

Poland and Spain in the Interwar and Postwar Period

Edited by
Małgorzata Mizerska-Wrotkowska
José Luis Orella Martínez

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Reviewers:

- 1) Prof. Javier Paredes (University of Alcalá)
- 2) Prof. Dariusz Milczarek (Centre for Europe, University of Warsaw)

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Preface

Preface

JAVIER PAREDES

1. The possible history

The limitations of human knowledge are what forces us to study the history of one country or another separately; what is more, as historians we are often categorised as specialists of one country and one particular period, ignoring what was happening around. And, fortunately, we have already recovered from that fever that was high enough to produce hallucinations so severe that we raised „local history” to the status of a legitimate sub-discipline of our science, maintaining that small villages located no more than a couple of kilometres from one another should be treated by investigators as if they were two different worlds. Methodological imperatives should not allow us to forget that there is no other History than the Universal History in time and space. As a consequence, I am more than glad in view of the project of cooperation between Polish and Spanish historians, who overcome the historical and mental localisms limiting researchers to resolving some small, uninteresting historical problems, as it was the case with the squire of Don Quixote.

Sancho Panza insisted on “doing history” in order to find out who was the first man that scratched his head or the pioneer of tumblers, after which he concluded, in view of the answers he received, that “to ask foolish things and answer nonsense I needn’t go looking for help from my neighbours”. To which Don Quixote replied: “Thou hast said more than thou art aware of, Sancho, for there are some who weary themselves out in learning and proving things that, after they are known and proved, are not worth a farthing to the understanding or memory” (Cervantes, *Don Quixote of La Mancha*, Part II, Chapter XXII; translation by John Ormsby).

García de Cortázar was right when he stated that different historiographic methods derive from very precise concepts (Cf. García de Cor-

tázar 1968). Therefore, the choice between one or the other and, ultimately, the epistemological statute of History, depend on those precise, preliminary concepts we depart from in our understanding of reality. In this sense, the first aspect to be considered is the cognitive scope of History, a debate that is still lively and heated, since the times when Ranke established History as a scientific discipline.

“Traditionally - writes Olábarri - Ranke is considered to be the father of scientific History. In such case, it is not - as people used to think - because Ranke invented or applied truly scientific methods and techniques to the past for the first time; the rules of documentary critique had been developed, most of all, by the dark Bollandist brethren in the 18th century. Ranke turned History into science by assigning a specific object of study. Within the framework of reaction of German thought confronted with the encyclopaedist naturalism disseminated from France, Ranke saw a scientific discipline through which - and only through which - human beings could be understood” (Olábarri 1984: 157).

Ortega y Gasset wrote years ago that such a discovery was not a discovery at all; and therefore, it was not a scientific advancement, but rather a leap into the void. This is how the philosopher summarizes the thoughts of the historian: “Ranke thought that humans had no nature, that they only had history. Or, which would be the same, that history was the same for humans as nature was for things” (Ortega y Gasset 1942: 63). It is not a coincidence - still considering the author quoted above - that since those times, many diverse historiographic movements, apparently different from one another, such as historicism, Comte’s positivism, Marxism or the *Annales* school, agreed on this central point: that History was a science of humans par excellence.

Departing from this thesis, one may understand how - in spite of the differences between the positivist and the Marxist schools - both movements agreed that the knowledge of physical phenomena is no different from the knowledge concerning human behaviour, once we have discovered the immutable laws governing social behaviours. Having accepted this proposition, naturally, those who monopolise the knowledge of such laws would have access to the key leading human species to a paradise on Earth. This is how History becomes a political tool and facilitates the “sages” to give up understanding of the world, in order to dedicate their efforts to its transformation - in accordance with the famous proposition by Marx.

On the other hand, there were historians who maintained that humans cannot be the object of History, because in such case all other Sciences would prove unnecessary. History, they said, can only study one of the many aspects of human beings, or - to put it in more academic terms: the formal object of History consists in the historical dimension of human beings, known as historicity. Therefore, History can only study this particular area, and it should not intrude in other areas of knowledge, trying to subordinate or absorb them, up to the point of making them disappear.

In contrast to animals that only live in their physical time, historicity is a characteristic typical of humans. This is why, without the possibility to go beyond the world that surrounds the former - the *Umwelt*, as described by the etologist Uexküll - they live in a closed, programmed world, where only programmed responses are possible. On the contrary, historicity or historical time is constituted by a whole set of possibilities available for human beings to choose from. This explains the fact that goldfinches have built their nests this year in the exact same way as they used to in the Middle Ages, and they cannot do it otherwise. Nonetheless, medieval people, who had exactly the same nature as we do and the same as the first man, Adam, would build a world completely different from ours. And this is, precisely, the task of a historian: to explain the changes produced by the decisions made by human beings in their continuous exercise of free will.

As a consequence, depending if we consider that the formal object of history consists in humans themselves or in their historicity, that is: the set of past events that people caused or could act upon, some will trace the "immutable laws" governing human life and others will scrutinize the signs of human freedom in the past; some will strive to exceed the categorical and closed approach of positivism, considering themselves to be white-coat natural scientists, and others will stay within the limits marked by Humanism. The former can recreate reality in accordance with their prejudices or the purpose of their *questions*; while the latter, consciously limited by the realist principle that "things are as they are", will be aware that in the progress of understanding reality, the *answers* cannot recreate it or distort it, as the only due course is to simply respect it.

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Introduction

Introduction

MAŁGORZATA MIZERSKA-WROTKOWSKA
UNIVERSITY OF WARSAW

JOSÉ LUIS ORELLA MARTÍNEZ
UNIVERSITY OF SAN PABLO CEU (MADRID)

In the second volume comparing Poland and Spain (the comparison being fruit of cooperation between the University of Warsaw and the CEU San Pablo University in Madrid) we concentrate on studying two historical periods of the 20th century, the happy 1920's of the interwar period and later on at the end of World War II. The two periods have been studied in their corresponding countries but have never been compared in parallel to see their coincidences and differences. Poland and Spain of the time allow for a comparison due to the similar populations, social agricultural models with intensely industrialised local centres and modern structuring processes which lead to a crisis of the very national unity. The selected periods present indispensable similarities which make the study interesting.

The first part of the book, devoted to Poland, starts with a text by **Łukasz Zamecki**, where he analyses a selection of issues concerning the Second Polish Republic. The author recalls the circumstances under which Poland regained its independence after 123 years of thralldom and dissects the process of young democracy shaping. A further section of the article is devoted to the economic reconstruction of the state which had suffered from massive war damage.

The next chapter, written by **Błażej Poboży**, analyses the political system of Poland as ruled by Marshal Józef Piłsudski. The author depicts the process of formation of the authoritarian regime, foundation of the charismatic leader's authority and the hallmarks of the Sanation rule. Thought-provoking conclusions provide an interesting closure to the disquisition.

Another succulent thread raised in the presented book is the condition of the Catholic Church in Poland in the interwar period and after World War II. In a section devoted to the period immediately after Poland regained its independence, **Jan Żaryn** paints in a very interesting manner the Church's role in the state's functioning, the foundations of its authority and the specific nature of the Polish nation's Catholicism. In a fact-rich section of the chapter devoted to the Polish People's Republic, Professor Żaryn presents manifestations of the communists' fight against the Church and the grounds for its moral victory.

In the chapter closing the "Polish part" **Małgorzata Mizerska-Wrotkowska** analyses the problems of emigration essential for Poland's contemporary history as based on the Swedish case. Research conducted has proven that the example is universal. It represents two basic types of emigration – economic and political.

In the second part of the book – devoted to Spain - **Carlos Hernández** introduces us to his work on Spain, in which he discusses the period of transition from the old political forms of the Restoration to the new mass organisations more compatible with similar European phenomena. On its own, his study becomes interesting from the time of appearance of secessionist, national movements in Spain.

The second study discusses the process of modernisation of Spain which intends to recover from the chaos by appealing to the "iron surgeon", a strong authority, who will draw out a leader to unite the energy of the entire country. **Antonio Cañellas** presents how General Miguel Primo de Rivera rose to power and intended to enact under the efficient and aseptic direction, far from party struggles, what was called in the language of propaganda an attempt to modernise the backward Spain of the time. Those are the moments when restrictions of freedom are considered to contribute to the better efficiency of governments' executive power.

On another plane of comparison, the role of the Catholic Church in the configuration of the Spanish society becomes indispensable. In his work, **Paweł Skibiński**, Hispanist, investigates the role the Catholic Church played in Spain impeding the establishment of a totalitarian regime and acting in favour of a Concordat with the State, where Church-related, educational, health-care and social institutions enjoyed autonomy and special favours, in the process of shaping a new Spanish society. His work focuses mainly on the negotiation process which was completed with the signature of the concordat to be later classified as model by the Catholic Church.

As regards studies concerning the second half of the 20th century, they restrict themselves to a more specialist plane, following the fateful World War II. The participation of **José Luis Orella** is limited to the change which occurred in the war economy, managed by the military authorities, which had to reconstruct the country also razed to the ground by a war, the civil war in this case. In the 1950's, however, the economy was transformed into a social market economy due to development plans which gave Spain the western standard of living and made Spain the ninth economic power in the world.