

José Álvarez Junco and others, *Las historias de España. Visiones del pasado y construcción de identidad*. Barcelona, Madrid: Crítica, Marcial Pons, 2013, xxvii+914 págs.

The identities of Spain, from Traditional Narratives to Current Historiography¹

Along with studies on cultural memories, national identities have proved to be one of the most fertile grounds in the last three decades for encouraging historiographic studies; for the images of the past – and by extension the writing of history – are one of the principal ways in which identities and memories manifest themselves. It is however true that the study of historiography can by no means be reduced merely to an inquiry concerning public uses and historical narratives. Historiography also covers all ideas, whether philosophical or methodological, which revolve around historical writings and historical thought, their specific methods and content, and the circumstances of the historians and intellectuals that produce them. In fact, it is historiography itself which has ceased to be one of the main supports of identity processes as such uses and narratives diversify and adapt to mass societies. At the same time, the fact that current historiography has been able to deconstruct those identities and memories, by examining how they have arisen and evolved, and what their political roles have entailed, has also been an issue worthy of attention.

After all, if professional historiography – in essence modern historical research – emerged in the 19th century closely (albeit not exclusively) linked to political narratives, in the twentieth century historiography has also shifted to the point where it now examines all kinds of institutions, movements and cultural objects in a historical way, narratives on the past included. From the 1980s onwards, the fields of political and cultural history were the realms in charge of unveiling the role played by historical narratives (narratives concerning identities, memories and policies), and analyzing in what way history books, school textbooks, monuments, toponymy, films, literature, and pictures have endorsed those narratives. Today, it is not possible to write a history of a specific country or region (France, Italy, Spain, Catalonia, etc.) without taking into account how its identity narratives – understood as “cultural artefacts” of legitimization – have emerged and changed. Far from what happened one hundred years ago, historiography has evolved to become a non-nationalist discipline, one of its main tasks being to puzzle out the foundations of nationalisms.

This is just what the present book does with the study of the narratives of Spain and its regions. Forming volume 12, which ends the encyclopedic *Historia de España* (2008-2013) under the stewardship of Professors Josep Fontana and Ramon Villares, the work has been coordinated by Professor José Álvarez Junco, perhaps the foremost specialist in research on the history of national identities in Spain, with contributions by Gregorio de la Fuente Monge, Carolyn Boyd and Edward Baker. Professor de la Fuente is an expert in aspects concerning the political history of liberal Spain in the 19th century, Professor Boyd, a well-known US Hispanist on account of her studies on the

¹ Gonzalo Pasamar is in charge of the Project “The memory of the Spanish Civil War during the transition to democracy”. Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness (Spain). Reference HAR2011-25154 (2012-2014).

so-called history of the curriculum and the textbooks of history in contemporary Spain, as is Professor Baker – the latter being a US historian whose research deals with cultural history, lately that of Madrid in the early decades of the twentieth century.

In order to discuss the main aspect of Spanish narratives, the volume has been divided into three parts: the first, by Álvarez Junco and de la Fuente Monge, which is the longest with 18 chapters, devoted to “La evolución del relato histórico” (pp. 1-437); the second, by Carolyn Boyd, with five chapters, dealing with “Los textos escolares” (pp. 449-561); and the last, by Edward Baker, also with five chapters, on “La cultura conmemorativa” (pp. 565-663). To highlight the importance of the topics, the work is completed with several appendices with extensive, useful lists of bibliography and sources (“fuentes historiográficas directas”), plus a no less interesting selection of documents and testimonies.

Las historias de España. Visiones del pasado y construcción de identidad is not of course the first book to be published in Spain on the narratives and their supports on the history of Spain – one can find other examples in the attached bibliography – but because of its extent and updating, it is probably the most notable and accessible synthesis of this subject. What is harder to understand however is the doubts of its authors concerning the place the book should occupy, and whether it is a historiographic work or not. While we may indeed discuss whether the second part belongs to this field – we think that it does – there is no doubt that experts would consider the first part (the longest) to be a typical work of historiography. In this sense we can also argue that if the history of historiography – understood as an intellectual history ranging over several centuries – has any sense for historians, this is because it offers the possibility of examining such a sort of representational problem, i.e. the role of memory and “contemporary time” in historiography; the ways historical writings portray historical time; the place of rhetoric and method; the introduction of new topics, amongst others, together with the issue presented in this volume: the changes in identity narratives.

Indeed, the interest in examining Spanish historiography as a tool of national identities harks back to previous studies carried out in Spain on modern historiography. This was the case of the pioneering book *Historiografía y nacionalismo español (1834-1868)*, by Paloma Cirijano Marín, Teresa Elorriaga Planes and Juan Sisinio Pérez Garzón published in 1985, a book that came about as the result of the interest aroused by culture and liberal ideas accompanying the development of Spanish historiography in the 1970s and 1980s. It would have to await the coming decades (during the 1990s, interest in the historical idea of Spain took a leap forward) to find a collective volume such as *La construcción de las historias de España*, edited by Ricardo García Cárcel in 2003. This may be a precedent to the present book (or at least the first two parts).

The theoretical perspective of *Las historias de España* is nurtured by classical studies by Benedict Anderson and Eric J. Hobsbawm, on the “invention of traditions”, but references to the role of memory are also present in Edward Baker’s section with the distinction being made between “recuerdo” and “memoria” (a difference that is hard to translate into English but that may be manifested in the difference, for instance, between simple evocation and memory). According to experts, from the 1980s onwards, reflection on the topic of “imagined communities” has been increasingly mingled with aspects concerning social or cultural memories, and today no reflection on identities is possible without looking at memories.

In this work the reader will thus discover a general survey of a complete range of histories of Spain and its regions – many times, mythical stories – and authors (or reference to them at the very least), from the ancient expressions of “identity and pride of belonging” to current Spanish historiography. Histories and manuals targeting schools, as well as memory aspects relating to toponymy, centenaries, and annual events in contemporary Spain, have also deserved specific attention.

The section written by Professors Álvarez Junco and de la Fuente Monge is with no doubt the most important. It represents a painstaking inquiry concerning an impressive volume of sources (chronicles, histories, essays, etc.) which, as they freely admit, would otherwise have been impossible to amass without digital resources, such as the Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes and other collections. It also serves to highlight their generosity – and at the same time rigour – in their willingness to recognize the merits of the specialists they are quoting. Unfortunately, this is not often the case, at least in the Spanish academic world.

In their overview of a wide range of identity narratives, the authors present a history of historiography which takes the reader through different ages and ways of writing on the past: from the first chronicles coming from the axis comprising the Asturias “core of resistance” and the Kingdoms of Leon and Castile, during the Middle Ages, to current historiography on Spain and its regions and nationalities. Both the specialist and the curious reader will find here an interesting survey where a great deal of effort has been made to accommodate works and writers, and where several threads can be observed that link ancient narratives to modern historiography.

According to the authors of this section, the origins of Spanish identities are shrouded in mist, since, while it is true that the ancient writers coined expressions such as “Hisperia”, “Iberia” and “Hispania”, one cannot ignore the fact that these names were simply geographical references to the Peninsula. They tell us it was necessary to wait for the Visigoths to find seminal expressions of identity and pride.

After examining these early signs, the authors turn their attention in the following chapters (chapters 2-5) to review the countless “chronicles” and “histories”² that cover the 9th and 10th to the 15th century, until they come to the official chronicles written during the time of the Catholic Monarchs (Ferdinand II of Aragon and Isabella I of Castile), Charles V and Philip II (the reader will also find here a good selection of texts where none of the most outstanding are lacking: the Chronicles of Florian de Ocampo, Ambrosio de Morales, Esteban de Garibay, etc.). Apart from its formal aspects based upon the rules of the *Ars rhetorica*, the theme stemming from such different sources is the construction of a “Gothic myth” to showcase the “origins of Spain”, and the need to surpass it in search of more ancient origins (pre-Roman and pre-Greek). It is however hard to completely agree with the assertion that during the first two Hapsburgs

² During the Middle Ages and well into the 16th century the expressions “chronicles” and “histories” were interchangeable. Experts however have observed a subtle difference between them: while the expression “chronicle” normally refers to the genre of the writing of history as such, the term “histories” (in the plural) alludes to the content of the genre, i.e. the facts. For the examination of the consequences of this distinction, see Gonzalo Pasamar “The Traditional Forms of the ‘History of the Present’: From Herodotus to Humanist Historians”, *História da historiografia*, 10 (dezembro 2012): pp 173 ff. [165-182].

there were no noteworthy inroads made in representing the history of Spain with respect to the period of the Catholic Monarchs. The importance of the *Crónicas de Indias* would maybe indicate something different.

From chapter 6 onwards the authors analyze two fundamental components of Spanish identities arising in the 16th century that subsequently enjoy an extended period of fortune: 1) the image of Spain as seen from abroad and 2) what the authors call “anticuarismo corporativo” (see below).

The first issue was crucial for understanding how the negative aspects of the Spanish Empire and of the Hapsburgs (barbarism, cruelty, etc.) with “the Spaniards” came to be identified. According to the authors, this fact would demonstrate that “the method of government in Spain in the Austrias era was obsolete, [and] not based on the opinion but on the coercion”, [since] “they ignored propaganda, a keystone in modern wars” (p. 109). This situation did not however prevent the birth of what was the most important historical work for centuries, the *Historia General de España* by Father Mariana (chapter 7), which, as the authors point out, was published for the first time in Toledo in 1592 in Latin under the title of *Historiae De Rebus Hispaniae*. This detail is crucial to understand Mariana’s identity purpose: it was about counteracting the negative image of Spain coming from foreign writers who also wrote in the language of Cicero. The fact that the book did not receive official support well into the reign of Philip III – despite its translation into Spanish, we might add – may give an idea of the aforesaid disinterest in propaganda typical of the years of Philip II.

The “anticuarismo corporativo” is another aspect that illustrates the 16 and 17th-century historiographies, which was not completely swept away before the 19th century. The thesis on its social function is perhaps one of the most interesting contributions in this volume. The authors define such a phenomenon as a widespread practice consisting of the invention of spurious sources – what Nicolás Antonio and Gregorio Mayáns called “historias fabulosas” (fabulous stories) and José Godoy Alcántara “falsos cronicones” (false chronicles). This habit, they explain, stemmed from the fact that in a society such as that of the Ancien Regime, where “the corporative principle” prevailed, the need to boast about remote origins was crucial. If people’s rights and duties depended upon the special laws of the group, institution or “collegium” to which each one belonged, the invention of traditions (the more remote the better) became a habit that was deeply rooted in that society (p. 128).

One of the symptoms related to “anticuarismo corporativo” was the emergence of a historiography of “contentious” interest in other kingdoms forming part of the Hispanic Monarchy such as the Corona de Aragon, Navarre and Portugal, and even within the Castilian Crown itself (chapter 8). These chronicles and histories were to trigger the “particularistic myths” concerning the Aragonese, Catalan, Basque and Portuguese peoples. The list of examples the author offers is illustrative: the “Fueros de Sobrarbe” as a body of ancient freedoms in Aragon, the “pact” between the Goths and Charlemagne, as the foundation of the origins of Catalan freedoms, the presumed remoteness of the Basques rooted in the mythical Tubal, etc.

From chapter 9 onwards, the authors enter the Enlightenment period of historiography, and the first task they set themselves is to examine the so-called “novatores” of the late 17th century and the first half of the next, from Nicolás Antonio

to Gregorio Mayáns. References to the “historiographic turn” that allegedly happened at that time may however need further explanation. In our opinion, it is equivocal to complain about the fact that the “novatores” and Enlightenment intellectuals did not supposedly imitate a universal model of Enlightenment historiography. Although there were some very well-known writers in Europe (Voltaire, the Abbé Raynal, William Robertson, etc.) who took historiography beyond traditional models, it is more difficult to state that there was truly a “model of Enlightenment historiography” as opposed to “national history” (p. 173). What to our mind really took place was that the so-called Philosophes (French, Scottish, Germans), having invented the genre of moral philosophy, used it to provide historiography with original tools to understand changes in ideas, law, economics, etc., that is, to refresh the national narratives (the history of the Spanish Empire included). In this way, criticism of “false chronicles” by the “novatores” would somehow be rooted in the new way of understanding culture. Yet, as far as “historiographic novelties” in the 18th century in Spain were concerned, it would be “literary” and “civil” history, written or claimed in the second half of the 18th century (chapter 10), that would provide the best expression of what had been said so far. (In chapter 10 the reader will find an overview of the main Spanish Enlightenment historians, from Father Juan Francisco Masdeu to Jaime de Capmany, including Campomanes, Juan Pablo Forner, Juan Sempere y Gaurinos, etc.).

Chapters 11 to 14 are devoted to the 19th century. Here, the authors spare no effort to examine the different myths and narratives of Spain that are doing the rounds during this period, and can, when all is said and done, be regarded as the inventor of Spanish nationalism proper. First, the core of “liberal historicism” is addressed, that is, the interest in medieval “Courts” as presumably being the origins of modern liberal freedom, or the idea that Spain already enjoyed freedom during the Middle Ages, but since this was abolished by the absolute monarchy, the Spaniards were forced to reclaim it during the War of Independence. Second, the republican and traditionalist narratives of Spain, which are the object of examination in chapter 12. And third, the narrative of the liberals and their foremost representatives in the field of historical writings, Modesto Lafuente and Antonio Cánovas del Castillo (chapter 13). Here we can observe how with the senior Cánovas, the “discourse” on Spanish history undergoes changes with respect to former liberal narratives, the harsh image of 17th-century (the “Decadencia”) tempers, and see how the positive judgement deserved by the Comunidades de Castilla is reduced with the Cánovas historian Manuel Danvila y Collado.

Chapter 14 completes this survey of the 19th-century narratives with the examination of “regional histories”, a phenomenon encouraged by the Romantic taste for the past that pervaded politics and culture in the first half of this century. The basic idea to retain here is that antiques and histories never did manage to become the antagonist of Spanish identity, but “they [did] set the identity bases which would be useful in some cases to later nationalist approaches”, something similar – the authors add – to what Modesto Lafuente did with Spanish nationalism” (p. 327).

From chapters 15 to 18 – the 20th century and the current situation – the range of available sources increases for, while historiography takes the path of professionalization and attempts to modernize research on the history of Spain, the identity narratives find a lasting refuge in the genre of the essay and in the topic of “el problema de España”. In fact, at least until the middle of the century, Spanish

historiography remained a “nationalistic” discipline somehow related to the Spanish identity problem, and pieces of history and essays on the topic of the “essence of Spain” had many points in common. Surely this essentialist reflection had its first pioneers in Unamuno and Ganivet; but historians such as Rafael Altamira and Ramón Menéndez Pidal, albeit engulfed by research on the cultural aspects of Spanish history, such as law, language and literature, never shunned the identity discussion on Spain (chapter 15). The reader will therefore discover in these chapters, along with historical works proper, interesting insights into the essayistic reflections of the history of Spain typical of the first decades of the 20th century: as much as the “neoconservative” perspective of the aforesaid “el problema de España” by authors such as Julián Juderías, José María Salaverría and Ramiro de Maeztu (chapter 16), as one of its more “liberal” versions, ranging from Ortega’s well-known *España invertebrada* to the controversies taking place among exiles after the Civil War (chapter 17).

Álvarez Junco and De la Fuente Monge’s chapters end with the examination (chapter 18) of the part taken by identity narratives in the process of modernizing Spanish historiography from the 1950s onwards. Except for some very well-known assertions, a more concerned prediction of the current situation would have been interesting.³ It is true that the essentialist reflections on Spain have been consigned to the past. And as for historiography, its modernization, in which figures such as Jaume Vicens Vives, José María Jover, Miguel Artola, Manuel Tuñón de Lara, or the “new” Hispanists stood out, has accelerated and yields ground today to a decline in the “big paradigms”, where fragmentation predominates. This is not necessarily a negative situation, and the future of Spanish historiography, the authors assure us, seems “promising”. But the main problem persists. In Spain, new identity and memory problems have recently emerged, especially those associated with the history of the present (the memories of the Civil War, Francoism and Transition, the places harbouring peripheral nationalisms, etc.): in what way will the contribution of historians be fruitful?

Parts 2 and 3, by Carolyn Boyd and Edward Baker, complete the current issue. Professor Baker’s section deals with the “commemorative culture”, whose main points are summarized at the beginning of the section (pp. 565-576). The remaining pages contain a review of interesting aspects and examples involving the “urban space” in Madrid, such as the changes in the names of streets and squares in the era of liberal revolutions, and the centenaries from the Restoration period to current times, in addition to a chapter devoted to festivities.

Boyd’s chapters, which address the importance of the interest in national history in school in the 19th and 20th centuries and its current transformation, require more thorough attention. According to the author, it was during the era of liberal revolutions, with roots in the Enlightenment, when the State discovered the importance of the public use of the history of Spain, the usefulness of a shared view of the national past, and the need to apply it to educate the citizens of the future. But there was less unanimity and more hesitation when the time came to apply this idea to the school laws, and there was a need to decide on the number of hours to devote to the teaching of history, which in general proved to be scarce. In any case, during the 19th century, the textbook genre began to take on a momentous role as a tool of learning, especially in secondary

³ In any case, it should be remembered that Professor Álvarez Junco sometimes extends his analysis of national identities to newspapers and applies them to Spanish current affairs.

education, and has continued to do so until the last few decades. In this section (pp. 458-521), the reader will therefore find an illustrative overview of the most important textbooks, along with interesting comments on their functions and formal aspects: from the pioneering *Compendio de Historia de España* by Manuel Gómez Ranera (first edition, 1837) to national-Catholic manuals in the early decades of the 20th century, including the well-known *Epítome de Historia de España* (1927) by Rafael Altamira, one of his school's foremost contributions.

After a quick overview of the history of Spain during the Franco era (the most illuminating information here possibly being the pages examining the changes made in the subject of history in school during the period of “el desarrollismo”), Professor Boyd offers an update of the current situation, and also a useful summary to bring this section to a close. The reader is sure to find Professor Boyd's article highly interesting. She considers that reforms undertaken from 1970-1975 onwards (the implementation of the Ley General de Educación), and the new social climate ushered in by the Spanish Transition, represented a wonderful chance to “rethink national history as a school subject” – this time under the *Annales* paradigm. It is true that the way of presenting the Second Republic and the Civil War in textbooks mirrored the problems concerning political memory and its limitations – that is, the “memory and oblivion” of the Civil War during the period of the Transition, as Paloma Aguilar's famous title reads –⁴ but in general, according to the author, the aspect of such texts and their functions began to improve.

These hard, early transformations, she adds, would have culminated in the so-called LOGSE (Ley Orgánica General del Sistema Educativo) in 1991 and 1992. However, over the past two decades there would also have been several “wars of history”. These “wars” would have witnessed a worrying habit of governments to intervene in the curriculum,⁵ along with some public debates such as the one set in motion during the first mandate of the Partido Popular (1996-2004) concerning the role of the history of Spain in current education. In this troubling situation, under no circumstances has the real background of these wars been instruction; it has rather been the underlying concept of nation, which had tended to reproduce outdated narratives. For the author, if “la España de las autonomías” intends to use the concept of “nation”, then it must “rethink it”. According to her, “the task of the teaching of history is not to build a homogeneous national identity based upon an invented ‘collective memory’, but to study the past of Spain with the objectivity that the discipline requires, and with the purpose of clearing up the complexities, conflicts and contingencies of processes of historical change” (p. 561).

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⁴ Paloma Aguilar Fernández, *Memoria y olvido de la Guerra Civil española* (Madrid: Alianza, 1996).

⁵ The LOCE (Ley Orgánica de Calidad de la Educación) in 2002, the LOE (Ley Orgánica de Educación) in 2006 and, furthermore, the current LOMCE (Ley Orgánica de Mejora de la Calidad Educativa) in 2013.

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