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Collective memory, the nation-state and post-Franco society

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Introduction

The challenge facing Spaniards in the period after the death of General Franco was nothing less than the reinvention of Spain as a state and as a nation. The new democracy had to be capable of absorbing possible competing nationalist sentiments which might have destabilized the country and ended in violent conflict. Any territorial settlement contributing to this absorption of nationalisms was above all to be decentralizing, allowing political parties not governing at the level of the Spanish state to have a voice where they had most support. The aim was to avoid the ever-radicalizing pendulum swing from left to right politically which was a feature of the descent of the democratic Second Republic of the 1930s into the Civil War (1936–39). Judged by these criteria, Spain's transition to democracy was a success. Violent Basque separatism, in the shape of the activities of ETA, meant that the process was not entirely peaceful. But, fortunately the country did not fall back into the internecine divisions of the past. For a population which had been ruled by dictatorship for nearly 40 years, the transition revealed considerable political maturity. However, part of this maturity was an unspoken agreement to leave certain fundamental issues unresolved. Was Spain to be considered a nation or merely a state formed by a group of nations, for example (Mercadé, 1986)? Behind this problem lay centuries of complex history.

Constructing the Spanish state

Spain is, of course, a very old state. Its centralized national administration was one of the first in Europe. The expulsion of the Moors and the Jews in

the fifteenth century and Spain's isolation from Europe during the Counter-Reformation were accompaniments to the construction of this centralized state. Its power was linked to a Castile-oriented army which resisted professionalization and saw part of its historic destiny as preventing the fragmentation of the *patria*, and a Roman Catholic Church which was economically and politically privileged and fiercely resistant to social change. By the nineteenth-century, the Spanish political class had become peculiarly restricted in size and increasingly divided. The contemporary history of the authority of this weak oligarchical state over Spain's geographic periphery is problematic and bloody. Formal authority resided mainly in the geographic centre of Spain. 'Spanishness' (*hispanidad*) was measured according to idealized (and gendered) religious and militarist models: the austerity, stoicism, and crusading mentality of warrior-monks and the interiorized sensibilities of Holy Sisters. The socially more advanced localities of the coast, often industrial and more liberal – Barcelona, the Basque Country, Valencia, Málaga, etc. – were seen as heterodox and dangerous.

In previous centuries, the army and the church were sources of warrior-like crusading strength, a legacy of the long and uneven process of the Reconquest of Spain in the Middle Ages. But, in the latter part of the nineteenth century, by which time most of Spain's empire had been dissipated, they became symptomatic of a crisis of the nation-state. Spain had declined from the metropolitan centre of a seaborne empire to a relatively inconsequential power on the periphery of Europe. By the last third of the nineteenth century, liberal reforms, secularization and the rationalization of state institutions headed the Europeanist political and social agenda. Catholicism in Spain was slowly on the wane, though its control of most of the country's educational establishments was tenacious. It would not be long before modern political parties and movements began to call for an end to electoral falsification and governmental corruption and for a better way of life through the actions of the state. The Second Republic in the 1930s tried and failed to answer this call, democratically.

Liberal governments of the mid-nineteenth century instituted reforms, seeking to restrict the economic power of the church and attempting to make civic national institutions work. But, the restoration of the monarchy in the mid-1870s perpetuated clerical and military power somewhat artificially and kept politics as the exclusive reserve of elite society, controlled from Madrid. Mass schooling was fragmented, inadequate and dominated by Catholic doctrine (Boyd, 1997). Crucially, the education system failed to play the role of agent of cultural homogenization. Overall, the liberal revolution of the last century was a very passive one. Consequently there was a great deal of resistance to the authority of the state and the process by which people in Spain were 'made national' was truncated.

Since the beginning of the present century, regional nationalist sentiment, culture and politics have been particularly pronounced in the north-eastern

region of Catalonia and the northern coastal areas of the Basque Country and Galicia. The expression of these differences, and claims for political autonomy to articulate them, were met by obstructionism and resistance from the Restoration state (1874–1931). The response, especially of the political right, to the autonomy provisions of the 1931 constitutional programme of the democratic Second Republic, was bellicose and threatening. The Republic was granted insufficient time to take up what was liberal of the nineteenth-century legacy and to popularize a modern sense of common identity and community in Spain. The governments of the Republic were unable to reoccupy the territory of Spain's history as civil ideology.¹

In contrast, the army and political conservatives revealed the depth of their hatred of 'separatism' by claiming that even an 'España Roja' (a 'Red Spain') would be preferable to an 'España Rota' (a 'Broken Spain'). The response of unitary nationalism to this regionalism therefore became a significant contributory factor in the onset of the Civil War in Spain in 1936. Autonomy, in the 1930s, entailed a major challenge to existing power which would not be tolerated. These claims of difference were washed away in a torrent of blood during the war and in its aftermath and were suppressed and denied during the reign of the centralized authority in the Franco years.

The nineteenth-century 'nationalization' of state and society, through the liberal juridical revolution, had been resisted right up to the Civil War years, just as resistance after the Civil War to the centralism of Franco was later sustained throughout the years of dictatorship and beyond. The pre-Civil War struggle was ideological and economic, but also, in part, based on a sense of locality. Two sets of tensions are of interest here. First, there had long been a conflict between the state and urban modernizers (especially in Catalonia) who wanted to go much further than Madrid-based liberals in rationalizing authority. After the disastrous loss of the remnants of the American empire in 1898, some of them appeared to want to take direct hold of the reins of power themselves, virtually by 'catalanizing' the Spanish state. Second, another long-standing tension existed between the state and largely rural, anti-liberal dissenters in the provinces who had not benefited materially from the liberal land reforms of the previous century, and wanted only to safeguard religion, monarchy and local (*pueblo*) lifestyles or institutions, in areas such as Navarre, Zaragoza, Soria, La Rioja and the Basque Country. In a sense, the experience of Francoism dissolved both of these tensions.

Francoism: the fantasy of 'nation'

The Francoist state was, above all, a centralizing power. Faced with Franco's victory, a substantial number of 'realists' within the Catalan social elite underwent a voluntary process of '*españolización*' (hispanicization) in the aftermath of the Civil War. The hope of securing leadership of the

Spanish state was given up in return for maintaining the basis of their hold on the local economy and diversifying nationally through financial investments. The lesser objective of gaining some measure of regional autonomy remained, however, an ultimate desire, in the post-Franco period.

By contrast, rank-and-file, provincial, anti-liberal dissent suffered a different fate. Francoism might have been expected faithfully to represent this particular social constituency, but the heartlands of social conservatism lost out much more than the Catalan elite in the wake of Franco's victory. In the immediate post-Civil War decades, the Francoist state favoured monopolistic economic forces and put resources behind grandiose industrializing projects. Spanish family agriculture was treated to rhetorical and ideological eulogization while suffering virtually total material neglect.

In addition, broader social change did little to favour the perpetuation of a social consensus based on a so-called 'Francoist nationalism'. Almost in spite of itself, in its later phase, Francoism was economically modernizing, coinciding with the great social upheavals of the 1960s and the dramatic urbanization and economic growth of these years. Paradoxically, the heart was torn from communities which historically had engendered politically non-subversive *pueblo* culture and had supported Catholic, anti-liberal, *Spanish* nationalism through its daily habits, customs and economic way of life. While Catalanism could be reborn after 1975, it is not surprising that there was little sign of a renaissance of Castilian nationalism after Franco.

Other developments further afield, on which Francoist Spain was dependent, tended to militate against an internally coherent unitary nationalism. Full incorporation into all of the most important international institutions was denied to Spain while Franco reigned. Spain could not occupy a place by the side of other democratic European states as an equal and did not become a member of the European Union until 1986. The inability, indeed unwillingness, of Franco to incorporate the country into Europe had been an isolationist tendency which it was feared threatened definitively to detach Spain from the rest of the developed world.² Franco preferred to maintain the 'purity' of 'organic democracy', maintaining his own violent rule, rather than open the country to the considerable benefits of integration into such bodies.

However, from the early 1950s the Franco regime, in spite of its rhetoric of self-sufficiency, was obliged to form political associations with transnational bodies, like the United Nations Organization, and to make far-reaching bilateral agreements with the international powers, especially the United States.³ The purity of Francoism's version of Spanish culture was diluted years before the dictator's demise. Since Franco, the Spanish regions have often turned their backs on Madrid and looked outwards to Europe and beyond. After the 1950s, economic growth depended hugely on the tourist boom. Therefore, by the 1960s, the formal Spanish nation-state, despite its rhetoric of powerful nationhood, functioned upon a rather weak foundation. Although Franco would not admit it, Spain existed within a European

and world system on which the country depended. The apparently exclusivist Francoist state imposed itself in a context of institutional diversity in international terms, and a reality of social and cultural fragmentation in Spain. The Francoist nation, meanwhile, remained a fantasy.

Mobilizing historical memory

The regime was marginalized by Europe because of the past, and yet, Francoism depended on memory to maintain itself. While the social base of Francoist nationalism, such as it was, has essentially disappeared and Spanish sovereignty has been partially usurped by transnational arrangements, the painful legacy of Franco and the Civil War remains. The legitimization of the Franco regime, of course, rested on its military victory, its violence, and its construction of the Civil War as a religious 'crusade'. Franco's nationalism was therefore inevitably highly divisive. Particularly during the first two decades, the regime sought constantly to remind Spaniards of its capacity for violence in defence of its vision of the nation. The manipulation of history mingled with memories of blood and sacrifice. Franco called for 'a pact of the future with the past'. The Civil War 'imposed a duty to cultivate memory' (Richards, 1998, p. 7).

Catalonia, the Basque Country and Galicia were especially prey to discrimination, providing the regime with images of dangerous internal enemies. A struggle over collective memory has been waged in these places, as in the rest of Spain. In these areas particularly, and not surprisingly, regional identity has been in the foreground of opposition. The Nationalist war effort, and the repression in its aftermath, was intentionally brutal. As Franco proclaimed at the height of the Civil War in 1938: 'The cruel war sustained today, and the sterile sacrifice made to their regions by the Basque and Catalan leaders, are so hard a lesson that they will never be able to forget it' (Franco, 1938, p. 202). In areas of the country with a distinct regional identity, the rebels attempted a form of cultural genocide, affecting language, customs and freedoms, of the type carried out in the 1930s and 1940s against other European nationalities: Czechs, Slovaks, Albanians, Poles, Lithuanians.

This vengeance was only slightly mitigated, first, by the nature of regional conflict in Spain and, secondly, by the way in which social memory functions. The cultural 'cleansing' of the Civil War, though wrapped in the language of Castilian ultranationalism, was not essentially an ethnic phenomenon, despite the retrospective attempts of some regional nationalists to depict it in such terms. Also, although anti-clericalism was important, there was no conflict between different religions in Spain which could be portrayed in terms of 'ethnic' difference. The categories of class and morality, and, above all, a desire on the part of the Francoist authorities to prevent the 'break-up of Spain', ideologically, culturally, spiritually and juridically, were more significant to Francoism than ethnicity. Much of Spain, by the

time of Franco's death in 1975, was left with a legacy of repression and systematic discrimination against the regions, and a memory of fearful violence. However, the Spanish Civil War did not encompass specific ethnic destruction as such, comparable to the Second World War memories of Serbs and Croats, for example.

Memory does not exist in a social vacuum and Spanish society since the 1940s has done anything but stand still. The decline in the social and political influence of the Catholic Church meant that anti-clericalism no longer weighed heavily upon the mentality of the left and its social constituencies. Although the ownership of land still remained concentrated in a few hands, for the most part, agricultural production no longer depended on the exploitation of masses of poorly paid rural workers. Many people in the rural south, in Andalusia, for example, continue to express a kind of regional identity in determinedly voting for the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) – the governing party in Spain from October 1982 until March 1996 – since the establishment of democracy, because they associate the party with attempted land reforms in the 1930s and the extreme economic exploitation of Andalusia with Franco and his regime. But Spain was a very different society in 1975 to that of the 1930s. There was a dramatic contrast between the enormous hardship of the first post-Civil War decade and the rampant consumerism of the 1970s. Moreover, at a personal level, there were good psychological reasons for forgetting the sheer awfulness of the conflicts of earlier years.

In this changing environment, the effort of keeping alive a submerged memory of the days of hope of the early 1930s was an enterprise of diminishing practical and psychological returns. As the Spanish economy and society experienced modern development in the 1960s, the past, in some ways, seemed irrelevant. The objectives of most progressive political activity inevitably shifted from 1940s' strategies aimed at the violent overthrow of the regime to more mundane, everyday concerns. The Francoist state, in many senses, had to run just to keep up with society and ultimately, by the late 1960s, lagged far behind. Subtle though they were, changes of emphasis can be traced in the pronouncements of the dictatorship in order to adapt. Examination of the sources of political socialisation employed by the regime – documentaries, speeches, commemorative monuments, political institutions – show that the balance between the 'legitimacy of origin' of Francoism (the Civil War), and its 'legitimacy of office', or tenure (*ejercicio*) was a shifting one. There was a dialectical relationship between a narration of war and triumph, on the one hand, and a discourse of peace, security and even reconciliation, on the other (Aguilar Fernández, 1996).

Recuperation of difference

These 'messages' from the state were not, as we have seen, devised in isolation, for consumption by a passive society, but partly as a response to social

pressures. By the 1960s, the Francoist state could not control all information or even all schooling. This 'slippage' of the totalitarian state permitted some degree of articulation of difference. Recovering regional identity was part of the rebuilding of civil social relations (Pérez Díaz, 1987). In recent years, there have been many examples of political transitions with varying degrees of success or failure: Argentina, Portugal, Chile, South Africa, the Soviet bloc, the Balkans. In all these cases, the role of history and collective memory have been undeniably significant whether in a positive or negative way. Democratization has been based on claims from below – recapturing regionalist, ethnic or national cultures, employing the symbols of long liberation struggles and on concessions granted from above. Those transitions where conflicting ideas of 'the nation' have played a part have often experienced more difficulties than others, occasionally with tragic consequences. An element of 'forgetting' was intrinsic to Spain's peaceful transition to democracy after Franco, becoming an example to other countries in this sense. But 'forgetting' had to be supplemented (even compensated for) by political and ideological representation, especially of the 'historic regions'. Here, the devolution of administration and decision-making through the so-called 'state of autonomies', in spite of its imperfections, is crucial.

State, nation, nationalities

It was inevitable, as society began to contemplate life after Franco by the early 1970s, that the question of regional representation and the relationship of state to nation and nationalities would again rise to the surface of political debate surrounding the new Constitution approved in 1978. Plurality demanded the renunciation of the centralizing mission of the state. The existence of other nationalities became a primary focus of attention. Although the Constitution was based on 'the indivisible unity of the Spanish Nation' and Castilian remained the official language of the state, the right to autonomy of the nationalities within the state was guaranteed and other languages were to be official in their respective Autonomous Communities. Spain now has a semi-federal structure in which the powers of the state are shared with the 17 autonomous regions (Newton and Donaghy, 1997). Basque and Catalan statutes of autonomy were approved in October 1979, shortly after the second democratic elections in Spain since the death of Franco. Both regions also secured their own parliaments. Galicia followed suit in April 1981.⁴

In spite of the challenges posed by ETA and the bunker mentality still discernible within the army in the early 1980s, democratic institutions have since been consolidated. As a 1985 editorial in the much respected Spanish national daily *El País* claimed, celebrating the progress made in the 10 years since Franco's death, 'the State of the autonomies has opened up practicable ways for the solution of the historic disputes with Catalonia and the Basque

Country'.⁵ In spite of the unanswered questions, the new territorial distribution of powers appears to go from strength to strength, constituting, certainly in terms of distributing finance, the greatest decentralization process of the modern era.⁶

1992: reappropriating *hispanidad*

By the 1990s, the generation for which the Franco dictatorship, which it hardly knew, had been simply an anachronistic vestige of inter-war Fascism, had reached adulthood and was now incorporated into society. In contrast to the interiorism of Francoism, Spain's democratic governments have followed the younger generation in stressing openness to the outside world, constructing Spain as a stage for the performance of international events, for example. This is demonstrated in Spain's relations with Europe and America and her growing role in world affairs. Some of this, like membership of NATO in May 1982, has been forced through, apparently against the popular mood, though protest was based on a pacifist rationale and the idea of non-alignment rather than on a belief in Spanish isolationism.⁷ The Spanish government's hosting of the First Middle East Peace Conference in November 1991 was a symbol of the 'arrival' of Spain onto the world stage as a politically significant player. The following year saw the rapid and impressive consummation of this arrival when, simultaneously, Madrid was named European Cultural Capital for 1992, the Universal Exhibition (Expo) was held in Seville, and the Olympic Games staged in Barcelona. Although these two latter events were really occasions to celebrate regional success (Andalusian and Catalan, respectively), an attempt was made by the Madrid-dominated state to draw a broad historical circle linking these 'Spanish' achievements with 'Spanish' history, especially the discovery of the Americas 500 years earlier, in 1492. Christopher Columbus was reappropriated for Spain, as he had been by the highly conservative creators of *hispanidad* in the lead-up to the Civil War in the 1930s. Not very much was said officially about the expulsion of the Moors and the Jews from Spain which also coincided in 1492 with what some in Spain thought of as a genocide in America but what officially in 1992 became, very ambiguously, '*el encuentro*' (the encounter).

Beyond the 'nation-state'

An irony in referring to Spain as the 'nation of the nations' is that regional nationalist sentiments began to be institutionally recognized at a moment when conditions, especially economic conditions, were making possible, for the first time, the construction of a coherent, rational and unitary administration.⁸ The economic development of the 1960s was the basis of a

modernization producing a state less encumbered by elite divisions than ever before, with financial power able to provide services and use authority for the benefit of the entirety of Spain. The long crisis of the nation-state in Spain could perhaps have been overcome. The growth of Spanish capitalism within an increasingly globalized system produced a uniformity in habits of consumption familiar to modern states post-1945. To an extent, the market has overtaken concerns with locality and the nation. Rampant consumerism has inevitably partly filled the vacuum left by older cultural forms and society, even in the regions, appears uncertain about its own history, stressing the positive and obsessive about the idea of 'progress'.

However, there are significant reasons why regional sentiment will not disappear. First, it is deeply entrenched and based on real and valuable cultural differences like language. Second, sharing an experience of personal consumption in the market place does not necessarily dilute other differences, although an obsession with consumption may well relegate or distort historical memory. Nationalism can be linked to consumerism quite easily, but not always so easily to historical truth. During the autumn holiday in Spain, in October 1992, in a double celebration of Spain's 'National Day' and the quincentenary of '*el encuentro*', customers were invited by one department store chain with branches throughout Spain to make their own 'great discovery', just like Columbus, by collecting a discount cheque for 1492 pesetas. It was 'something else to be thankful to Columbus for'.⁹ But, third, it seems that the debts of history do sometimes have to be paid. However much collective or social memory might be submerged, Francoism as a highly destructive and repressive cultural force, will not be merely forgotten in Catalonia, the Basque Country, Galicia or elsewhere. Fourth, Spain has shown other states how regional devolution and recognition of difference are part of modern democracy, a fact understood by many other governments of the European Union. Perhaps the advantages of a fragmentation of identities outweigh the disadvantages and dangers. Finally, although in European terms, Spain's experience of industrial modernity has been a relatively short one, the country is as much a part of globalization as other European states. In a sense, Spain has been plunged into the uncertainties of *post*-modernity without knowing much of modernity at all. The grand narrative of the nation-state – Spain's great historical problem – can perhaps be side-stepped after all.

Notes

1. M. A. Bastenier, 'España y el uso del pasado', *El País*, 3 August 1992, p.10.
2. The Spanish government first requested associate membership of the EEC as early as 1962. Full membership was applied for in July 1977, virtually as soon as the first post-Franco democratic elections were held. The Treaty of Accession was finally signed in Madrid in June 1985.
3. Spain signed military and economic agreements with the US in September 1953.

During the dictatorship, Spain was admitted to the following international bodies: UNO (1955), ILO (International Labour Organization) (1956), IMF (International Monetary Fund) and IBRD (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development) (1958), OECD (Organization for European Co-operation and Development) (1961).

4. 61 per cent of voters participated in the referendum on the Catalan statute, of which 88 per cent were in support. The figures for the Basque referendum are almost identical in both respects. The other regions of Spain had statutes approved in the period December 1981 to February 1983.
5. *El País*, 20 November 1985, p. 10.
6. In 1979, the state and its central institutions administered 90 per cent of public spending. By 1986, this was down to below 70 per cent. In 1990, more than 40 per cent of expenditure was regulated by the Autonomous Communities or local town halls (*ayuntamientos*).
7. A referendum in March 1986 confirmed Spain's membership.
8. See the article by Antonio Elorza, *El País, Extra*, 28 December 1990, p. 31.
9. *El País*, 10 October 1992, p. 23.

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