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David R. Ringrose

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*Part 1*

The problem of perception

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## 1 Perceptions and perspectives

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### From failure to success

#### *Implications of the post-Franco transition*

Spain is widely perceived as a country that missed an opportunity to join the rest of Western Europe in its progress towards industrialization, significantly higher standards of living, and liberal and parliamentary democracy. This assumption, stereotypically articulated with regard to the nineteenth century by Jordi Nadal,<sup>1</sup> permeates Spanish historiography.

In the last thirty years, however, Spain has been transformed from a backward country in the grip of a stultifying military dictatorship into a country with a lively parliamentary democracy and a burgeoning industrial economy. Politically the reactionary dictatorship has been replaced with a constitutional monarchy on the Scandinavian model and a socialist government which has rapidly integrated Spain into the rest of Europe. In economic terms, as of 1960 Spanish income per capita was half that of Italy and one fourth that of England.<sup>2</sup> By 1980 it was nearly that of Italy and three-fourths that of England,<sup>3</sup> while as of 1990 material living standards in much of Spain appeared comparable to those in England.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Jordi Nadal Oller, *El fracaso de la Revolución Industrial en España* (Barcelona: Ariel, 1975). Summarized in Jordi Nadal Oller, “The Failure of the Industrial Revolution in Spain, 1830–1914,” in Carlo Cipolla (ed.), *The Fontana Economic History of Europe*, vol. IV, *The Emergence of Industrial Societies*, pt. 2 (London: Collins Books, 1973), pp. 532–626.

<sup>2</sup> For a general view of conditions in Spain around 1960, see Arthur Whitaker, *Spain and the Defense of the West: Ally and Liability* (New York: Praeger, 1962).

<sup>3</sup> Real income per capita as of 1980, expressed as purchasing power parities in 1970 dollars, was \$2,536 in Spain compared with \$2,966 in Italy and \$3,613 in Great Britain. Leandro Prados de la Escosura, *De imperio a nación. Crecimiento y atraso económico en España (1780–1930)* (Madrid: Alianza, 1988), p. 51.

<sup>4</sup> Based on direct observation in both countries of urban housing, access to consumer durables, quality of diet, public facilities. Statistically, per capita income domestic product remained higher in England.

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The impression of rapid and sweeping transformation is unquestionably accurate, but among the historians who try to understand Spain, the very rapidity of that change has helped to trigger a reexamination of the developments in the century that preceded the recent democratic transition. With the exception of the Basque separatist problem, Spain's recent economic and political transformation has taken place with remarkably little violence and social upheaval. Indeed, the apparent ease of the transition has caused observers to overlook the remarkable nature of what has happened.

Even a casual reading of European or third world history tells us that it is exceptional to find rapid economic change without vigorous and even violent struggles over the forms and distribution of political power. Where such transitions have been relatively smooth the historian invariably finds that essential elements of the new polity and economy actually took shape over several generations. This realization has encouraged a reexamination of some of the problems of continuity and change in Spain. It is the sort of observation that prompts reiteration of the old truism that historians shape the questions they ask about the past in response to the present in which they live. Nowhere is this more evident than in the historiography of early modern and modern Spain.

*Structural origins of negative perception*

**Political context of historiography** Until the 1930s only a few non-Spanish historians paid much attention to Spain. Those who did so usually studied either the Habsburg-Spanish hegemony in sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Europe or else the creation of the Spanish empire in America. Spain then faded from Western historical self-consciousness until the European crisis of the 1930s, during which the Spanish Civil War gave Spain an integral role in the sequence of events that drew everyone into World War II. Thus it is hardly surprising that the dominant themes in the historiography of Spain were set by Spaniards writing their own history.

This national historiographical arena has had many facets. The debates have been structured around a series of historical myths. Such myths rationalized and legitimized contemporary aspirations; alternatively they explained why the nation (or monarchy) failed to achieve its supposed destiny. Perhaps the most enduring myth is that of “one, eternal Spain,” which reads into Spanish history a continual, in-built quest for unity. It is a myth derived from visions of Christian unity and the Crusading tradition of the Reconquista and one that has been used by absolutist monarchs and later by authoritarian regimes and nationalists

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of many political persuasions. An alternative myth that is currently in vogue in Spanish political rhetoric is Américo Castro's formulation of a myth of *convivencia*, a medieval tradition of pluralism which supposedly survived in spite of foreign absolutism and Inquisition. Other such myths present a dramatic version of the decline of Spain under the Habsburg dynasty as a warning about the perils of absolutism. During the Franco years the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella was idealized as an era of integration, Catholic unity, and indigenous rule, while the eighteenth century was rejected because of its addiction to non-Spanish (and Liberal and secular) ideas. Nineteenth-century historians created myths to legitimize Liberalism by romanticizing the medieval Cortes and the revolt of the *comuneros* against foreign absolutism in 1520. By the same token, Liberals mythologized the Inquisition as the explanation for every Spanish disaster over three centuries. The interplay between such myths and political traditions is illustrated by the Liberal resistance to absolutist centralism at the beginning of the nineteenth century, followed by Liberal adherence to nationalist centralism in later decades.<sup>5</sup>

Ever since the eighteenth century these historical myths have been elaborated in the context of a fundamental historiographical dichotomy. On one side is a conservative, organicist school that has maintained the validity of traditional Catholic and hierarchical values. On the other side is a varied assortment of historians and intellectuals who descended from the Enlightenment tradition and believed that a liberal, secular, and rationalist society was the key to general well being.<sup>6</sup> This liberal camp has in turn produced a wide spectrum of positions that range from Montesquieu to Bakunin in their inspiration. This Enlightenment heritage is the primary inspiration of that part of the Spanish intellectual elite which endorsed the European trend toward liberal, secular politics and economics, and has become the dominant element in the historical discipline in twentieth-century Spain. In practice, most of these modernist

<sup>5</sup> Some of these issues are perceptively outlined in J. N. Hillgarth, "Spanish Historiography and Iberian Reality," *History and Theory*, vol. 24 (1985), pp. 23–43.

<sup>6</sup> Three essays that suggest this distinction are María Victoria López-Cordón Cortezo, "La mentalidad conservadora durante la Restauración," Antonio María Calero Amor, "Los precursores de la monarquía democrática," and José-Carlos Mainer, "Ortega: primeras armas, 1902–1914," all in José Luis García Delgado (ed.), *La España de la Restauración: Política, Economía, Legislación y Cultura* (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1985), pp. 71–110, 21–54, and 437–468. It is also illustrated in the essay by Pierre Ponsot, "Révolution dans les campagnes espagnoles au XIXe siècle: les désamortissements. Revue des études récents," *Etudes Rurales*, vol. 45 (1972), pp. 104–123, in Miguel Martínez Cuadrado, *La burguesía conservadora (1874–1931)* (Madrid: Alianza, 1974), pp. 25–28, and in Raymond Carr, *España, 1808–1975* (Barcelona: Ariel, 1982), pp. 337–344. It is presented in a more general historiographical framework by José María Jover Zamora, "El siglo XIX en la historiografía española contemporánea (1939–1972)," in *El siglo XIX en España: Doce Estudios* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1974), pp. 9–27.

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(as opposed to traditionalist) historians have been more liberal and eager for political and economic change than the regimes under which they lived and worked. As a consequence they were almost universally critical of those regimes and their policies.

This negative self-perception of the Spaniards' own political history was reinforced prior to the 1940s by the fact that Western historians wrote economic and social history primarily as the history of institutions and economic policy. Indeed, the original *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* of 1937 complained about the legal and institutional emphasis in social and economic history.<sup>7</sup> By the 1930s this institutional bias was being eroded by the *Annales* school and Keynesian economic thought,<sup>8</sup> but unfortunately for Spanish historiography, Spain was at that moment isolated from European intellectual currents by the Franco regime.

**Illustrations** *Royal promotion of industry in the eighteenth century* The interpretive consequences of a reflexively negative, policy-oriented historical perception perpetuated by isolation are best shown with a pair of illustrations. Many historians have been intrigued by the efforts of the government of Charles III (1759-1788) to create what it perceived to be a modern industrial sector. In practice the government wavered between capital-intensive factories and a kind of state-sponsored proto-industrial system.<sup>9</sup> Beyond state initiatives, with the exception of the Catalan textile industry, Spanish manufacturing was assumed by historians to have been locked into self-limiting patterns of dispersed, low-quality production for local needs. Against this dismal backdrop the Crown set up several state-sponsored enterprises to introduce new technology and industrial organization and to create import substitution

<sup>7</sup> J. H. Clapham, “Economic History: Survey of Development to the Twentieth Century,” and “Study and Research in the Twentieth Century: Great Britain,” in Edwin Seligman and Alain Johnson (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Social Sciences* (New York: MacMillan, 1937), vol. V, pp. 313–322.

<sup>8</sup> This is already clear in the words of the pioneer Henri Pirenne, who insisted in 1937 that it was time to emancipate economic history from “the study of individual nations” and adopt “the comparative method of research and systematization.” See Henri Pirenne, “Study and Research in the Twentieth Century: Continental Europe,” in Edwin Seligman and Alain Johnson (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Social Sciences* (New York: MacMillan, 1937), vol. V, pp. 322–325.

<sup>9</sup> Campomanes in particular favored “popular industry” in which spinning, weaving, and other work was distributed to rural families to complement farming. Pedro Rodríguez, Conde de Campomanes, *Discurso sobre el fomento de la Industria Popular* (Madrid, 1774). A somewhat rambling discussion of royal policy towards industry is in Agustín González Enciso, *Estado e industria en el siglo XVIII: La Fábrica de Guadalajara* (Madrid: Fundación Universitaria, 1980), pp. 115–116, 141–149, 235–256. More analytical about economic thought is Concepción de Castro, “Mercado y sociedad estamental en Campomanes,” *Revista de Historia Económica*, vol. 9 (1991), pp. 315–340.

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industries as a step towards imitating England.<sup>10</sup> These businesses invariably foundered on the shoals of poor administration, high costs, inadequate markets, and misconceived expectations.<sup>11</sup> The failure of such policy initiatives has been taken by many historians as representative of the failure of eighteenth-century Spanish manufacturing in general, when in fact the fate of a specific policy tells us little about trends in the larger economy.<sup>12</sup> The implication was that Spain lacked both entrepreneurial talent and opportunities, and that only some kind of externally induced crisis could jolt the country from its ossified ways.

**Failure to coopt new political forces** Similarly, Liberal Spanish historians observing Europe have perceived the early twentieth-century entry of popular, left-wing political parties into the parliamentary politics of England, France, and Germany as a constructive process. In their view, the Canovite political system of *turno pacífico* and rigged elections failed to evolve as Cánovas had hoped, and after 1900 became increasingly inflexible in the face of the same new political forces. The apparent unwillingness of the Spanish political system to experiment with European techniques of political co-optation was taken by historians as evidence of a retrograde political culture that set the stage for Primo de Rivera and ultimately for the Civil War.<sup>13</sup> These political “failures” then became evidence of a weak liberal and democratic political culture, another myth that is being reexamined.<sup>14</sup>

**The problem of perspective** While there is some truth in the way that both of the preceding cases have been interpreted, it is also apparent that the underlying assumptions of historians have conditioned

<sup>10</sup> A concise résumé of these ideas is given by Barbara Stein in Barbara H. Stein and Stanley J. Stein, “Concepts and Realities of Spanish Economic Growth, 1759–1789,” in *Historia Ibérica*, vol. I (New York: Anaya/Las Américas, 1973), pp. 103–110.

<sup>11</sup> James Clayburne La Force, Jr., *The Development of the Spanish Textile Industry, 1750–1800* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965); and “Royal Textile Factories in Spain, 1700–1800,” *Journal of Economic History*, vol. 24 (1964), pp. 337–363.

<sup>12</sup> The persistence of this analysis is exemplified by the recent John Lynch, *Bourbon Spain, 1700–1808* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), pp. 116–123, 219–229. See also González Enciso, *Estado e industria*, pp. 703–708.

<sup>13</sup> Miguel Artola, “El sistema político de la Restauración,” in José Luis García Delgado (ed.), *La España de la Restauración: Política, economía, legislación y cultura* (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1985), pp. 11–20, especially pp. 19–20.

<sup>14</sup> For a recent example, see Joe Foweraker, *Making Democracy in Spain: Grass-Roots Struggle in the South, 1955–1975* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). The creation of a functional political space outside the formal institutions of the Restoration by the variegated Spanish press is explored by David Ortiz, “Opposition Voices in Regency Spain: Liberalism, the Press, and the Public Sphere, 1885–1902” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, San Diego, 1995).

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the approach to the sources and the results of the research. Strictly speaking, this is true of any research agenda, but in the case of Spanish historiography we need to make a more vigorous experiment with alternative assumptions.

In the Spain of Charles III, reform-minded officials who promoted industry frequently operated without reliable economic information. At the same time they were caught up in a combination of abstract ideas, utopian solutions, and their own prejudices that conditioned their awareness of social and political realities. It is hardly surprising that many of their enterprises failed. Yet this was typical of Enlightenment reform in every country and has been the Achilles heel of economic development schemes ever since. Even as Spain's Enlightenment industrial projects were stillborn, Spain was host to a variety of private economic initiatives that involved the manipulation of land, labor, and capital in ways that were clearly entrepreneurial and often successful.<sup>15</sup> While enterprises which we perceive as “industrial” in that they involved capital-intensive factories often failed, eighteenth-century Spain saw a considerable array of commercial ventures in agriculture, investments in intermediate processing, new kinds of artisan manufacturing, and regional specializations. As we will see, more than a few regional economies also saw the capital that was accumulated in the course of such ventures invested in more explicitly industrial enterprises during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. We need to consider these new ventures as initiatives just as carefully as we measure their actual performance and catalog their failures. If Spanish society was capable of producing such entrepreneurial activity, explanations of the larger outcome must pay more attention to non-economic factors.

Similarly, despite the political rigidity of the Canovite regime created after 1874, it can be argued that by contemporary European standards, the Restoration of 1875-1923 allowed a remarkable amount of room for political discourse. An entire generation free of overt military intervention in politics, with vigorous political discussion and a rich intellectual life was no small achievement for a nineteenth-century country. Despite the frustrations of would-be political reformers, it can be argued that the Restoration instilled in much of Spanish society a political culture that assumed the normalcy of parliamentary government that was democratic

<sup>15</sup> For a few examples, see Agustín González Enciso, “La proto-industrialización en Castilla la Vieja en el siglo XVIII,” *Revista de Historia Económica*, vol. 2, no. 3 (1984), pp. 51–82; Xoán Carmona Badía, “Clases sociales, estructuras agrarias e industria rural doméstica en la Galicia del siglo XVIII,” *Revista de Historia Económica*, vol. 2, no. 3 (1984), pp. 51–82 and pp. 35–50.

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in principle.<sup>16</sup> To appreciate this, however, it is necessary to go beyond the study of formal politics and examine the extra-constitutional public political spaces that emerged. The press was one such arena, but various kinds of laboring, professional, and fraternal groups also shaped political life outside the electoral process.<sup>17</sup>

**The lure of comparisons** The problem of decline, backwardness, and failure that long characterized Spanish history, whether defined as economic, political, or social in nature, is inherently a comparative one. In themselves, comparison and contrast form the very basis of how we organize and define ourselves and our relations with others. Nevertheless, it is important to use care in selecting and defining the things which we compare. Explicit comparisons often involve constructed representations of actual cases, with the actual comparison involving a third, even more abstract model that is used to identify differences between the targets of the comparison. One can compare regions (as defined by custom and tradition), cities, and perhaps political power structures without too much apparent arbitrariness, if only because the concepts are familiar.<sup>18</sup> Since the nineteenth century, however, we have been conditioned to draw historical comparisons in terms of the modern nation-state and its politico-geographic boundaries.<sup>19</sup> The pervasiveness of this attitude is illustrated by the Federalist proposals that surfaced around Europe in the period 1850-1870. Regional groups sought a recognition of local autonomy, but initially accepted the premise that such autonomy involved concession of sovereignty to a larger national state.<sup>20</sup> In Spain the disputes over local autonomy and elective mayors in the early 1840s, and the Federalist revolts of the First Republic in 1873

<sup>16</sup> The problems of this perspective are discussed in Fernando Castro de Isidro, “La democracia en España. Notas para una historia,” unpublished typescript, January 1991.

<sup>17</sup> The concept of public political space outside the formal political structure is explored relative to the analogous world in late nineteenth-century Argentina by Hilda Sabato, “Hacer política en Buenos Aires: los italianos en la escena pública porteña, 1860-1880,” *Boletín del Instituto de Historia Argentina y Americana “Dr. E. Ravignani”*, 3rd series, no. 2 (1990), pp. 7-46, and “Political Participation and the Public Space in Buenos Aires, 1850’s-1880’s,” unpublished research proposal in typescript, 1990. For Spain they are investigated by Ortiz, “Opposition Voices in Regency Spain.”

<sup>18</sup> For a recent thoughtful argument for a regional approach, see Lajos Timár, “Regional Economics and Social History or Historical Geography?,” *Journal of European Economic History*, vol. 21 (1992), pp. 391-406.

<sup>19</sup> For discussions of nationalism, see: Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991); Peter Sahlin, *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); R. Grillo, “Introduction,” in R. Grillo (ed.), “Nation” and “State” in Europe. *Anthropological Perspectives* (New York: Academic Press, 1980), pp. 1-30.

<sup>20</sup> Robert C. Binkley, *Realism and Nationalism, 1852-1871* (New York: Harper, 1935), pp. 181-261, esp. pp. 181-184.



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started as arguments about the internal organization of the Spanish nation, rather than as challenges to the integrity of that nation.<sup>21</sup>

Thus even as historians of Spain concentrated on policy, narrative, legal, and institutional development, they accepted the premise that Spain was a nation-state. This habit of mind encouraged them to focus on the central government of the nation and on the infighting associated with access to the power and resources commanded by the state. This approach, and the comparisons it permits, has its uses and even a certain validity in the contemporary world, but it becomes increasingly problematic as we push our analyses back to an era before the French and Industrial Revolutions, when Europeans did not yet think or operate in terms of nations.

This is especially the case where economic activity is involved, since, regardless of political boundaries, before the middle of the nineteenth century economic ties outside the locality linked it either with the surrounding region or with international trade. Such economic relations rarely conformed to the boundaries of latter-day nations. Nevertheless, historians writing about Spain have perceived that other European societies, defined as nations, enjoyed levels of well being, technological expertise, political participation, and cultural sophistication higher than those of Spain. Hence they have been drawn to questions that one way or another boil down to “What have Spain and the Spaniards done wrong?” In fact, “Spain” is an abstraction, a conceptual collectivity, and even a collective myth. From an economic perspective, it is a collection of distinct, autonomous, and overlapping networks of regionally oriented activity, many of which extended beyond the political confines of the Spanish “nation.”<sup>22</sup> While we cannot work without comparative insights, we must remember that the things we compare are often concepts that mask both divergent and highly interactive phenomena.

*Recent trends in historiography*

The rapidity of change in contemporary Spain has combined with belated Spanish access to recent European historiographical trends to highlight aspects of Spanish history that need review. Now that Spain has “succeeded” economically and politically among the community of

<sup>21</sup> On 1840–1844, see Carlos Marichal, *La revolución liberal y los primeros partidos políticos en España, 1834–1844* (Madrid: Cátedra, 1980), pp. 204–231. Comellas, writing from a relatively conservative perspective, suggests that many of the cantonal revolts of 1873 involved protests against the local agencies of central or regional administration, rather than against Madrid itself. José Luis Comellas, *Historia de España contemporánea* (Madrid: Rialp, 1988), pp. 243–246.

<sup>22</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, esp. chapter 3.

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nations, the problem is no longer that of explaining failure, but rather that of explaining success. The nature of the comparative exercise has changed dramatically, and it has become necessary to explain Spain's *particular* role in a larger process rather than Spain's missteps along one of several distinct but parallel national paths.<sup>23</sup> This perceptual shift came about just as Spanish scholars finally obtained easy access to the historical methods and approaches developed in Europe and the United States during the Franco years. There are at least three approaches to historical inquiry that thus became available simultaneously with the need to reformulate the main questions asked about the Spanish past.<sup>24</sup>

**History of people without history**<sup>25</sup> One such development is the mid-twentieth-century preoccupation with the history and economic context of society, particularly the poor and working elements that have left few documentary sources even though such people constituted the vast majority of past populations. Both an outgrowth of and a response to Marxism, this approach is epitomized by the *Annales* school in France and elements of the group associated with *Past and Present* in England. Within Spain important groups of historians working in this tradition emerged in Barcelona and Seville, and more recently in Galicia.<sup>26</sup>

Whether espousing economic determinism, the dialectic of the class struggle, or simply a concern for the ecological and structural constraints on individual decision making, this approach was introduced into Spain by Jaime Vicens Vives and brought to Spanish history a lively concern for social and economic structures and patterns. By the 1960s this approach was established in French and English historical circles, and it was taken up rapidly in Spain as scholars educated in the 1950s and 1960s became established in university faculties. In many cases, whatever the specific questions or premises of a given author, the results have included findings that fit uncomfortably within the prevailing historiography of Spain and its search for an explanation of failure.

<sup>23</sup> This is analogous to the critique in David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), esp. pp. 98–117.

<sup>24</sup> This is explored in much greater detail relative to Spanish historical writing between 1939 and 1972 in Jover Zamora, "El siglo XIX en la historiografía española," pp. 27–151.

<sup>25</sup> The specific phrase, of course, is borrowed from the title of Eric Wolf's famous *Europe and the People without History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

<sup>26</sup> Examples include Jordi Nadal, Josep Fontana, and their numerous successors in Barcelona, Luis Alonso Alvarez, who has published extensively on Galicia, and Antonio García-Baquero and Antonio-Miguel Bernal in Sevilla. See various citations in the Bibliography.