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Spanish Identity: Nation, Myth, and History

Abstract

In the last two centuries, conservatives and liberals have offered two mutually exclusive visions of Spanish history, each with distinct myths, symbols, and heroes. The conservative image, formed in the Middle Ages, was based on the myth of the Reconquest and the need to restore (or keep) the homogeneity of a country characterized by its Christian religion and Latin culture. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, faced with Napoleon's invasion, Spanish liberals understood the danger of associating their modern ideas with France and invented a progressive and democratic Spanish tradition. According to their interpretation, the most authentic Spain was not the one identified with the Reconquest and the Empire, but the Spain of all those who had been excluded from the nation-building process because of their religion or ideas: the tolerant al-Andalus Muslims, the freedom-fighter *comuneros* and the defenders of the democratic medieval *fueros*. The great success of the transition to democracy and the Constitution of 1978 resided in the ability of all different tendencies and parties to overcome this division, to build bridges and create a common national project. For the first time in history, Spaniards managed to build a successful society based on consensus, pluralism and democracy. However, as a reality based on agreements, its nature is fragile. What is at stake now in Spain is to strengthen the viability of this model.

Keywords

Spanish history, heterotopia, Reconquest, Christianity, Latin culture, progressive, comuneros, fueros, al-Andalus, national identity

Spanish Identity: Nation, Myth, and History

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In the last thirty years, Spanish society has experienced a radical transformation that few would have dared to predict in light of the conflictive record of the country's past. In a very short time and with few internal disruptions, Spain broke free from the centuries-old bondage of endemic civil strife and social inequality, dissipated the repressive atmosphere of authoritarianism, and embraced a Constitution that granted broad political freedoms and recognized the cultural and linguistic diversity of its people. Moreover, with its modern infrastructure, strong investments abroad, and a dynamic economy that attracts millions of foreign immigrants, Spain has become an important player in the economic landscape of the European Union, and is a peer among countries that a few decades ago seemed unreachable models of progress and social welfare. One cannot but echo the conclusion of a recent report on Spain by the British publication *The Economist*: "over the past 30 years few other places have been as successful" (20). To a significant extent, this success is due to the Constitution of 1978.¹

The referendum that validated the Constitution (the culmination of an impressive effort to redefine the nation after Franco's death) was the first indication that perhaps the dream of several generations of Spanish liberals—routinely silenced, executed, or uprooted into exile since the return of Ferdinand VII in 1814—finally had become a reality. Indeed, it is possible to affirm that the Constitution of 1978 reproduces in spirit the Cadiz Constitution of 1812, as well as all the liberal legislation that ensued. And although the former does not make explicit reference to its immediate predecessor, the Constitution of 1931, "a comparison of the two texts would

show that some of the drafters of the 1978 Constitution had the earlier text close at hand” (Balfour and Quiroga 45). The successful implementation of a liberal legislative code in Spain was indeed surprising, not only because it happened with a minimum of social and political unrest, but also because the document received the explicit support of the immense majority of parliamentary groups, particularly, and enthusiastically, of the conservative forces that for centuries had been hostile to the very same ideas that it proclaims. Without a doubt, the conciliatory restraint the various political parties exercised in the writing of the Constitution of 1978, giving up some of their customary demands in favor of a basic consensus, produced an inclusive *Magna Carta* that enjoys the support of the majority of the Spanish population today.

Having said that, it is paradoxical that despite Spain’s considerable successes, the image of the country still evokes negative feelings in a significant part of its population. Let us consider, for instance, the national symbols. In theory, according to the Constitution of 1978, the flag and the national anthem represent all Spaniards, but in practice, these symbols are generally identified with conservative, if not fascist, groups. To explain this fact we must consider the country’s recent history. Even though the Constitution is informed by a progressive sensitivity that has inspired an open and tolerant society, the symbols that define the Spanish nation are a slightly modified version of those associated with Franco’s regime, and clearly different from those in use during the Second Republic. Therefore, although in the last three decades Spain has managed to disassociate itself from tyranny and intolerance, its symbols (rather paradoxically) still have negative connotations of repression and fanaticism. Consequently, a Catalan socialist or a Basque communist, even if they feel Spanish, would rather attend a political rally with the flag of Catalonia or Euskadi instead of the national flag. The *senyera* or the *ikurriña* still evoke in them relatively recent memories of resistance against Franco, whereas the national emblem continues to bear the stigma of its association with the dictator’s regime. To those familiar with the importance symbols have in the formation of a collective identity, the persistent identification of the Spanish flag with repression and authoritarianism represents an undoubtedly serious concern.

The problem extends as well to the interpretation of history. Recently, there has been an abundant bibliography seeking to elucidate the meaning of the concept of Spain as a historical entity. In books and periodicals, numerous authors have pondered the possible responses to the question: what is Spain, a nation of nations, a state, an ethno-patriotic entity? When was it born? Who and what should it include? What are its spatial and temporal borders? The answers to these questions are manifold and often contradictory, revealing internal tensions within Spanish society that, far from easing, seem to have gained strength in the last few years. History, as we know, is not innocent or disinterested. The question: what is Spain? is often understood as: what should it have been? or what would I like it to be in the future? In this regard, two critical issues deserve further analysis: the various interpretations of Spain as a nation and the interrelationship between myth and history.

For several years, a growing number of studies on Spanish identity have assigned a central importance to the concept of nation, and, as Henry Kamen observes, the majority of them coincide with the idea that “the myth of Spain as a nation was born around 1808 or 1812” (1). This is partly due to José Álvarez Junco’s influential thesis that Spanish resistance against French occupation represents the defining moment of the birth of the Spanish nation. According to him, Spanish liberals understood this rebellion against the invaders as the popular expression of a national will that would culminate in the writing of the Constitution of 1812. In *Mater Dolorosa*, Álvarez Junco affirms that the attitude of the intellectual elites towards the lower classes suffered a 180-degree turn after the start of the war in 1808, and that this radical change of attitude was the crucial issue of the war (136). The popular uprising against the French proved to the Liberals “que el pueblo, preservado del ‘contagio’ cosmopolita gracias a la ‘falta de lectura,’ había ‘salvado’ al país; y al oponer tan tenaz resistencia frente a Napoleón, España demostraba que era una nación” ‘that the people, preserved from the cosmopolitan “contagion” thanks to their “lack of reading,” “saved” the country; and by opposing such stubborn resistance against Napoleon, Spain demonstrated that it was indeed a nation’ (137). To substantiate his theory, Álvarez Junco mentions the case of Antonio de Capmany, who in his *Centinela contra franceses* (1808) warned his fellow Spaniards

against the danger of adopting French customs, and invited them to imitate the customs of the populace. In Capmany's view, only ignorant people (because of their lack of exposure to French ideas) had managed to preserve unchanged the authentic traditions of the country (Álvarez Junco 136-37).

This interpretation, however, raises legitimate objections. First, the displacement of national identity onto the lower classes in Spain occurred a hundred years before the Napoleonic invasion, as a reaction against the cultural "invasion" of French ideas and fashions. Since, in the eighteenth century, high culture was synonymous with French culture all over Europe, some members of the Spanish upper classes turned to the popular and marginal groups in search of "authenticity": the more marginalized the group, the better; the poorer and the more ignorant, the less exposed to French contagion. Works by Samaniego, Jovellanos, the duke of Almodóvar, Romea y Tapia, León de Arroyal, and Leandro Fernández de Moratín, documented this trend, although, more often than not, to condemn it. In *El deseo de seguidillas*, a *sainete* by Ramón de la Cruz staged in 1769, one of the main characters maintains that, just as survivors of the Visigothic army took refuge in the mountains of Asturias after the Muslim invasion, so now Spaniards should move to the outskirts of the cities and follow the example of the lower classes to preserve authentic Spanish values and initiate a new Reconquest (118-19). A few years later, Capmany echoed those words in his *Teatro histórico-crítico de la elocuencia española* (1786), suggesting the most authentic representatives of a nation are not its scientists or writers, but the lower classes. As he explains, cultured elites tend to adopt fashionable tastes and habits regardless of their origin, while the ignorant populace keeps its customs "constantes, uniformes y comunes" 'constant, uniform, and common' (XCIX-C).² Capmany and de la Cruz represent those members of the Spanish upper classes who, as a reaction against French influence, depict the ignorant masses as representative of the most authentic Spanish values. The Spanish *ilustrados*, on the other hand, generally condemned this attitude as a manifestation of an unjustified and uncouth irrationality.³

Consequently, it is at least doubtful that the populace who rose against the French army in 1808 did so in the name of those principles of popular sovereignty that would later inspire the Constitution

of 1812, especially given the similarities between the Cadiz Constitution and the Bayonne Statute inspired by Napoleon.⁴ Towards the end of the war, both liberals and conservatives endeavored to interpret the struggle in the manner that best benefited their agenda: either as a sign that Spaniards were willing to die in defense of their liberties or as a heroic defense of the sacred traditions of their ancestors. In the end, it seems that the reactionary rhetoric of the clergy and other conservative groups made a stronger impression on the lower classes than the liberal discourse of civil liberties and freedom. The popular cry of “¡Vivan las caenas!” “Long live the chains!” welcoming Ferdinand VII suggests that the liberal interpretation of the War of Independence as a fight for freedom may have been “un grandioso malentendido, origen de muchas de las decepciones que vinieron luego” ‘a magnificent misunderstanding, the origin of many disappointments that came afterwards’ (Álvarez Junco 144). A misunderstanding, however, that turned out to be extraordinarily fruitful, for even if it did not faithfully reflect contemporary reality, it initiated a rich tradition that served as a blueprint for all subsequent attempts to create a free and democratic society.

To establish the starting point of the Spanish nation between the years 1808 and 1812 creates the additional problem of leaving a broad temporal spectrum outside the field of study. What to do, then, with all those authors who in previous centuries expressed their belief of belonging to a nation called Spain?⁵ To address this question, some historians distinguish between ethno-patriotism and nationalism, but these categories have not always proved useful in practice. Henry Kamen, who accepts the year 1808 as the origin of the Spanish nation, warns it is perhaps “a mistake to restrict the rise of nations to the nineteenth century, because this arbitrarily excludes from our consideration a vast span of previous history in which the theme was certainly a relevant one and had an indisputable importance” (10).

A crucial issue lies in the definition of the concepts of nation and nationalism, a point of contention for many critics. While Liah Greenfeld maintains that there are two essential forms of nationalism, civic or “individualistic-libertarian” and ethnic “or collectivistic-authoritarian” (11), Benedict Anderson distinguishes between “nation-states” as products of the Enlightenment and “the nations

to which they give political expression,” whose origins are to be found in a remote past (11), and Anthony Smith identifies five basic approaches to the study of nations and nationalism: primordialism, perennialism, ethno-symbolism, modernism, and postmodernism (223-25). On the other hand, after acknowledging his skepticism towards a possible scientific definition of the term, Hugh Seton-Watson concludes that “a nation exists when a significant number of people in the community consider themselves to form a nation, or behave as if they formed one” (5). It is not surprising that Balfour and Quiroga characterize the concept of nation, as “one of the most elusive in political science,” adding: “What constitutes a nation is the subject of wide-ranging and sometimes contradictory definitions” (6).

Faced with so many interpretations of the concept, critics usually choose the best suited for their purposes, which more often than not leads to an unproductive circularity. For instance, Juan Pablo Fusi, whose objective is to prove that Spain has to be understood as a European variable, suggests that it was the centralism of the Bourbons that would end up creating the sense of nation (130). Similarly, Álvarez Junco, who wants to imbue the idea of Spain with liberal connotations, resorts to the concepts of ethnic patriotism and nationalism to argue that the Spanish nation began its historical journey when Spaniards revolted against Napoleon and the representatives to the Courts of Cadiz embraced popular sovereignty as the fundamental principle of the Constitution of 1812. Juan Sinisio Pérez Garzón takes this argument to its logical extreme, by pointing to the numerous similarities between the Cadiz Constitution and the Bayonne Statute, to conclude that the birth of the Spanish nation, understood as “the liberal nation,” was decisively conditioned by the legislative activity of the French invaders and their Spanish supporters (413).⁶

At this point, it is necessary to acknowledge that the concept of the Spanish nation as a political entity defined by the idea of popular sovereignty not only excludes numerous testimonies spanning several centuries, but also may lead to the paradoxical conclusion that the birth of the Spanish nation crucially depended on the legislative activity of Napoleon. As stated before, it seems doubtful that the authors of the Constitution of 1812 echoed the will of the people

at war with the French, given the behavior of the Spanish masses shortly thereafter. Only two years after the enactment of the Cadiz Constitution, Ferdinand VII managed to revoke it without any serious popular opposition. To a significant extent, this was due to the effectiveness with which the most reactionary forces mobilized the masses against the liberals after the defeat of the French army, a fact that seems to contradict the understanding of Spanish identity as essentially liberal.⁷ References to liberal Spanish traditions in the Constitutional Preamble only prove the drafters were aware of the need to “nationalize” their ideas to avoid the pro-French label.

Now, if the concept of nation understood as the expression of popular sovereignty does not particularly help explain Spain as a historical reality, why has it been so widespread in recent years? Not because it represents more accurately the historical facts, but because it reflects the dynamics and tensions of current Spanish society. For instance, liberal historians may use the concept in order to disconnect Spain from its traditional reactionary connotations (authoritarianism, intransigence, religious fanaticism) and to associate it with tolerance, democracy, and the fight for freedom.⁸ The tactic is part of a larger political project of the Left whose objective is to reinvent Spanish identity, an effort that has been extremely successful, according to Balfour and Quiroga (96-7). What is at stake is not a desire to better understand the past, but to solve the problems of the present and, if possible, to shape a better future. In a society in which the image of Spain has suffered and is still suffering the consequences of its association with the Franco regime, the Left has strived to highlight the country’s open and progressive tradition in order to strengthen the foundation of the new reality. Additionally, this liberal revisionist effort owes its success to the support it has received from the regional nationalist movements, which see it as an opportunity to diminish the historical importance of Spain, and, therefore, to justify their own political agenda.

Another major issue in the historical revisionism of recent years, equally related to the concept of nation, concerns the role that myths have played in the configuration of Spain. Numerous publications have shown that the writing of canonical Spanish history (as any national history) is not only the result of objective scientific investigation, but also the product of partisan biases. These stud-

ies have questioned essential “truths” held by many as unquestionable, such as the idea of Reconquest or the imperial greatness of the sixteenth century; therefore, it is not surprising that they have aroused furious responses. The ensuing polemics are a healthy sign, especially if we take into account that they are perfectly justified. Historiography is a battlefield on which to dispute current issues and, under the cover of objectivity, also becomes a weapon to attack or defend political positions. A review of the record suggests that the ideological division between conservatives and liberals at the beginning of the nineteenth century contributed greatly to the production of two markedly distinct, and often incompatible, historical narratives. Thus, depending on the author, the Muslim invasion of the peninsula is either a tragic event that endangered the very survival of the nation, or the beginning of one of its most memorable periods in arts and sciences. Also, the imperial expansionism of the sixteenth century represents either the most glorious era in the country’s history or one of the main causes of its long and tragic decadence. This means that the traditional myths of the loss of Spain, the Reconquest, and the Empire have been opposed by the liberal myths of al-Andalus, the Castilian *comuneros*, and the alleged ancestral Spanish democracy destroyed by foreign dynasties.

There is, however, an element in this revisionism that needs “revision,” namely the identification of myth with history, for just as the mere denunciation of a myth as false does not invalidate the historical reality that grounds it, the fact that myths represent historical fiction does not make them any less real either. Myths have a decisive influence on the formation of a particular society, condition the behavior of its people, and contribute to the molding of their identity. They are significant not so much because of their allegedly faithful interpretation of the past, but because they reveal strategies to confront the present and ultimately contribute to shape the future. Thus, how they relate to the idea of objective truth (historical events that can be proven scientifically), “is less relevant than the purpose and intention they serve” (Kamen x). Whether myths are true or not is not as relevant as whether or not they are effective.

Let us consider, for instance, the concept of Reconquest, widely acknowledged as one of the foundational myths of the Spanish nation. Whether Pelayo’s intention in Covadonga was to initiate a pro-

cess that would culminate in the expulsion of the Muslims from the peninsula is highly debatable, if not plainly false.⁹ The same can be said about the myth that connected the kings of León with their Visigothic peers as if united by an uninterrupted continuum, or about the reductionist interpretation of the tensions and confrontations in the peninsula during the Middle Ages as a single conflict between native Christians and foreign Muslims. We all know that these myths are false in historical terms. However, we have to acknowledge as a truth that the Christians responsible for elaborating those myths, fictitious as they may be, managed to impose them effectively as a reality, contributing to fashion the character of an entity that in time came to be known as Spain.¹⁰ This is a fact, not a myth. Consequently, if we accept that Spain is a historical reality, whose identity has been shaped in a particular fashion through time, it seems problematic to speak of the “Spanish Muslims” of the Middle Ages. First, it is highly debatable that Spain existed at that time. However, even if we agree that Spain indeed existed in the Middle Ages as the idealized memory of a past to be recovered, or, in other words, as the myth, fashioned by clerics and jurists of a Visigothic *Hispania* united under one monarch and one religion and used by the Christian kingdoms “para cimentar su legitimidad” ‘to cement their legitimacy’ (Álvarez Junco 40), is it justified to say that this myth included the Muslims? Positively not.¹¹ Hence, if we speak of Muslim Spain, which concept of Spain are we using? That of a country shaped (as it was) by exclusionary myths that incited to expel the Muslim invaders, or rather that of a tolerant and inclusive society that seems to reflect, not the past, but our current desires and sensitivity? In any case, it is clear that we should not confuse the historical concept of Spain with the geographical concept of the Iberian Peninsula.¹²

Evidently, I am not implying hereby that Spanish history developed the way it did because of teleological determinism. Spain could have constituted itself as a nation in many different ways: as a political entity encompassing the entire Iberian Peninsula; as the product of the union between Castile and Portugal; as a nation with three religions and two languages, or five languages and three religions; as a centralized, federal, authoritarian, tolerant, fanatic, or democratic country.... However, among the many possible outcomes, the

Christians who monopolized the concept of Spain forged a country with specific characteristics defined by a culture that was Latin and a religion that was Christian; a country, also, where purity of blood became a national obsession.¹³ Spanish liberals at the beginning of the nineteenth century did not like this country, and consequently they proceeded to redefine it, that is, to elaborate a series of alternative national myths. To the “foreign absolutism” of the Hapsburgs, they opposed the “democratic spirit” of medieval Spanish *fueros*, as well as the myth of the Castilian *comuneros*, who, in their opinion, defended the popular sovereignty that had defined Spain from time immemorial.¹⁴ They also argued that “Spanish Muslims” of the Middle Ages formed an open and tolerant society subsequently destroyed by Christian religious fanaticism, in a version of the myth where Christians and Muslims seemed to reflect the Conservatives and Liberals of nineteenth-century Spain. Clearly, these revamped myths are as false as those of Pelayo, the Reconquest, or the Visigoths. The historical revisionism of nineteenth-century liberals reveals above all a strong will to create a new country. This desire shaped their image of an ideal society which, while located in the past, reflected a project for the future.¹⁵

In addition to the traditional and liberal concepts of Spain, a new interpretation of the country’s identity—exotic Spain—emerges in the eighteenth century and reaches international popularity in the Romantic period. Although all three images allegedly reflect intrinsic qualities of the Spanish character, it is clear that all of them are products of specific historical circumstances. The traditional interpretation of Spanish identity that prevailed during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries originated in the confrontation with Jews and Muslims and proposed a reductionist definition of Spain as exclusively Christian. The Reconquest and a political project to “re-establish” the old kingdom of the Visigoths were its foundational myths. This interpretation motivated the end of Muslim political power in the Iberian Peninsula, justified the expulsion of religious minorities, and taking the war-like impulse beyond the confines of the peninsula, created the first universal empire in history. The Spanish identity derived from these events was associated with religious intransigency and fanaticism, as well as with the restraint and aloofness characteristic of dominant groups. Testimonial accounts

from the sixteenth and seventeenth century, whether coming from foreigners or nationals, apologists or detractors, describe the Spaniards as proud and serious, intolerant, frugal, phlegmatic, and reserved.

When Spain lost its political hegemony to France at the beginning of the eighteenth century and experienced a cultural invasion of French fashions, the defensive reaction that occurred contributed to the construction of what I have called the “exotic” image of Spain. To counter the Spanish elites’ tendency to imitate French customs, some members of the aristocracy sought the most genuine expression of Spain in environments as removed from the upper class as possible: not only among the lower and ignorant people of the cities, but also among the marginal groups of the *majos*, gypsies, and bullfighters.¹⁶ The Spanish character so conceived was based in radical opposition to all things French: if French culture occupied a central position all over Europe, Spanish culture ought to be found at the margins; if France monopolized the concept of high culture, Spain should be associated with popular culture; if France meant sophistication, Spain should mean simplicity and roughness; if France was civilized, Spain primitive; if France logical, Spain passionate. This image, which appears in numerous literary works from that time, was disseminated all over Europe by romantic writers. The twofold impulse—nationalistic and exotic—explains its success. The identification of Spain with Andalusia, *flamenco*, gypsies, and bullfighting is still prevalent today and its popularity does not appear to be waning. Carmen may be its most representative symbol.

The exotic image of Spain should not be confused with the traditional image of the previous centuries. Both coexisted in the nineteenth century and both worked against the modernization of the country. The *ilustrados*, well aware of the problem, attempted several strategies to overcome the alleged opposition between “Spain” and “modern.” However, it was not until the Napoleonic invasion that the liberal patriots understood the need to root their progressive ideas in the Spanish tradition if they wanted to avoid their association with the enemy. We should not forget that Napoleon justified his Spanish invasion as an opportunity to modernize the country, and, for that reason, received the support of many progressive-minded Spaniards. In this context, the *Discurso Preliminar ‘Preamble’* to the

Constitution of 1812 reflects a revolutionary approach to the problem, not only because Spain was defined as a political entity based on the novel ideas of national sovereignty and freedom, but also because those ideas were supposed to connect with the most authentic Spanish tradition. The drafter of the Constitution, reflecting the liberal version of Spanish history circulating at the time, proposed that Spaniards had been free from time immemorial and had always endeavored to limit royal authority with democratic laws. It was only after the arrival of a foreign dynasty in the sixteenth century and the defeat of the freedom-fighter *comuneros*—who represented tradition—that royal absolutism was imposed, a form of government foreign to national traditions (104).

The audacity of this indictment against three centuries of Spanish history is hard to exaggerate. Its foundational significance is comparable only to the medieval project that advocated the restoration of a Visigothic Spain united in one God and one King after the defeat of the Muslim invaders.¹⁷ In fact, the disconnection with the reality of its time was just as conspicuous, since both of them were born not so much as reflections of the present but as visionary projects for the future. As a gesture whose goal was to create a new reality, this new approach included an intense mythical activity.

The liberal project dating from the first three decades of the nineteenth century, as seen in the Preamble to the Constitution of 1812 and in numerous poems, dramas, and newspaper articles, coherently presents Spanish identity as fundamentally egalitarian and democratic.¹⁸ According to this interpretation, Spaniards had governed themselves through consensual agreements until foreign dynasties introduced royal absolutism. Consequently, the most authentic Spain was not the Spain of Charles V and Phillip II but the Spain of those who opposed them in defense of popular freedom: the Castilian *comuneros* and the Aragonese who died in defense of their *fueros*, Padilla, Bravo, and Maldonado, Bishop Acuña, Diego de Heredia, and Juan de Lanuza. This explains why during the Liberal Triennium, secret societies and revolutionary publications extolled their memory with hagiographic fervor, organized events to restore their reputation, and created symbols and traditions to perpetuate their legacy.¹⁹

The mythical activity, however, extended well beyond those

years and was strengthened through the writings of exiled liberals, who identified with all the groups excluded from the Spanish nation-building project due to their religious beliefs or ideas. In an article published in 1825 in *Ocios de españoles emigrados*, Basque exile Pablo de Mendíbil declared that he personally identified not with Christian Spain, heir of the Reconquest, an inquisitorial and fanatic society in his opinion, but with the tolerant and cultured society of “los árabes nuestros abuelos” ‘our forefathers, the Arabs’ (299). The idealization of al-Andalus as a multicultural society where three cultures and religions coexisted in harmony became one of the foundational myths of Spanish liberalism, together with the image of Castilian *comuneros* as advocates of the common people and of the medieval *fueros* as the embodiment of Spain’s democratic spirit.²⁰

For almost two centuries, conservatives and liberals forged two exclusionary visions of Spain, each with a unique interpretation of Spanish history, each with distinct myths, symbols, and heroes.²¹ The great success of the transition to democracy and the Constitution of 1978 resided in the ability to overcome this division, to build bridges and create a common national project. This middle ground allowed the political viability of a liberal Constitution for the first time in Spanish history, a Constitution that, on its thirty-year anniversary, earned the explicit endorsement of the major political parties, both from the Left and the Right. This is not to say that the Constitution has provided an answer to all the country’s problems.

The most critical challenge Spain faces at this moment arises from the flirting with separatism by regional nationalist parties (the third key element in the transition process). In fact, if we ignore the anachronistic nostalgia exhibited by some irrelevant far-right groups, the only serious challenge to the Constitution comes from that camp. When I speak of serious challenges, I do not imply the possible amendments of secondary issues or minor aspects of the text. What I imply is the questioning of the text’s legislative authority, the defense of the right of some regions to secede, the refusal to recognize the sovereignty of the Spanish people over the entire national territory. The challenge concerns the Left in particular as, for the first time in history, Spaniards have been able to build a progressive society based on freedom and tolerance, neutralizing the conservative tendencies of an important part of the population. The

strength of the consensual approach that defined the transition to democracy resided in the creation of a common ground where the majority of Spaniards felt included. However, as a reality based on agreements, its nature is fragile. Just as the Right has the responsibility to avoid a recurrent tendency in Spanish history to political intolerance and dictatorship, so is the Left responsible for neutralizing the opposed tendency toward fragmentation and social instability. It is up to the Left to demonstrate that they are capable of defending a viable model of Spain different from the one that has monopolized the idea of the country until recently. What is at stake is to prove that despite what conservative groups may claim, the alternative to traditional Spain is not the anti-Spanish zeal of those who seek to undermine or destroy it, but a nation based on pluralism and respect for differences.

Another pending issue in today's Spain is the lack of a distinct image to represent it. Traditional Spain immediately evokes images of mystics and conquerors, fanatical friars, and serious and proud people, whether true or not. Exotic Spain evokes images of gypsies and bandits, bullfighters and guitars, violence and unleashed passions, spontaneity and primitivism. However, neither the Spain of the Reconquest and the Empire, nor the Spain of Carmen and Lagartijo does justice to the country's current reality. The inclusive and dynamic Spain of today needs to develop an image that more accurately reflects its nature. So far, the most successful attempts made towards this purpose, such as the films of Pedro Almodóvar and Juan José Bigas Luna, rely too heavily on what may be called a modernization of the old exotic image: a perpetuation of exotic tropes framed by a modern and postmodern sensitivity. Evidence suggests that Spaniards, regardless of their political persuasion, have internalized the exotic image to such an extent that they tend to legitimize it even when attempting to change it. The creation of a new image more attuned to the new reality of the country is still pending.²²

In the eighties, the institutional support of the PSOE to Spanish cinema (to Almodóvar in particular) suggests that the socialist government was already aware that in addition to laws, the new situation required the creation of new images, myths, and symbols.²³ However, the creation of myths, necessary as it is, should not inter-

fere with the writing of History. As I indicated above, myths belong to a different reality than facts. Whether we like it or not, the history of Spain has followed a path that we have to acknowledge and accept, although it does not mean that the country should perpetuate its errors. The Spain of the future will become what Spaniards want it to be like, but this willful disposition should not be a key element in the interpretation of the past. The radical discord among historians reveals that, far from being a dispassionate activity, Spanish historiography is still subject to the whims of often-incompatible political projects. History writing is thus confused with national myth making. This proves that the conciliatory mood that guided the writing of the 1978 Constitution still faces important challenges. Spain must preserve the spirit of consensus and broaden its scope to ensure an open and stable society. The unilateral denunciation of the transition pacts as interim responses to a particular situation may provoke a falling back to the confrontational dynamics that have so often characterized modern Spanish history.

The growing political tension experienced by the country since the second term of the Aznar administration is perhaps responsible for the recent proliferation of books on Spain. To this regard, needless to say, the articles included in this volume do not aspire to provide an exhaustive examination of such a complex subject, but they do explore some of its most polemic elements. In general, they center on two major themes: the conflictive relationship of Spain with its internal and external Others, and the need of the country to find an updated image more attuned to its current reality.

In "Uses of a Myth: al-Andalus," Serafín Fanjul explores a highly charged subject that touches upon the foundational myths of both traditional and liberal Spain. According to the author, in the mid-nineties there was a significant change of attitude in the Spanish press, shifting from coverage of the Middle East conflict usually favorable to Israel to a generalized pro-Arab position. This change was also experienced by other European countries, but in Spain it implied a reassessment of its Islamic past that in the last twenty years has gotten out of hand in its blatant disregard for the historical record. According to Fanjul, the idealization of a mythical and entirely imaginary al-Andalus needs to be reassessed by a serious and scientific analysis of the historical facts.

Nil Santiáñez's "Habitús, Heterotopia, and Endocolonialism in Early Spanish Literary Fascism" is also concerned with the complex relations between Spain and the Islamic world, although he focuses on Spain's most recent colonial past. While Fanjul criticizes a deformed interpretation of the historical record, Santiáñez tracks down the beginnings of Spanish fascism in the Rif war and warns about the danger of colonialism turning into endocolonialism. According to Santiáñez, the textual appropriation of the Moroccan landscape not only anticipated the military occupation of the country, but, transferred to Spain, contributed to the development of the Civil War of 1936. Santiáñez examines the work of fascist author Rafael Sánchez Mazas and shows how the techniques used to describe the Moroccan Other are later employed to depict Spanish workers, intellectuals and politicians. The colonial mission in Africa is characterized as a rehearsal of the mission that Franco would carry out in Spain. This suggests that the desire to dominate the Other can easily translate into militarism and, therefore, colonization can turn against its practitioners.

In "The Basque Country: The Heart of Spain, a Part of Spain, or Somewhere Else Altogether," Paddy Woodworth reminds us that all nationalisms rely on myths and that both Spanish and Basque nationalisms are no exemption. However, what makes Euskadi different is the persistence of an attitude that identifies negotiation with treason, and therefore hinders the possibility of agreements. As Woodworth points out, those who attempt to move to the middle ground are ostracized. Nevertheless, the author insists, Basque reality is quite multilayered, which makes him think that any solution to the conflict can only occur through dialogue and consensus.

The creation of a new image of Spain better adapted to its current reality informs the rest of the contributions. In "Spain Reincarnated: Julio Medem's *Caótica Ana* and the New Media(tion) in the World," Susan Martin-Márquez examines the new role that Spain seeks to perform in the international arena. According to Martin-Márquez, personalities like Judge Garzón (prosecutor of Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet) and Spanish Prime Minister Rodríguez Zapatero (instrumental in the creation of the Alliance of Civilizations) seek to replace the United States as leaders in the fight for international justice. This grandiose project, however, may

be weakened by the lack of political will to face the country's own past. On the other hand, according to Gonzalo Navajas, a certain degree of amnesia may not be altogether bad, especially if remembrance causes growing tensions. In "The Spanish Case for Europe: the Power of Cultural Identity," Navajas considers the transition to democracy as a turning point when the country deliberately chose to leave behind—although not necessarily to forget—a confrontational history of civil strife and authoritarianism. Ever since, Spain has built a modern, diverse, and tolerant society fully integrated within Europe. Hopefully, the country's opening to the world, both through Europe and Latin America, will assuage the tension of its internal conflicts and inspire a broader and universal outlook for its citizens.

Cristina Sánchez Conejero ponders the meaning of "Spanish" in an increasingly interconnected world. In "Spaniwood? English Language Spanish Films since the 1990's," Conejero analyzes recent English language production by Spanish directors, to highlight the inadequacy of national categories applied to the global film industry. If a film like Amenábar's *The Others* received several Goya awards from the Spanish Academy of Cinema, despite being in English and having foreign actors, does it mean that we should attempt a more inclusive definition of national cinema or should we simply study film as a global phenomenon?

Finally, Andrés Zamora's article, "A Vindication of the Spanish Mother: Maternal Images in the Filmic Make-over of the Nation," examines how the long duration of Franco's dictatorship affected the perception of Spanish identity. According to Zamora, the chronological pervasiveness of the regime contributed to the confusion between temporal and essential qualities conflating its characteristics with that of the country. Spanish films of the seventies developed metaphors of the country through repressive images of violence and intolerance. This association began to weaken after the dictator's death. Zamora examines maternal figures in Spanish films of the last twenty years and shows that there is a distinct tendency to exorcize the past through the creation of mother figures that represent polymorphic perversions of the traditional maternal ideal.

Notes

1 None of these changes would have occurred so rapidly had it not been for the social dynamics in existence during Franco's dictatorship. In "Examen de conciencia," an essay published in *El furgón de cola*, Juan Goytisolo points out that in the 1960s, for the first time in history, thanks to the double flow of foreign tourists and Spanish migrant workers, Spaniards learned to assimilate the economic values of industrial nations, "y todo ello ... bajo un sistema originariamente creado para impedirlo" 'and all this ... under a system originally created to prevent it' (261).

2 This reaction reveals a strong nationalistic component. Bruce King considers that nationalism "aims at group solidarity, cultural purity, and dignity, a typicality in the lower orders (worker or peasant) and rejection of cosmopolitan upper classes, intellectuals and others likely to be influenced by foreign ideas" (42).

3 I provide a full account of this phenomenon in *España exótica: la formación de la imagen española moderna*.

4 According to Pérez Garzón, the Statute of Bayonne strongly influenced the Cadiz Constitution and all subsequent Spanish liberal constitutions of the nineteenth century. This affinity, however, was not acknowledged "porque le quedó la marca de ser un texto 'afrancesado' y eso pasó a significar tanto como traidor a la patria" 'because the text's characterization as pro-French implied that it was a traitor to the country' (130).

5 See for example Cristóbal de Villalón, Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, Diego de Saavedra y Fajardo, Francisco de Quevedo, Félix Lope de Vega, Benito Jerónimo Feijóo, José Cadalso, and Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos. Miguel Antonio de Gándara claims in 1759 that "no tengo más patria, más partido, más paysanage ni más sangre que España, España y España" 'I have no other fatherland, no other allegiance, no other country, and no other blood than Spain, Spain, and Spain' (2).

6 Santiago Muñoz also affirms that the Bayonne Statute left a decisive mark on the Cadiz Constitution: not only did the former mobilize the constitutionalist impulse among liberals, but more importantly—and similarly to what happened to the Cadiz text—its supporters considered that the document should respect Spanish traditions and institutions (32).

7 Examples abound in accounts by liberal writers like José Somoza (461) and León López y Espila (20-3). In *El risco de la Pesqueruela*, for instance, Somoza reports that as soon as Ferdinand VII returned to Spain in 1814, he heard turmoil in the streets and saw a procession, directed by the clergy, carrying a portrait of the king and shouting "Viva la religión y mueran los impíos" 'Long live our religion and death to the impious' (461). The author recounts how the

mob attempted to storm his house and how he escaped to safety thanks to the intervention of some of his servants.

8 Álvarez Junco begins *Mater Dolorosa* by stating that his book tries to understand the problems confronted by Spanish identity, “una cultura y un sentimiento de los que se sienten distanciados una parte—mayor o menor, según las estimaciones, pero innegablemente suficiente como para generar conflictos—de los ciudadanos del Estado español” ‘a culture and a feeling with which a segment of the citizens of the Spanish State—a greater or smaller percentage, depending on the estimates, but without a doubt significant enough to cause friction—are unable to identify’ (18). Although the author speaks of “understanding,” he tries to solve what he perceives as a problem. His study seeks to configure an idea of Spain that is less conflictive, more appealing to all Spaniards, and more attuned to the country’s new reality.

9 According to traditional Spanish historiography, Pelayo was a Visigothic nobleman who commanded the first Christian military victory against the Muslim invaders in the battle of Covadonga. He is considered to be the initiator of the Christian “Reconquest” of the Iberian Peninsula.

10 In *España y las Españas*, Luis González Antón offers a detailed presentation of the origin and evolution of this myth.

11 In the foreword to the second edition of *La realidad histórica de España* (1962), Américo Castro points out that, when speaking of Spaniards, we have to understand a group of people from northern Hispania who, back in the eighth and ninth centuries, “comenzó por dotar de *dimensión político-social* su condición de creyentes cristianos, y por eso se llamaron a sí mismos ‘cristianos,’ un hecho nuevo y sin igual en la vida de Occidente” ‘began to provide a *socio-political dimension* to their being Christian believers, which is why they began to call themselves ‘Christians,’ a new and unprecedented event in the West’ (xx).

12 The lack of coherence that characterizes any discussion on the subject is worrisome. It is present even in authors who are quite perceptive otherwise. For instance, Balfour and Quiroga declare that one cannot speak of a differentiated idea of Spain and Spanish identity until the sixteenth century (104), but they lament the exclusion of Medieval Islamic and Jewish Spain from “the canon of national culture” by conservative historians (101). If Spain did not exist as such in the Middle Ages, how can we speak of “Islamic Spain”? Should we not rather refer to the Muslims of al-Andalus or of the Iberian Peninsula? Discussions on the subject elude any logic: to question that medieval Muslims were Spanish is perceived not as an argument that can be logically proven or refuted, but as a political position that needs to be condemned.

13 Anthony Marx affirms that nationalism in the core countries of Western Eu-

rope “was built, more or less purposely or successfully, not only in the context of, but also on the back of, fanatical religious passion and conflict” (193). According to Marx, Spain’s “early efforts at exclusionary nation-building perhaps provided a template for others later but proved premature for Spain herself, and it failed to take hold” (195).

14 *Fueros* is the Spanish designation of a compilation of laws, especially at a local or regional level. *Comuneros* are Spaniards who revolted against King Charles V, to defend local interests.

15 A similar historical revisionism occurred in other European countries at the beginning of the nineteenth century. According to Leersen, to counter the claim that some French aristocratic families made about being descendants of the Franks, some post-revolutionary historians interpreted French history “as a long and radically ethnic conflict translated in terms of social classes—the conquered Gauls passing on the ideal of liberty and tribal democracy to the communes, the *roturiers*, the cities and *Tiers état*; the Franks imposing feudalism and the aristocratic values of the *ancien régime*” (46). This caused an identification of the French people “with *nos ancêtres les Gaulois* (as opposed to Montesquieu’s earlier ‘*nos pères, les anciens Germains*’)” (46).

16 The *majos* were people from the lower classes of Spanish society who were recognized by their distinctive clothing and behavior, as seen in the paintings of Francisco de Goya.

17 Susan Martin-Márquez calls this double “invention” of Spain “First-Wave” and “Second-Wave Nation Building” (12-27).

18 On 27 April 1814, *La abeja madrileña* claimed that it was in Covadonga and in Sobrarbe where the social pact of Spaniards began, “pues las leyes de Castilla y Vizcaya, con los fueros de Navarra y Aragón, componían una constitución tan sabia y perfecta, qual vemos y admiramos en la promulgada en Cádiz” “since the laws of Castile and Biscay, together with the *fueros* of Navarra and Aragon, made up such a wise and perfect Constitution as the one we see and admire now enacted in Cadiz” (383). Similar statements abound in liberal newspapers of the time; see for instance *Semanario patriótico* (6 Jul. 1809): 153-4; *Redactor General de España* (16 Nov. 1813): 61; *La colmena* (25 Apr. 1820): 90; Bartolomé Gallardo’s *Alocución patriótica* (1820): 19; *Minerva Nacional* (213-5); *El eco de Padilla* (17 Aug. 1821): 51; *El Zurriago* 6 (1822): 2; and *El Espectador* (28 Mar. 1823): 352.

19 Some members of Masonic lodges decided to break away from them in order to establish a new association heir to the *comuneros*. According to Antonio Alcalá Galiano, liberal Bartolomé Gallardo claimed to have found proof in ancient documents that the *comuneros* had formed a kind of secret society with symbols resembling those of the Masons and on that ground he designed a

project whereby the Spanish masons would have new grades alluding to those who fought in the War of the *Comunidades* (170).

20 Other articles included in *Ocios* reveal how early nineteenth-century liberals identified themselves with medieval Muslims of the Iberian Peninsula. Likewise, during his exile, José Joaquín de Mora published a *Cuadros de la historia de los árabes* (1826), characterizing them as wise and tolerant and declaring he considered them “parte de nuestra familia” ‘part of our family’ (VI). The identification with the Arabs of Medieval Iberia is documented as early as the eighteenth century, but it was not as unanimously upheld among the liberals as the identification with the *comuneros*. I provide a more detailed account of the positive image of the Arabs among Enlightened Spaniards in *Guerras literarias del XVIII español*.

21 Eric Hobsbawm points out that when confronted with a new situation, members of a society may resort to the past “to construct invented traditions of a novel type for quite novel purposes” (6).

22 Different from the traditional and liberal image, identified with their respective groups, the exotic image has been accepted as authentic by Spaniards of all ideologies, although, of course, each group interprets it differently. See chapter II of Torrecilla’s *España exótica*.

23 The Second Republic myths, which the Left embraced for decades, recall a time of radical confrontation that cannot adequately reflect the conciliatory and inclusive climate of the new Spain.

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