unification of Spain and the establishment of a Christian kingdom, yet much of the Middle Eastern influences on Spain could still be felt in regions such as Andalusia, which was historically at the centre of Islamic Spain before the Spain's unification.

During my visit to Greece, I visited the Ancient Agora and learnt about the birth of democracy, which helped me understand how Ancient Greek democracy influenced the thought of key Enlightenment thinkers I studied in POL8 (History of Political Thought), who debated and encouraged modern democracy. Furthermore, during my visit to the Benaki Museum, I learnt about the importance of such West European Enlightenment figures in influencing modern Greek nationalism. During the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, the fixation of West European intellectuals with regards to Ancient Greece, lead Greek nationalism to emerge as an attempt to rediscover Ancient Greek culture and trace a direct community of descent from Ancient to modern Greece. Just as art and architecture played a key role in Spanish national identity, archaeology, art and architecture have also played an important role in Greek national identity.