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SPORT, IDENTITY, AND NATIONALISM
IN THE HISPANIC WORLD

Ed. Mariann Vaczi (University of Nevada, Reno)

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MONOGRAFÍCO

SPORT, IDENTITY, AND NATIONALISM
IN THE HISPANIC WORLD

Ed. Mariann Vaczi (University of Nevada, Reno)
From Marxism to fascism across the ideological palette, sport has engaged politics and power in diverse ways. Nationalism, nation-building and identity construction has occupied a prominent place in, and produced some of the most seminal works of sport studies. More particularly, the works of Joseph Maguire and Alan Bairner inspired the application of nationalism, globalization and identity theories in diverse geographical contexts. Sport studies have integrated and complemented the most significant theoretical currents and conceptual toolkits of mainstream sociology, history, political science and anthropology (Giulianotti). Sport and physical culture have been variously presented in terms of “imagined communities” (Palmer, Harris, Gleaves and Llewellyn) and “invented traditions” (Brandes, Foster and Hyatt) for purposes of nation building. Due to the ubiquitous presence of multi-billion dollar sports in the media, as well as global mega-events, sports yield themselves easily as prime manifestations of “banal nationalism” (Billig) as quotidian, unselfconscious vindications of the nation. Theories of globalization and glocalization inform sport in a swiftly changing global world, where sport and physical cultures find themselves affected by glocal encounters and their homogenizing or heterogenizing tendencies (Giulianotti and Robertson). Sport studies have intensely engaged the most influential social theories of identity construction: primordialist and social constructivist (see Smith “The Ethnic” and “National Identity”, Geertz) manifestation of identity construction, as well as performance theory (Goffman), including the gender dimensions of performed individual and collective identities (Butler, Yuval-Davis).

This special issue deploys the approaches above in a Hispanic context. While diverse in focus, the single greatest common denom-
nator to all analyses is that their subjects belong to the particular geographical unit of the Hispanic world, which we take to include nations and cultures that speak Spanish, and have a historical-cultural link to Spain. This Hispanic dimension allows us to examine sport colonialism and post-colonialism, race-relations and indigenous politics, sport in authoritarian regimes, and the use of sport to break with European roots in quest of South American nationhood and identities. We understand the concept of “sport” quite broadly, including elements of body culture and gaming that some would question as “sport” or “physical culture.” As long as an activity has competitive dimensions and/or involves strenuous, ritualized, rule-driven or choreographed physical activity, however, we considered it as sport, broadly defined. Moreover, we find that crossbreeding sporting elements with other realms of culture such as art and ritual, as with the bullfight; or cognition and logic, as with chess; or folklore, as with human tower building, only yield more exciting and exact conclusions about their social and political embeddedness. In the following, I will briefly review the contributions of this special issue in light of their national or sub-national cultures, as well as the theories and literatures that inform them.

Sporting Nationalisms in Spain

Sporting nationalisms in Spain will be organized around three main pillars for our purposes: the Franco regime, due to its authoritarian nation-building dynamics through sport; soccer, due to its import as the most popular sport that has aligned with regional nationalist movements; and the current Catalonian independence movement, which provides a case study to observe the way politics engage physical culture for its nation-building purposes.

Sport and Identity under the Franco Dictatorship

Their ideological compass notwithstanding, dictatorships across the world have routinely espoused sports and physical culture for nation building purposes. Authoritarian regimes have equated physical superiority with national superiority, and the Greek ideal of the strong, healthy body soon assumed ethnic and racial characteristics in order to establish biologically rooted hierarchies among groups of people. The first sport documentary *Olympia* (1938) by Leni Riefenstahl, in itself a landmark in the history of documentary cinema but highly controversial due to its political context, suggests the ease with which the physical
prowess and competitiveness of the individual may translate, through their iconicity, into the prowess and competitiveness of the nation. Sport, politics and nationalism intertwined in ideologically as diverse regimes as in Nazi Germany (Carr, Hart-Davis), Communist China (Brownell), the Soviet Union (Riordan “Sport in Soviet”) and Eastern Europe (Riordan “Sport, Politics”), Fascist Spain (Shaw, Ofer) and Italy (Martin). While these and similar regimes fought major wars due to their ideological antagonisms, they all remained remarkably similar in their treatment of the sporting body as never an end in itself, for effort or for pleasure, but as a means to political agendas such as social control, conformist coercion, the establishment of the custodial role of the state, the inculcation of world views, division and rule, or placating social tensions. For authoritarian political establishments, sport variously served as embodiment of their own political successes, or as “opium of the people” (Lever, Redeker) that placates slumbering discontent.

The Franco regime (1939-75) was characterized by extensive control over all realms of life, sport included. The Falangist National Sports Federation oversaw three sporting areas: national federations, clubs and leagues; sports events and tournaments established in the model of Nazi and Italian ideological institutions; and the less relevant military sport (Quiroga 205). As far as the first category was concerned, soccer had a strategic importance for Francoist politics. The regime used the sport to improve its image abroad, and to promote Fascist ideology through, for example, the adoption of Eastern European players as political refugees of communism. Soccer stadiums became a field where Fascism could be “normalized” as quotidian: the ubiquitous display of Fascist symbolism, greetings, anthems and chants, the central appointment of presidents instead of democratic club voting, the forced Hispanicization of all foreign, non-Spanish club names, the control of stadium language use and behavior (Shaw) aimed to homogenize the sporting arena in terms of Hispanic and Fascist identity.

Inbal Ofer’s work filled a lacuna on sport research under Franco, as she identified the interfaces of physical education, Fascism, and women’s social roles during the dictatorship. In the current volume, she examines the ambiguous results of ideological sentimental education launched by the Department of Physical education of the Sección Femenina, or Women’s Section of the Fascist Falange party. The objective of the movement was to improve the Spanish “race” through training strong women for motherhood, spreading the Fascist doctrine,
and reaching more diverse female populations by universalizing physical education. The spread of physical education, however, had a dual effect for Francoist Spain: while it reinforced control over the female body, it also became an arena of resistance, liberation and progress. The care of, and pleasure in one’s body, which in national-Catholic, Francoist Spain was suspect at best and anathema at worst, ended up undermining the official discourse on the role and capacities of women: they learnt how to take care of their bodies, “and exercise muscles no one even dared to speak about” (Ofer, present issue). In spite of itself, Francoist physical education became a site of transgression for women and female PE teachers. The very fact that all primary school children (boys and girls) should be entitled to weekly hours of physical education, the training of thousands of women as teachers with competitive salaries, and less restrictive sport wear including bathing suits inadvertently promoted progressive ideas of female agency. Ofer points at what I call sporting women’s double bind elsewhere (“Soccer”, 105): to the political right, those who thought women should stay at home, PE teachers were too revolutionary and “forward;” to the left, they were too conservative because of their association with the Falange.

“Poor Spanish mailman,” American chess grandmaster Bobby Fisher said to Arturo Pomar, chess prodigy of the 1940s in Francoist Spain. “What a shame. You play so well, and you’ll have to return to Spain to the life of affixing stamps” (cited by Escourido, present volume). The splendors and miseries of Pomar’s career were symptomatic of a rarely explored facet of the Francoist sport establishment: the glorification and subsequent abandonment of a sport personage at a whim, and overnight. Few things demonstrate so poignantly the regime’s utilitarian approach to people, which often treated sport clubs and athletes in function of whether they contributed to the advancement of fascist ideologies. Franco was not much interested in sport himself, and his dictatorship did not substantially finance sport, unlike other authoritarian regimes like Italy or the Soviet Union (Shaw). Arturito the child player became the embodiment of the “Iberian Fury,” and his sporting successes were appropriated by the regime as properly Spanish. In spite of the child’s sensitive psychological disposition, Arturito was dragged across Spain in display of chess and Spanish exceptionalism. His parents dared not protest in order to protect Arturito from burnout — another characteristic feature of regimes that silence people even when their most elemental human rights were violated. As Arturito grew into Arturo, he took up a job at the Spanish
Postal Service. The Swedish qualifiers for the world championship made his abandonment by the regime most salient: Pomar made the trip without a team of analysts, on borrowed money. He put on such an impressive game in spite of sleep deprivation due to the lack of a team that he earned the admiration of the greatest chess grandmasters of his time. Escourido’s conclusions show the determining impact of the regime on the sportman’s career: Arturo was not even upset with his treatment, as if it was only natural that a career the regime started would also be finished off by the regime. His nonchalance reveals a particular feature of authoritarian regimes: their capacity to alienate individuals from their own talents, lives and careers.

**Soccer in Spain: National and Sub-national Perspectives**

Soccer in Spain has so closely aligned with nationalist movements during their twentieth century trajectories (Noci, Gómez, Shobe, MacClancy “Nationalism”) that it often spectacularly visualizes the country’s political and identificational impasses (Vaczi “Bilbao Catch-22”). The Spanish national team in particular is a contested ideological terrain: throughout its history, regional players have been fundamental in the development of the sport, and for the national team, while they were often anti-Spain Basque or Catalan nationalist (Vaczi “The Spanish Fury”, O’Brien). National team performance is often viewed as a barometer for regional, sub-national relationships: poor performance in the past was considered as a sign of antagonism, and more recent international feats have been celebrated as unity in diversity (Delgado). Spanish national identity narratives through soccer have tended to split dramatically according to loss or victory: if a sport team, especially the national football team won, it was variously proof of the “vigor,” “fury,” “passion,” and “race” of the nation and the unity of its nationalities, while losses would generate the fatalism of failure narratives (Quiroga).

Complementing qualitative and historical research, Ramón Llopis-Goig offers a quantitative analysis of soccer fandom and political sentiments with regards to the four most politicized and symbolic teams in Spain: Real Madrid, FC Barcelona, Athletic Club de Bilbao, and the Spanish national team. These teams have been major icons for Spanish, Catalanian and Basque identity construction, respectively, throughout the twentieth century. Llopis-Goig explores the larger questions of regional nationalism, identity, and left vs. right political leanings through fans’ self-identification, their following of the Spanish national soccer team, their preferences with regards to regional auto-
nomy, and their left vs. right ideological orientation. According to this study based on representative sampling and a national survey, the fans of FC Barcelona are most left-leaning, and are most in favor of reforming the current state by increasing the autonomy of the region. This resonates with the larger social impetus of the current Catalan sovereignty process (see Vaczi current issue). The fans of the Basque Athletic Club de Bilbao have the strongest regional identification with their Basque heritage: fans identify as either only Basque or Basque and Spanish, but not exclusively Spanish. At the same time, they are not as discontent with their autonomous regional arrangements as Catalans, which coincides with the current Basque nationalist (PNV) agenda of not pursuing independence. And finally, the fans of Real Madrid are the most right-wing leaning, and most likely to define themselves as entirely or partly Spanish. Llopis-Goig’s research concludes that the symbolic import of these clubs remains important for political-ideological identifications, while radical, exclusive and homogenizing loyalties are not as prevalent as stereotypes would have us believe.

The Basque Athletic Club has been subject of sport studies research for a recruitment philosophy that is singular in the world of elite sport: the club only signs Basque born, or Basque trained players. Several studies have addressed the assumptions this philosophy has of Basque identities and their impasses, and their relationships with the Basque nationalist movement. The contributions in this volume will approach the club’s signing philosophy from novel perspectives. While the club’s identification with its Basque fan base has inspired much analysis (Vaczi “Bilbao Catch-22”, Carlos Castillo), Gutiérrez and Aquino set out to explain a conundrum: why do non-Basques support a team that, on a practical level, discriminates their own athletes because they are not Basque? With 165 official fan clubs, Athletic Club is the fifth most supported club in Spain, and the third most successful historically. The impasses between keeping the localist Basque-only philosophy and winning more games and titles also resonate in fan communities Spain-wide, as Gutierrez shows. However, it also remains clear that without its unique roster, the club would lose much of its fan base outside of the Basque Country.

Basques are a heavily ethnicized people (MacClancy “Biological”) due to their ancient, obscure, and insular origins: in his 1950s BBC series “Orson Welles Around the World,” the American director presents them as “the Red Indians of Europe.” Never, however, had Basqueness been conceived in terms of Blackness until the first Black soccer player
was signed by Athletic Club de Bilbao. Aquino explores the integration of Iñaki Williams in the club, and how it produced the symbolic, if not necessarily real, inclusion of African immigrant communities within Basque identity. The integration of non-white players in European national teams has gained considerable media attention for the past decade, “signaling as it does,” Aquino writes in the current issue, “the destabilization of normative white European identity.” The case of Iñaki Williams is a particular breakthrough in a club where, because of its Basque-only philosophy, the discussion of player pedigrees in Bilbao actively constructs the boundaries between Basques and non-Basques. Aquino revisits some of the special chapters of defining Basqueness through player recruitment, and also rejections. Each case reveals a particular idea of ethnic identity in terms of primordialist, social constructivist, or performative definitions: birthplace, upbringing, genealogy and national belonging have variously established ingroup and outgroup boundaries. In all its variations, however, Basque identity was white until Iñaki Williams, whose eruption in the field provoked several race related commentaries Spain and Basque Country-wide, arguing that it should be perfectly natural that Blackness and Basqueness go together. This aggressive “rhetoric of colorblindness,” however, as Aquino remarks, was ultimately just as “othering:” it was precisely this loud defensiveness that revealed that Black Basqueness, instead of quotidian, remains a major breakthrough.

**Sport for Catalonia’s Independence**

As of this writing in 2017, Catalonia is preparing to vote on a referendum about the region’s independence in spite of a Constitutional ban. The current Catalan sovereignty process is the result of accumulating conflicts and disagreements over cultural, social and political issues with the Spanish government, and has become particularly intensive over the past ten years. The present contributions explore the role physical culture has played in rallying Catalonians, formerly unconvinced of secessionism, behind the idea of independence: banning the ultimate Spanish symbol, the bullfight in Catalonia, and promoting the ultimate Catalan symbols, soccer and human towers, for nation-building purposes.

Bullfighting is part of a complex we might find unique to Spain: the coexistence of cutting edge modernity and social progress with almost Medieval traditionalism, all with utter naturalness as if such contradictions were a problem for lesser spirits only. If soccer is some-
times viewed as a barometer of Spain’s state of the union, the bullfight is viewed, by its opponents anyhow, as a barometer of Spain’s reluctant modernization. In spite of its shrinking base, bullfighting still reflects important dilemmas between tradition and modernity (Douglass), state vs. region, centralism vs. secessionism (Brandes current issue), including social issues like the role and possibilities of women in popular culture and public performances dominated by men (Pink).

Stanley Brandes explores Catalonia’s alienation from the bullfight as symptomatic of its alienation from Spain. Catalonia’s outlawing of the proud and masculine black bull, I write elsewhere, was “a ritual act of territorial demarcation” (Vaczi “Football”, 7). In July 2016, a 29-year old matador was gored to death in the bullring of Teruel. The incident caused international criticism of the practice of bullfight in the European Union; more importantly and surprisingly, the anti-bullfight public reveled in the matador’s death. Two adjectives constantly emerged in the international and national media: “barbaric,” as allusion to the bullfight’s opposition to civilization, and “sport,” which meant to distract from its cultural value defined by its aficionados as “art.” The Osborne bull, once a commercial for liquor displayed by highways, has turned into a national symbol. Catalonia used the abolition of the bullfight as a conscious strategy of rejecting not just the practice, but the entire culture that endorsed it: a “backward” Spain. The last bullfight was held in 2011 in Catalonia, and bullrings were quickly converted into other social spaces such as malls or arenas for folkloric events, making sure the specter of the Spanish bull may never return for the lack of a place. Banning the bull is widely considered as one of the most important symbolic cultural policies for the Catalonian sovereignty process. While animal rights were cited as one of the reasons, a political agenda was quickly revealed as Catalonia did not ban its own variations on the bull sport, the correbous and the bou embolat, which some argued also qualified as abuse.

The bullring of Tarragona, south of Barcelona, now homes the region’s emergent national symbol: the Catalonian human towers. I discuss the iconic significance of this old folkloric traditional sport for the Catalonian sovereignty process elsewhere (Vaczi “Catalonia’s”), and Erickson has noted its potential for community formation. The article here was inspired by an episode I witnessed of sub-national solidarity in Basque and Catalonian desires to vote about independence. The iconicity of tower building, and the sport’s ethos of collaboration and cooperation embodied Basque and Catalan sub-national solidarity in
their pursuits of regional autonomy. In this chapter, I take the emblematic Catalan liberty song, Lluis Lach’s *L’estaca* or “The Stake,” as a metaphor for the agonic state-region relationships of Spain. The stake was a metaphor for the Franco dictatorship that tied its peoples, and did not allow them to walk freely — a logic Basque and Catalanian *independentistas* argue they continue to feel. Pulling the stake from several sides, however, wears it out and eventually causes it to collapse. The metaphor’s two fundamental motifs map a particular political geography of Spain: the agonic relationship between the center (stake) and the periphery (pull away regions), as well as solidarity and united struggle among them. I examine how the two political peripheries have progressively conspired to “wear out” Spanish sovereignty through sport and physical culture, which are particularly apt to present these agonic interactions due to their physicality. After a historical overview, this chapter will focus on the diverse ways Basque and Catalanian sport and physical culture have challenged Spanish centralism throughout the current Catalanian sovereignty process (2009-2017).

**Hispanic Nationalisms in the Americas**

Sport in Hispanic America was much influenced by its Spanish colonial heritage, as well as its proximity to the United States. Soccer and baseball have become “national” sports in many South American countries, structuring both internal, post-colonial relations, and external ones with the hegemonic and nearby “Other,” the United States. Sporting nationalisms in these countries therefore often assume an anti-capitalist, anti-hegemony character, which also permeates political relations in the North and South Americas. At the same time, South American countries used sports in order to distance themselves from their European roots, in quest of their own independent nationalism and identities.

As we transition from the Iberian Peninsula to the Americas, we will start with the United States and the way its Basque game, the *jai alai*, grew into a site of resistance to capitalism as Basque sport migrants drew on values and features of political struggle inspired by the Basque-Spanish conflict back in Europe. We will continue the theme of resistance to capitalist exploitation and US hegemony in Dominican baseball. Baseball in Cuba bears the mark of irony as the “Cuban national sport” to the extent that it becomes quotidian even in literature, in spite of US-Cuban relations. Finally, Argentina is approached from two of its most relevant perspectives: the links between Argentine soccer and
Peronism reveal how politics used soccer for its nation building practices, and Argentine rugby shows the encounters of state nationalism with indigenous peoples’ resistance.

**Confronting US Capitalism: Jai Alai and Baseball**

At the height of its game in the late 1980’s, González Abrisketa tells us (present issue), jai alai was a 700-million-dollar business a year, with 14 active frontons throughout the United States, which would routinely fill with gamblers and aficionados of the “world’s fastest sport.” González revisits the two golden ages of the Basque sport in the United States: the 1950s-60s, and the 1970s-80s. The author argues that these two eras were also a generation gap not only in terms of age, but the political culture jai alai players brought with them. Overwhelmingly from the Basque Country, sport migrants in the 70-80s responded very differently than previous generations to what the game had to offer in the United States. While the first generation of Basque players were relatively content with the socio-economic opportunities sport migration offered them in comparison to the early Franco regime, the author argues that the emergence of ETA, considered revolutionary, left wing and socialist back then, had an impact on how Basque players viewed their situation in US capitalist culture. The emergent Basque political culture lent ethos and vocabulary to US based jai alai players: an ethos of resistance and struggle, the strategy of hordago or all or nothing, and deeply politicized resistance strategies like hunger strikes were borrowed from their original Basque context and deployed in the American one of maximum capitalism and zero unionism. These resistance strategies had great success in players’ struggle for greater job security and fair treatment.

“Americans cough, and we get pneumonia,” they say in the Dominican Republic (Klein, present volume), with reference to the pervasive American influence in all walks of life, except baseball. Alan Klein presents Dominican baseball as an example of relational nationalism in which the Global South is reacting to the exploitation experienced from the Global North. Dominican baseball nationalism is intimately embedded in a context of the neocolonial hegemony of Major League baseball, which used the DR as a resource for players. Baseball has become the country’s great resistance movement to American dominance, and the exploitative behavior of MLB. The first “no” came from a player, Fellito Guerra, who was sought after by American teams.
He loudly said no, citing the occupation of the Dominican Republic by US Marines between 1916-24. Dominican resistance through baseball would escalate into an “engaged acrimony” between the two countries, and the Dominican resistance consisted of circumnavigating US laws and rules wherever they could. Dominicans were engaged in age and identity fraud as a reaction to strict MLB regulations, and the so-called buscónes (scouts) emerged in US media as manipulating scoundrels. Conflicts were exacerbated by different cultural approaches to rules, law, and ethics, which point at an arrangement where the North makes the laws and rules, and the South can’t afford to keep them. The conflict reveals the cultural difference between the dominant, who create and observe the law, and the powerless, who take the risk of breaking laws in an environment that is devoid of opportunities. The struggle for baseball is a struggle for political and economic sovereignty.

“Before the republic, there was baseball,” Pérez writes about Cuba’s dominant sport. “After the revolution, there was baseball. And during all the years in between — there was baseball” (493). That baseball should remain Cuba’s favorite past time is not without irony, the author continues: “the quintessential American game, at the service of the Cuban revolution, [became] the quintessential anti-American embodiment” (494). But then, sport history thrives on similar ironies as colonialized subjects attempt to insert themselves, as agents, into history by beating the master in their own game, whose most poignant exponent was C.L.R. James’ book on Trinidadian cricket. Baseball arrived on the island in the mid-19th century, just when Cuba looked increasingly towards the United States, and away from Spain, in its quest of identity, autonomy, and relationships. Among this quest of a Cuban nation was the deployment of de-territorialization strategies from Spain: among others, the endorsement of baseball by Cuban criollos and the Havana elite. They adopted the American game as modern and progressive, and the rejected the Spanish bullfight as backward and inhuman (Pérez 505), whose logic was not unlike contemporary sub-national views of the bullfight in Spain, as we see in this issue from Stanley Brandes. While the Castro regime achieved its primary objectives of socialism and nation-building through a sport sector that was governed entirely by the state, and it opened to the south in a counter-hegemonic move (Huish), baseball kept its dominance throughout the era. Ballet too became a hallmark of Cuban identity as another politicized instance of physical culture. The Ballet Nacional de Cuba, famously spearheaded by Alicia Alonso and supported by the
Castro regime, became a pride of Cuban identity in its characteristic mixture of classical style and Latin sensuality.

Poetry was “one form of political commentary that shaped criollos’ debates on the politics of Cuba,” and it often made references to baseball (Carter 143). In this volume, Alan Bairner complements nineteenth-century poetry and baseball by approaching twentieth-century Cuban national identity through the Havana Quartet novels of Leonardo Padura Fuentes. Bairner proceeds along three basic premises: that the concept of national sport is a useful lens to examine national identity; that works of fiction can be legitimate data sources for sociological research; and that baseball is the national sport of Cuba. Beyond the habitual approaches of primordialist interpretations, “imagined community” and “invented tradition, ethnic vs. civil nationalism as backgrounds to the establishment of a sport as “national,” the use of a literary source allows Bairner to examine sport as “banal nationalism” (Billig): the everyday, discreet but consistent presence of sport in Cuban imaginary and daily life. How does a sport become national? Through a people’s priority in inventing it, like the Gaelic games, or the Basque pelota; through success and influence, like soccer everywhere; through symbolization in spite of decline, like cricket in England or bullfighting in Spain. On the basis of the novels, Bairner argues that below and beyond the spectacular, traditional or official, baseball discreetly emerges in the fissures of everyday existence. In a novel that is not a sport book but a detective story, thinking baseball is a routine and unconscious process as sport similes abound. The main character detective Conde uses baseball language to describe an admired woman; a school notebook; a murder weapon and homicide; streets, building and people, among other descriptions. Baseball emerges particularly as nostalgia and historical memory to articulate a feeling of spleen, “one of the many collateral damages of an unfulfilled country’s destiny,” Bairner writes. Baseball’s significance for Cubans emerges as it becomes a subtext to narratives other than sport.

**Argentine Rugby and Soccer**

With regards to Argentine sport and body culture, soccer and tango comes to mind immediately due to Eduardo Archetti’s by now classic ethnography about Argentine masculinity performed through soccer, tango and polo. Archetti’s work reveals the diverse ways play style and body technique engage gender politics, and essentialized as well as contextual national identities. Substantial research has been done on
Sport’s role as national representation through Argentina’s twentieth century political history: the commodification and massification of tango and soccer during the economic boom of the 1920s (Karush), race, politics and national narratives of soccer (Alabarces), the Peronization and de-Peronization of sport (O’Brien, present issue), or what anti-Peronists saw as the regime’s encouragement and promotion of sport as proof of its “Nazi-Fascist” character (Rein); the military Junta (1976-83) and its control of the 1978 World Cup for foreign and domestic politics (Smith “The Argentinian”).

Anthropologist Christopher Golias complements these macro-analyses with a study that addresses race relations and post-colonial encounters through a sport rivalry between the indigenous Qompi and Aborígen rugby teams in the northern Argentine province of Formosa. The Qom is an indigenous people whom the Argentinian authorities settled in a separate area called Lot 68. Rugby was introduced among the Qom by ex-European rugby player and Argentinian nationalist Eduardo “Loco” Rossi, who went from Nazi sympathizer to establishing a rugby team among the Qom with the intent of social integration in 1993. Aborígen was the first indigenous team of Argentina, and its story inspired an award-winning documentary, A Chimera of Heroes. The film celebrated not only one man’s ideological journey and conversion, but also Argentina’s outreach to its indigenous people, and players for whom the team, so was presumed, meant a leap out of the ghetto into mainstream city life. The Qom themselves, however, displayed “active non-participation” by rejecting the new coach and his methods, as well as Argentinian nationalism represented by that team. They founded their own club, the Qompi, in Lot 68, which recruited only indigenous people, while Aborígen sported a mixed team of Qom and criollos. This aboriginal self-segregation was subsequently labelled racist by Aborígen sympathizers. The rivalry reveals the dilemma between integration vs. ethnocide, while it makes salient such markers of difference as somatic body type, practice location, skills, uniform, and the use of the indigenous language so that the other team does not understand it.

While soccer in Argentina served to break with the country’s European roots in quest of its own national identity or Argentinidad, it also bore a ghostly resemblance to Spanish soccer, especially its national team: very much like the Furia Española and Spanish soccer, the La Nuestra and Argentine soccer was influenced by twentieth-century politics. And very much like the Spanish national team, La
Nuestra too came to be a barometer of Argentine national unity and consciousness in its splendors and miseries during the turbulent history of the country. O’Brien’s present chapter follows Argentine soccer as a symbolic representation of the Peronist impulse during Perón’s first period in power (1946-55), the post-Peron era and his brief return in 1973, as well as his legacy beyond his death. The pre-Peronist values of soccer, which celebrated individualism, the romantic escape and ascent of the poor boy to stardom, and a special Argentine play style cultivated in impoverished barrios, were fertile ground for Peronist mass populism and class identity to emerge. While not particularly interested in soccer himself, Peron used the sport to promote the objectives of justicialismo or social justice; to permeate working class populism; to establish the regime’s political legitimacy, containment and distraction; to project positive iconography around himself and Evita Perón; and to project his regime internationally. A close link such fixed between soccer, Argentinidad and Peronism, the artificially bloated sense of cultural coherence dissipated as the national team La Nuestra sank into disarray, mirroring the country’s split consciousness, doubt and malaise beyond the first Peronist phase, through the dictatorship of the military junta, up until today.

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Forging an Organic Nation: Physical Education, Gender and Class (Spain 1939-1975)

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Abstract: The current paper explores the fields of physical education and of women’s sports in Spain during the years of the Franco dictatorship. It analyses the duality of these fields as both reinforcing unequal power relations and as potential arenas for resistance. The article focuses on the promotion of physical education as part of a wider effort to forge a new Fascist, and later on a National-Catholic, culture. My claim is that when it came to the issue of physical education and sporting activities the dictatorship was motivated first and foremost by the belief that the state of the individual body (both male and female) could affect and shape the condition of the body of the nation as a whole. Similarly to its early allays — Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany — the Franco regime adhered to a policy according to which individual bodies had to be monitored and strengthened in order to insure that they could fulfill the functions assigned to them by the state. Physical education, competitive sports and military training, therefore, were viewed as the means for fortifying the body and exposing diverse populations to the regime’s surveillance and indoctrination techniques. The article examines some of the ways in which the implementation of physical education policies was used by the organizational entities in charge of mobilizing women and girls in order to undermine the official discourse on the role and the capacities of the female body.

Key words: Spain, Physical Education, Franco regime, SF de la FET.

Resumen: En este artículo se exploran los campos de la educación física y de los deportes de las mujeres en España durante los años de la dictadura de Franco. Se analiza la dualidad de estos campos al reforzar relaciones de poder desigual, así como áreas potenciales de resistencia. El artículo se centra en la promoción de la educación física como parte de un esfuerzo más amplio con el objetivo de forjar, primero, una nueva cultura fascista primero y, más tarde, una cultura nacional-católica. Mi argumento es que, cuando se trata de educación física y de actividades deportivas, la dictadura estaba motivada antes que nada por la creencia de que el estado del cuerpo individual (tanto masculino como femenino) podía afectar y dar forma a la condición del cuerpo de la nación en su totalidad. De forma parecida a sus aliados —la Italia fascista y la Alemania nazi— el régimen de Franco se adhería a la política por la cual los cuerpos individuales tenían que ser controlados y fortalecidos
para asegurar que cumplieran las funciones asignadas por el estado. La educación física, los deportes de competición y el servicio militar eran vistos tanto como medios para fortalecer el cuerpo como para exponer a la población a diversas técnicas de vigilancia y adoctrinamiento. En el artículo se examinan algunas de las formas más representativas con las que las entidades encargadas de la organización de la educación física de la mujer daban forma a este discurso oficial antes mencionado.

**Palabras clave:** España, Educación Física, Dictadura de Franco, SF de la FET.

Members of the Sección Femenina de la F.E.T. labor in their capacity as sportswomen [...] in order to celebrate the greatness of the Fatherland.

It is through the practice of sport that a nation fortiﬁes itself and its people prepare themselves for the great sacriﬁces required of them in order to reach the ﬁnal and deﬁnitive victory. It is in the legions of sporting women that we witness in countless mass demonstrations that the Spanish nation ﬁnds its most efﬁcient and dedicated defenders.¹

In the world of sport we give preference to those ﬁelds that are more effective pedagogically, as well as in hygienic and educational terms. We also promote those ﬁelds that are practiced in installations that yield the most proﬁt in terms of their use.²

The Department of Physical Education of the Sección Femenina does not function solely in order to bring about an improvement in the state of the Spanish race. It exists as a means of spreading our doctrine. Hence our preoccupation:

[...] should the Sección Femenina participate in sporting events organized by the National Council of Sport? If we do so we shall be classiﬁed by others as simply one more [sporting] club. However, if we no not participate we are running the risk that the teams that we had formed through much eﬀort will be taken over by other entities outside of the party and lose their speciﬁc national-sindicalist proﬁle [...].³

The above citations reﬂect the complex evolution of the ﬁeld of women’s physical education in Spain during the years of the Franco dictatorship (1939-1975). They point to the confusion (sometimes intentionally created) between the concept of physical education and that


² “Método, planes y objetivos de la educación física femenina en España,” *Real Academia de Historia*, Fondo Asociación Nueva Andadura (henceforth ANA), Serie Azul, carpeta 41, doc. 3.

³ P. Primo de Rivera, ANA, Serie Azul, carpeta 45b, doc. 1 (26.1.1943).
of sport and highlight the tensions between the wish to generate a new physical culture for the masses, on the one hand, and the demand for elite training, on the other. They also indicate the difficulties inherent in assessing the goals and impact of the policies which this authoritarian and ultra-nationalist regime formulated in relation to the female body: Its place and “appropriate” levels of exposure within the nationalist system of education and the Francoist public sphere; its expected functions; and the disciplinary measures applied to it.

Following the work of researchers such as Cathy van Ingen and Jennifer Hargreaves the current article views gender identities as developing relationally within different cultural spaces of which the classroom, the sporting club and the youth movement are but a few. Assuming agency and constraint to be dialectically interrelated, it examines the construction of such spaces as sites of struggle over meaning and practice. As Alan Bairner rightly noted sport often constitutes a conservative set of institutional practices that reinforce existing power relations. However, he adds that “[...] there is no reason why conservative approaches to a variety of human activities cannot be intrinsically progressive or, at the very least, serve a progressive social agenda.” In the pages that follow I would like to explore the duality of the field of physical education as both reinforcing unequal power relations and as a potential arena for resistance.

The first section of the article provides some working definitions, statistics and historical background regarding the institutional setting of the field of physical education under the Franco regime. The second section analyzes the promotion of physical education as part of a wider effort to forge a new Fascist, and later on a National-Catholic, culture. My claim is that when it came to the issue of physical education and sporting activities the dictatorship was motivated first and foremost by the belief that the state of the individual body (both male and female) could affect and shape the condition of the body of the nation as a whole. Similarly to its early allies — Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany — the Franco regime adhered to a policy according to which individual bodies had to be monitored and strengthened in order to insure that they could fulfill the functions assigned to them by the state. Physical education, competitive sports and military training, therefore, were viewed as the means for fortifying the body and exposing diverse populations to the regime’s surveillance and indoctrination techniques.

\[5\] A. Bairner 2014: 58.
The section, therefore, focuses on the disciplinary choices of doctors and administrators in relation to female physical education and on the ideological and moral rhetoric used in order to justify such choices.

The third section of the article examines some of the ways in which the implementation of physical education policies was used by the organizational entities in charge of mobilizing women and girls in order to undermine the official discourse on the role and the capacities of the female body. In Spain women entered the world of sporting activities and of physical education through a manipulation of the massage that called for national regeneration and for a demographic revolution. The Female Section of the Spanish Fascist party (Sección Femenina de la FET, henceforth SF) was assigned the role of developing and monitoring physical education schemes for women. However, the SF constructed a discursive and an educational environment where the more traditional dictates emanating from regimes’ official gender ideology were often subverted. The daily interactions between PE instructors and the girls and women who trained under their supervision within the school system, universities and the Falange’s youth movement generated a space where, despite many prohibitions, a better understanding and a more positive image of the female body emerged. This final section, therefore, focuses on some of the subjective experiences of female practitioners and instructors.

Who Is in Charge of What? Working Definitions, Statistics and Organizational Structure

Within Francoist rhetoric the concepts of “physical education” and of “sport” were quite often used interchangeably. For the purpose of the current article, however, it is important to distinguish between the two. In order to do so I rely on the definitions provided by Richard Bailey: 

Sport is a collective noun and usually refers to a range of activities, processes, social relationships and presumed physical, psychological and sociological outcomes. These activities include individual, partner and team sports; contact and non-contact sports; motor-driven or perceptually dominated sports; different emphases on strategy, chance and physical skills; and competitive, self-development and purely recreational activities.6

Physical Education, on the other hand, is first and foremost:

[...] a statutory area of the school curriculum, concerned with developing pupils’ physical competence and confidence, and their ability to use these to perform in a range of activities. Whilst the performance of physical skills forms a central and characteristic feature of the subject, like all other areas of the curriculum, it is fundamentally concerned with knowledge, skills and understanding.7

The above distinction singles out the classroom as a primary arena for the diffusion of physical education policies. However, in the case of Franco’s Spain due to the distinct institutional structure within which the education of girls and young women took place, physical education policies were implemented in a similar manner and by the same agents (instructoras de educación física trained by the SF) within schools, the Falange’s Youth Movement and certain professional spaces.

Generally speaking, during the first decade of its existence the Franco regime showed less interest than its Italian and German counterparts in the promotion of sports and of physical education. This is perhaps not surprising given that the dictatorship came into life following a civil war that took the lives of over 400,000 soldiers and civilians and set the development of the Spanish economy back by nearly two decades. During the 1940s little funds were available for the promotion of sporting activities and even less to the creation of adequate facilities. When it came to legislation and to the foundation of organizational structures, however, the dictatorship advanced in great leaps. The gap between legislation and reality was typical of the way in which the Franco regime conducted itself in various fields. It was especially apparent in areas where the Falange was eager to assert its administrative power by promoting policies that contradicted the aims of other prominent forces within the nationalist coalition such as the Catholic Church or the military.8

7 Ibid.
8 Before proceeding further it is important to note that in Spain the Fascist party was but one of three political organizations or “families” that constituted the administrative backbone and provided the ideological framework for the regime. The Franco regime should therefore be viewed as a profoundly anti-liberal and nationalist regime of which a fascist movement, the Falange, was but one political force. If prior to 1942 it was the most significant force in ideological terms, following the end of the Second World War the balance of power shifted in favor of Catholic elements and the fascist influence, while continuing to exist was overshadowed by the ideology of National Catholicism.
While the administrative and ideological influence of the *Falange* greatly fluctuated throughout the dictatorship’s existence its women’s section was recognized already during the Civil War as the official women’s organization of nationalist Spain. The SF was founded in June 1934. Throughout its 43 years of existence it was led by Pilar Primo de Rivera (daughter of the former Spanish dictator Miguel Primo de Rivera and sister of the *Falange*’s founder José Antonio Primo de Rivera). At its height, in the early 1940s, the organization attained a membership of over 600,000. During the initial years of the regime Pilar Primo de Rivera used her unique position in order to attain direct control over all spheres of life where women operated. It monopolized the Spanish Syndicate for (female) University Students (SEU); the teachers and nurses’ Syndicates; the Girls’ Section of the *Falange*’s Youth Movement; and the Social Service for Women.9 It was, therefore, only logical that the SF would extend its influence also into the field of women’s physical education.

The first reference to the issue of physical education in nationalist Spain dates back to September 1938. As part of a general effort to legally codify the changes undergone by the nationalist education system it was decreed that all primary school children (girls and boys) would be entitled to six weekly hours of physical education, music and arts and crafts.10 The law of December 6th 1940 charged the *Falange*’s Youth Movement (*Frente de Juventudes*) with the promotion of physical education amongst children and youth between the ages of 7-18.11 A year later the regime announced the formation of the National Department for Sports and Physical Education under the supervision of the *Falange’s* General Secretary.12 The decree constituted a great victory for the SF, which had taken over the feminine section of the *Falange*’s Youth Movement a year earlier. It now gained entry into the public school system when it was stated that all physical education classes would be administered by its instructors. In 1944 its mandate was further expanded when all university students were required to complete a gymnastic or folk-dancing course and one course in the fields of basketball, handball, hockey or tennis under the supervision of the SF’s instructors.

9 I. Ofer 2009.
11 Boletín Oficial del Estado de 7 de diciembre de 1940.
12 Boletín Oficial del Estado de 18 de octubre de 1941.
Before attempting to effectively implement its mandate in the field, however, the SF had to solve the acute shortage of professional teaching staff. In the 1930s relatively few qualified female physical education teachers could be found in Spain. A document published in 1939 indicated that the SF did not favor the option of employing male instructors. According to its National Delegate the promotion of physical education amongst women necessitated an exclusively female staff. The first course for PE instructors, therefore, opened in Santander already during the Civil War. Candidates had to be unmarried and between 17-27 years of age. They needed to possess a school diploma and had to further undergo an interview and an entry exam, but did not have to be affiliated with the SF. The SF kept to a minimum the students’ expenses by providing uniforms, equipment and even scholarships for candidates who were recommended by the SF’s local and provincial delegates. Training included theoretical and practical components: daily classes of anatomy and physiology; lectures on the history of physical education; training sessions in the fields of gymnastics, athletics, swimming, tennis, basketball, football, regional dancing, hockey, and outdoors games. Following the war the Falange founded two national schools for the training of youth and physical education instructors. In early 1941 it inaugurated the National School José Antonio Primo de Rivera for male instructors and months later the National School Isabel la Católica for female instructors. In 1956 a further national school Julio Ruiz de Alda was officially inaugurated.

Against this background it is interesting to examine the effects of the SF policies. Until 1945 the SF trained 194 new female PE instructors. Between the years 1957-1976 further 705 PE teachers graduated from courses of between 3 to 4 years long and 155 instructors from short, one-month long, courses. While officially every school-girl in Spain was required to take part in physical education classes there are no reliable statistics as to the number of students who actually benefited from the new legislation, especially in rural areas. The SF’s documents do not reveal differences in the budget allocated for different populations. However, the interviews I conducted with ex SF-members and PE instructors reveal the fact that such differences existed.

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13 “Método, planes y objetivos de la educación física femenina en España”, ANA, Serie Azul, carpeta 41, doc. 3.
At least until the late 1950s some of the physical education classes in rural areas were administered by local priests, as part of their role as village teachers. Girls who came from such areas only arrived in the city in their senior year in order to be examined by qualified SF instructors. M.J. (a PE instructor from La Rioja) remembered the final exams which took place in Logroño:

In the mountains around La Rioja the girls attended physical education classes that were administered by the local priest. The SF ordered physical education manuals for high school students. The manuals included tables and sketches of the exercises to be given by the priest. [For] those girls who came from the sierra, it’s clear that there was no [relation] between what was written down and what they actually did. But what could you do? You couldn’t tell them [that]. You had to let them pass. Even if the exercises came out real bad we gave them a good grade. We didn’t fail anyone.16

According to the testimony of Andresa López (who headed the SF’s National School Isabel la Católica) this situation gradually came to an end during the 1950s:

In later years the SF recognized that there was a systematic problem in rural areas and this recognition brought about the creation of colegios menores. The SF gave out many scholarships, which enabled girls from the villages to receive a more comprehensive education. During the day they went to regular schools and in the afternoons they came to centers where there was a qualified physical education teacher.17

A general comparison between the overall number of women and girls who were either identified as members of the SF or took part in its activities over time and the number of non-members who took part in the organization’s sporting activities sheds light on the two issues: the general view on women’s physical activity within Francoist society, and the role of such activity as an ideological recruitment tool. During the early 1940s the number of girls who took part in the activities of the Falange’s youth movement reached tens of thousand. According to statistics provided by the SF the overall number of girls and women who attended sporting activities within the SF’s installations in 1943

16 An interview with the author (Madrid, 15.12.2004).
17 An interview with the author (Madrid, 15.12.2004).
was 5,919. At the height of repression immediately following the Civil War many viewed their children’s membership within the Falange’s Youth Movement as an act that signaled their allegiance (either voluntary or forced) to the new regime. However, during that period the public school system (largely controlled by the Catholic Church) did not approve of the institution of physical education classes for girls and the SF did not have sufficient funds to develop the field within its own institutions. By 1948 the number of girls and women who attended the SF’s physical education classes increased drastically reaching 94,605 (of those almost 74% were not SF affiliates). Between the years 1952-1954 the number once again doubled.

These numbers are illuminating since by the mid-1950s the SF’s recruitment levels were dropping drastically. The regime was fast approaching a phase where brute political repression was at an all-time low (although this would reemerge in the late 1960s) and a growing emphasis was put on indirect supervision through cultural enterprises. Under such conditions the organization’s physical education and sporting policy played a central role in widening the SF’s contacts with different female populations.

By the mid-1960s the situation started to reverse. In 1965 the number of non-affiliated women participating in the SF’s physical education initiatives dropped by 39%. Internal documents from that time describe the growing resistance of many to take part in activities imposed upon them within different institutions. This lack of interest was compounded by newly found alternatives. The general improvement in the economic situation and the new Law of Association (1964) widened the choice of cultural associations available to women. During the second half of the 1960s the number of women athletes increased and more attention was paid to Spain’s status within international sporting events. A large number of the women who made a name for themselves during that period were initially trained under the supervision of the SF, but the organization itself was losing its monopoly in this area. However, this loss of control did not result from the better services provided by private clubs or even from the general weakening of the Falange, but rather from a central paradox relating to the SF’s policies. In the field of physical education, as we shall see, the SF managed to generate a more liberal value system and personal experiences than the ones

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18 ANA, Serie Azul, carpeta 41, doc. 66.
19 Ibid., Carp. 117, Doc. 69 & Carp. 80, Doc. 26.
20 Ibid., Carp. 83, Doc. 35.
promoted by other sectors of the Franco regime. Over time, however, the organization proved unable (both ideologically and structurally) to meet the changing needs and aspirations of thousands of Spanish women. While some had come to see the SF as too radical, for others it was not radical or innovative enough. In the long run, therefore, this effective recruitment tool in the early years of the dictatorship could not boost the organization’s popularity in its later days.

The Discourse on Active and Healthy Female Bodies: Physical Education between Moral and Ideological Dictates

Before analyzing the rhetoric that was employed in order to justify the engagement of Spanish women with the field of physical education it is important to understand what type of activities this field incorporate. During the late 18th and early 19th century three schools of physical activity emerged in Europe: the German, Swedish and the British School. All three schools viewed the world of sport as embodying the “learning of game skills [...] institutionalized through teaching and systematic preparation [...]”21 Just as important was the promotion of physical education in the wider sense of the term: as an ongoing activity taught within a non-competitive environment. The German school of gymnastics developed through the influence of Johann Muth and Friedrich Jahn. It was less leisurely and was mostly practiced in gymnasia. German gymnastics was closely associated with the formation of German nationalism. Muth and Jahn developed a system of drills (turn), which emphasized the importance of physical strength and the use of different apparatus such as ropes, bars and so forth.22 The Swedish school was founded by Pehr Henrik Ling, a fencing instructor who worked at Lund University. Ling’s routines and drills built on the German School, but were aimed more at the restoration of public health through regular, light exercise. Ling’s first and foremost concern was the promotion of physical activity as a way of preventing disease and encouraging the harmonious development of the human body. The Swedish school emphasized accuracy and style and called for a high level of discipline and attunement between the individual and the group.23 Finally, the British school developed through a strong inclination towards outdoor games such as football and rugby and track and field sports.

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23 S. Melnick 2015.
The German, Swedish and British schools shaped the nature and aims of physical education throughout Europe well into the 20th century. However, as each of these schools responded to somewhat different concerns in terms of morality and physical health they were soon adapted within different social and ideological contexts. Following the Civil War the Franco regime certain elements from all three schools within the physical education programs for men. It was only natural, perhaps, that a stronger emphasis was put on the German school, which was highly dominant amongst instructors with prior military background. In the case of women the Swedish school carried the day. Doctors and educators preferred the Swedish school because of its emphasis on refinement rather than on activities that called for sweaty physical proximity. Dr. Luis Agosti, the SF’s National Advisor in the field of physical education, explained the choice of this school “[which] can be applied to both young children and adults and offers varied degrees of intensity, with no need to deprive women of its benefits.”

However, even this seemingly “appropriate” choice in gender terms was not easily accepted by parents, practitioners and educators. As historian Luis Carrero Eras rightly noted “the activities of PE instructors during the [dictatorship] played a decisive role in eradicating the taboos imposed on women who wished to participate in sporting activities.” The SF’s achievements in this field constituted a marked exception in a society in which women (regardless of their ideological positions) suffered from continued discrimination, and in a time when attempts to nurture or even simply understand the functioning of the female body could be tagged as morally suspect. Such achievements, therefore, depended on the SF’s ability to align its policies with existing moral, demographic and hygienic concerns.

Reviewing a conference on women’s physical education that took place in Salsomaggiore (Italy) in September 1937 an article published in the SF’s journal, *Y: Revista para la mujer nacional sindicalista*, attempted to sketch the organization’s goals in the field:

We must keep in mind the need for all types of physical culture to be based on a rational and scientific direction. Such rationality is achieved only when physical exercise is executed in order to comply

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24 For more on the three schools and their implementation in Europe see: R. Naul, in K. Hardman 2003: 35-52.
with a specific end. These possible ends are all noble, but they may vary in nature and can include amongst others: fortification of one's muscles; the improvement of one's conduct; the prevention of illnesses etc. [...] Our overall goal is to improve the race in order to be able to serve Spain. [...] In order to do so we need to employ physical exercises which are concerned not only with esthetics but rather exercises that improve physical [stamina], hygiene and morality.27

Allusions to the greatness of the race and the nation abounded in the SF’s rhetoric regarding women’s right to take part in physical activity, but so did religion. A document composed by the SF’s National Delegate for Physical Education, María de Miranda, in 1942 stated for example:

In giving us this marvelous body, God provided us with an immeasurable gift. Abandoning such a gift, not taking care of it using the best measures offered to us by science, constitutes ingratitude. And while the mission we are called to fulfill is not solely a moral one [...] we are obliged to comply with our Christian duties, since the essence of Falangism is religion and militia, spirituality and discipline.28

Another document by de Miranda from the same period claimed that the religious prohibition against suicide also implied a need to vigorously improve one’s health. According to the SF, therefore, participating in physical education activities was tantamount to fulfilling one’s obligation to both the nation and to God.

Within this socio-cultural context it is not surprising that the SF’s leadership expressed public aversion towards the “professional woman athlete.” However, lack of femininity had nothing to do with the SF’s criticism, but rather the fact that female athletes were paid for their participation in the world of ports and that an extensive budget was required to train them at the expense of others, which was described as unjustified and unprofessional.29 Historian Maria Luisa Zagalaz Sanchez referred to the alarm the idea of professional women athletes cause in the 1940s: The SF presented physical education and sports as an integral part of women’s formation. However, the greatest contradiction inherent in its policies surfaced when a woman athlete truly stood out. Then the entire organization would raise its voice, up

27 “Cultura física”, in ibid.: 32-33.
28 Mª de Miranda, “Necesidad de la educación física”, ANA, Serie Azul, carpeta 42, doc. 49.
29 Plan general de educación física, ibid., Carp. 80, Doc. 15 bis.
to a point where Pilar Primo de Rivera herself would declare that the *Falange’s* objective was not to form elite sportswomen, but rather to bring physical education to all Spanish women.30

During the late 1950s and early 1960s the SF’s discourse on women’s physical education underwent some changes. The new rhetoric was part of the more general realignment of the SF’s discourse on gender identity and women’s role in society. An example of this change can be found in a lecture given in 1965 by Concepción Sierra y Gil de la Cuesta (the new National Delegate of Physical Education and Sports). Gil de la Cuesta referred to the partial improvement in women’s status within Spanish society, which in her opinion manifested itself mainly in the relation to the professional opportunities opened before them. She contemplated on the conditions that might enhance gender equality and presented the SF’s on the necessity for long-term change:

> The process of social promotion we are witnessing today does not push women to exhaust their full potential. This process is too limited and centers on institutional and structural aspects. We need to act further on the [...] educational, economic and social fronts [...].31

The National Delegate encouraged women to enter the field of physical education and quoted a recent study that pointed to a high correlation between the levels of institutionalized physical activities for women across the country and their integration into public life. She went on to make a case for the relationship between physical education and women’s changing patterns of public activism:

> The timidity and passivity exhibited by some women in high positions is at times nothing more than a pattern of behavior resulting from social conditioning. [...] There is no doubt that the sporting world [...] provides people with the strength to protect the essence of their personality. We therefore see in the [qualities] of leadership, initiative and decision-making that are required in the field of sports a perfect channel for promoting women’s activism in society.32

Javier Coterón López pointed to three perspectives from which the debate regarding the desirability of women’s physical education

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31 C. Sierra y Gil de la Cuesta, “El deporte — ocasión y promoción de la mujer en la sociedad”, *ibid.*, Carp. 118, Doc. 45.
32 ANA, Serie Azul, Carp. 118, Doc. 45.
was waged during the early years of the Franco regime: the scientific or medical perspective (which called for the foundation of health and hygiene related programs in relation to women’s role as future mothers and wives; the Catholic perspective (which conditioned any type of physical exercise on the completion of moral dictates regarding uniforms and the level of exposure of the female body to the public eye and to the company of men); finally, there was the “neotraditional” perspective (which was close to the Catholic view but emphasized the need to fortify the body of women in the service of the nation as well). During the years 1936-1939 it is clear that allusions to national regeneration carried the day. Following the Civil War the demographic perspective gained ground and the entire debate on the issue of physical education was conducted within the limiting boundaries of a deeply Catholic discourse.

Staring in the late 1950s the SF promoted several projects that were aimed at improving women’s legal and professional standing and expand their political rights. In line with this phase in the organization’s development references to women’s engagement in physical activity now focused on the empowering effects of such activities. However, even during that period it was not the yearning for individual freedom and new forms of personal expression that motivated the SF’s physical education policy. It was rather the will to glorify discipline and the need to reach new populations within Spanish society, which “refused” to be converted to Falangist ideology. The very same resistance that the organization’s policy encountered within the Francoist coalition turned it into a powerful recruitment tool by emphasizing the SF’s uniqueness and establishing its position as an independent entity with a distinct political and social program. By presenting a more youthful and attractive facet of the regime and positioning its members as intermediaries between different female populations as well as public and private institutions, the organization proved its usefulness far beyond that of other organs within the Falange.

The Subjective Experience: Practitioners and Instructors

Hardly any research exist that can point to the ways in which physical education classes were experienced by the young girls and women who passed through the SF’s institutions. What little information can be

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33 F. J. Coterón López 2012.
34 For the law on the Law of Political and Professional Rights (Ley de Derechos Políticos, Profesionales de Trabajo de la Mujer) see: I. Ofer 2009: 86-96.
found has to be gathered from local studies that focus mostly on the experiences of PE instructors and to a lesser degree on those of some practitioners who took part in sporting activities over time. A series of oral interviews that were conducted with 24 women who practiced sports overtime during the years of the dictatorship pointed to the importance of the SF in promoting physical education and in funding installations for the practice of sports.\(^{35}\) However, the same interviews also reflected the limitations of the SF’s policies. One interviewee recounted: “In school there was a group of us, of friends, full of energy. And obviously physical education classes seemed to us a bit like a boring routine at the time. There were hardly any exercises.”\(^{36}\) Another added “I told you already, we were considered tomboys. But I knew many [female] basketball players and none of them was a tomboy. They were beautiful girls, but people had this concept of women athletes, they did not look on us favorably.”\(^{37}\)

Many of the interviewees expressed their disappointment at the classes which they received within SF institutions and which were portrayed as boring and repetitive. The social perception of women who practiced sports, however, highlighted the importance of promoting physical education as a field appropriate for women. This task was entrusted to the SF’s PE instructors. As the SF’s internal correspondence demonstrates the instructors were perceived as the organization’s spearhead in an indifferent, at times even hostile, education system. They were supposed to provide a personal example of the “New Falangist Woman.” As one circular (written by the National Delegate for Physical Education and Sports) stated:

[The instructor] cannot wear in class the skirt, blouse or underwear she wears outside of class. She must be clean and look clean. She must keep her hair short and if she does not she must arrange it in an appropriate manner when teaching. She must — and this is of a special importance — watch her figure. It is important that the instructor maintain refined and attractive looks, so as to encourage her students to perform the exercises she gives them. [In order] to do so the instructor, who in some cases may no longer be young and may even be married, must keep her body beautiful, agile and elegant.\(^{38}\)


\(^{36}\) Ibid.: 7.

\(^{37}\) Ibid.: 9.

\(^{38}\) ANA, Serie Azul, carpeta 81, Doc. 8. Text not highlighted originally.
But good looks and youthfulness did not empress churchmen, educators and parents. In 1952 the National Delegate wrote with disappointment: “After such a long time, and despite the fact that I feel as if we have been at it for ever, the photographs of our teams still tell the same story: the girls are badly dressed, with no belts, their shoulder-pads loose and their hair hanging down.”

M. J. (a PE instructor from La Rioja) recounted in interview I conducted with her of the difficulties of controlling the content of her own classes. Following the completion of her training she was assigned to the same school from which she graduated ten years earlier. The headmistress was a young nun and a former classmate of hers. When at the end of the year she organized a display of her ten-year-old students. One of the exercises included a series of handstands. According to M. J. one of the older nuns was scandalized by the way in which the girls exposed their legs. At the end of the day she was informed by the headmistress that as impressive as the display was her students would henceforth refrain from performing handstands in public. M. J. made a decision to sacrifice handstands for the sake of good working relations.

In 1954 the National Delegate sent a report regarding the implementation of the SF’s physical education policies to all her Provincial Delegates. Her harsh words reflected her disappointment and testified to the fact that the experiences recounted above were not unusual:

According to the information I receive you have not fulfilled the orders given to you. The result is that instead of gaining ground on this delicate field we are losing the battle. [...] In some places this happened because of obvious lack of tact. This type of work is not the work of the [instructors] but rather of the provincial delegate. It is she who has to approach the headmistress and reach an agreement, without resorting to threats.

Magui de León Llorante (a former PE instructor from Castilla León) referred in her memoirs to the need to deal with inadequate facilities and constant criticism of her lifestyle:

With my Vespa I was at least spared the difficulty of moving between schools, but I would reach class half frozen because I couldn’t wear

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39 “Regidora Central de Educación Física: actividades de Educación Física que deberán realizarse”, in *ibid.*, Doc. 2.
40 M. J. Interview with the author (Madrid, 15.12.2004).
41 Delegada Nacional a las delegadas provinciales”, ANA, Serie Azul, carpeta 81, Doc. 10 (2.3.54).
pants. They wouldn’t allow it neither at school nor at some of the private centers in which I taught. And when I gave a class of gymnastics I had to change in a hurry in whatever corner they set aside for me.42

Despite the difficulties Juan Carlos Manrique Arribas (who interviewed former SF physical education instructors in Segovia) concluded that one of the reasons which led them to choose this profession was their love of sports and the ability to go on freely practicing physical activities. Furthermore, in a society where the majority of women had no access to higher education becoming a PE instructor provided meant that they could go on with their studies. According to Manrique Arribas doing so within the ranks of a political entity such as the SF was looked upon more positively than simply becoming a teacher or bank employee43. From the 1950s the difficulties encountered by the instructors were also rewarded by relatively high salaries. The statistics provided by María Luisa Zagalas Sánchez for the city of Jaen show that at the end of the 1950s a high school PE teacher earned an average salary of 3,000 pesetas, while that of an entry-level temporary teacher was 2,000 pesetas.44 For the sake of comparison, one should keep in mind that the salary of the SF’s National Delegate at the time was 3,180 pesetas.

During their training the instructors also benefited from the presence of qualified foreign professors and from excursions all across Europe. M.J. (who completed her studies at the Ruiz de Alda School) recorded the time she had spent in McColine’s, a physical education school in Switzerland. There she benefited from the company of young women arriving from all over Western Europe with their different customs and fashions. One of her most vivid memories was of the French students:

The French girls wore bikinis during swimming classes. During training, when the professor herself was in the pool, they changed to a one-piece bathing suit but as soon as she came out — not when the class was over but when the professor stepped out of the pool — they put their bikinis on again.45

It is not surprising, perhaps, that wearing bikinis during class while in Spain the debate still raged whether women should even wear bathing suits in public, imprinted itself indelibly on M. J.’s memory.

42 M. de León Llorante 2000: 74-75.
45 An interview with the author (Madrid, 15.12.2004).
PE instructors also held a special place in the hearts of many of their students. According to Andresa López this was partially due to the nature of an instructor’s job:

Physical education teachers gave classes since kindergarten [...] helping children take down their pants in order to go to the toilet. [...] With the physical education teacher, you usually had a good relationship, because when you were little she was the one shouting at you, or giving you a candy or wiping your nose.46

During the final decade of the dictatorship the internal contradictions generated by the SF’s physical education policy became more explicit. PE instructors taught girls and young women how to care for their bodies and exercise muscles no one even dared to speak about. As a result a space was created where short and relatively attractive uniforms, collective undressing and showering were considered legitimate. The organization’s leadership had to face the fact that such patterns of behavior, in combination with natural youthful curiosity, might lead to more liberal conduct than intended. As a result, one can find many documents from this period demanding that girls not be photographed standing too close together, holding hands, and so forth. Certain documents, such as this one written by SF’s General Secretary Syera Manteola, insisted:

In the dressing rooms one must take extra care when dressing and undressing together. The fact that we are all women does not mean we should forget our moral obligations ... Under no conditions must men be allowed into the dressing rooms, even when all players are fully dressed.47

The SF’s PE instructors provided their students with a model for a more open and healthy way of life, while at the same time monitoring their moral and aesthetic preferences. The instructors taught several generations of Spanish girls and women born after the Civil War how to nurture and even publicly expose their bodies. Such teachings, anchored as they were in a more open and progressive perceptions of the human body, were not always compatible with the existing moral code. In the words of Consuelo Valcarcel (head the SF’s department

46 An interview with the author (Madrid, 15.12.2004).
47 ANA, Serie Azul, Carp. 83, Doc. 19.
of Professional Training for Women and Youth and the SF’s Students’ Syndicate from the 1960s):

The ‘right’, those groups that viewed women as creatures that must stay at home and take care of their families, considered us revolutionary women. What can I tell you? I had a problem with that. Those of the ‘left’, on the other hand, viewed us a right — wing women for caring for home and family [...].

Conclusions

The model of Falangist femininity promoted by the SF was based on numerous contradictory messages. The SF stressed the importance of maternity, and consequently the need for women to retire from certain spheres of action. At the same time women were encouraged and often forced to take part in an array of projects aimed at national regeneration (including re-education and political indoctrination initiatives, demographic campaigns and the equivalent of an obligatory military service for women). The physical wellbeing of women was tied to the physical and moral wellbeing of the nation itself. During brief periods in the dictatorship’s history women’s physical strength was highlighted, but even then their reproductive capacities were never forgotten. During other, less radicalized periods, demographic and moral dictates carried the day. Such dictates did not negate all together the benefits of moderate physical exercise for women and girls, but clearly limited the “appropriate” fields of sport in which women could engage.

The SF emphasized a middle-class sporting ethos based on notions of refinement, self-control and modesty. In Spain young women and girls participated in several mass demonstrations throughout 1939 and 1940 but this type of public exposure was not sustained in later years. As we have seen, the SF strongly opposed the commercialization of all sporting fields that were deemed appropriate for women. In order to compensate for the lack of funding the organization created a nationwide network of classes and of sporting teams that operated under the most rudimentary conditions. The SF provided urban factory workers, girls and young middle class women, who participated in sporting activities within its institutions with free uniforms, equipment, coaches and travel expenses, all at a considerable cost and at times even at the expense of more “ideologically” oriented activities.

48 An interview with the author, Madrid, 23.05.2003.
At the same time it is important to keep in mind that the promotion of women’s physical education was also viewed by the SF as a tool of indoctrination and as essential component in the formation of what historian Victoria de Grazia termed as “culture of consent.” While the SF enjoyed almost full control over organized women’s activities during the early years of the regime, its core ideology was never hegemonic within Francoist society. Under these conditions the more open and innovative physical culture promoted by the SF served to differentiate it from other more conservative elements within the regime.

In conclusion, much work is still needed in order to assess the impact of physical education policies during the Franco regime on different target populations such as urban and rural school students, workers, university students etc. Two facts are clear however: Despite great moral and financial limitation the SF managed to instituted physical education as a permanent field within school curriculum in Spain. Furthermore, for the hundreds of women who trained as PE instructors the conscious promotion of women’s physical education provided new and exciting opportunities in terms of study and of work. While not all of the women who would go on to become PE instructors were necessarily adherents of the regime they willingly became its agents within schools and youth movements. In doing so they taught several generations of girls and young women how to nurture, take pride and even publicly expose their bodies in the only manner considered acceptable in a conservative and a highly chauvinistic society.

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Arturo Pomar Will Always Be Arturito: Media, Nationalism and Sports Celebrity in Francoist Spain

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Abstract: Arturo Pomar was five years old in 1936, when the Civil War began; eight when it ended; twelve when he drew in a three-day game against the then world chess champion, Alexander Alekhine; fifteen when a compilation of his best games and his first and unique biography during Francoism were published. The title of the biography uses the diminutive of his name, Arturito. La vida de Arturito Pomar (The Life of Arturito Pomar) responded to the popular demand for information about the child prodigy that started in 1943, when he first appeared in the NO-DO, the state-controlled series of cinema newsreels. According to his biographer, Jeroni Bergas, when he died in 2016, he was still Arturito in Spanish popular memory. Why and how Arturito Pomar never became Arturo are the questions that I ask in this text. I explain how the NO-DO and the written press produced Pomar as a celebrity representing Spanish exceptionalism. I also survey how the child-sportsman enabled the fiction of a national community through libidinal attachment. And finally, I attempt to interpret the political abandonment that Pomar suffered as an adult, despite his previous accolades and being the greatest chess player Spain ever had; someone that, without any economic or sport support, and overcoming bureaucratic and institutional obstacles, drew against Bobby Fischer in a tournament that had the Soviet players call Moscow to inquire about that excellent and unknown Spanish chess player.

Key words: Arturo Pomar, chess, media, Francoist celebrity, nationalism.

Resumen: Arturo Pomar tiene cinco años en 1936, al inicio de la Guerra Civil; ocho cuando termina; doce cuando hace tablas en una partida de tres días contra el entonces campeón del mundo de ajedrez, Alexander Alekhine; quince cuando...
se publica una compilación de sus mejores partidas y su primera y única biografía durante el franquismo, cuyo título utiliza el diminutivo de su nombre, Arturito. La vida de Arturito Pomar responde a la demanda popular de información sobre el niño prodigio que había comenzado en 1943, cuando apareció por primera vez en el NO-DO. Según su biógrafo, Jeroni Bergas, cuando muere en 2016, Arturo seguía siendo Arturito en la memoria popular española. Por qué y cómo Arturito Pomar nunca se convirtió en Arturo son las preguntas que planteo en este ensayo. Explico cómo el NO-DO y la prensa escrita produjeron a Pomar como una celebridad que representaba la excepcionalidad española. También examino cómo el niño-deportista habilitó la ficción de una comunidad nacional a través del apego libidinal. Finalmente, intento interpretar el abandono político que Pomar sufrió de adulto, a pesar de sus elogios anteriores y de ser el mejor jugador de ajedrez español de la historia; alguien que, sin apoyo económico o deportivo alguno, y superando obstáculos burocráticos e institucionales, entabló contra Bobby Fischer en un torneo en el cual los jugadores soviéticos llamaban a Moscú para recopilar información sobre aquel excelente y desconocido ajedrecista español.

**Palabras clave:** Arturo Pomar, ajedrez, medios de comunicación, celebridad franquista, nacionalismo.

Poor Spanish mailman. What a shame. You play so well and yet you’ll have to return to Spain to the life of affixing stamps.

Bobby Fischer to Arturo Pomar, 1962.

Arturo Pomar was five years old in 1936, when the Civil War began; eight when it ended; twelve when he drew in a three-day game against the then world chess champion, Alexander Alekhine; fifteen when a compilation of his best games and his first and unique biography during Francoism were published. The title of the biography uses the diminutive of his name, Arturito. La vida de Arturito Pomar (The Life of Arturito Pomar) responded to the popular demand for information about the child prodigy that started in 1943, when he first appeared in the NO-DO, the state-controlled series of cinema newsreels. According to his biographer, Jeroni Bergas, when he died in 2016 at age eighty-one, he was still Arturito in Spanish popular memory (6).

Why and how Arturito Pomar never became Arturo are the questions that I ask in this text. I explain how the NO-DO and the written press produced Pomar as a celebrity representative of Spanish exceptionalism. I am also interested in how the child-sportsman enabled the fiction of a national community through libidinal attachment. And finally, I will explore the political abandonment that Pomar suffered when he grew
up, despite his previous accolades and his becoming the greatest chess player Spain had ever had, who without any economic or sport support drew against Bobby Fischer in a tournament that had the Soviet players call Moscow to inquire about that unknown Spanish man.

Pomar’s political and ideological instrumentalization concerns three articulations: a) sports, popular culture, and mass media in the Spanish postwar era, since he was the first person iconized and endowed with the values that Francoism wished to disseminate; b) the Francoist media and children, where Arturo’s case is again the first of a list that would later include actors and singers such as Pablito Calvo, Joselito, Marisol, Pili and Mili, Rocío Dúrcal, Raphael or Ana Belén, among others; and c) sport and nationalism; again, here Pomar is the first in a list that would include, among others, the cyclist Federico Bahamontes, Real Madrid, and the boxer José Manuel Urtain, all constructed through mass media-elaborated libidinal attachment as personifications of state-held values.3

I. 1943-1946. Arturito’s Excellent Normality

Francoism’s Weltgeschichte, the regime’s ideological explanation of history and worldly experience, rested on the exceptionalism of the Spanish race as chosen by God to be, as Francisco Franco stated, “the West’s spiritual repository.” As Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe remind us, totalitarian narratives need an ideal type, a myth to be incarnated beyond its own constitutive sphere — the religious, in the Spanish case — that serves as a model enabling popular identification. The political and ideological myth constructed by totalitarian narratives

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2 For a bibliography of the theoretical works and the most representative case studies of this articulation, see Daniel Beck and Louis Bosshart; Alan Bairner, especially chapters one and eight. In the Hispanic world, both theoretical analyses and case studies are not as abundant as in the Anglo-Saxon, German and French traditions. Jorge Uría recently lamented the disinterest shown towards sport in the early years of the twentieth century, when it was already a mass phenomenon in Spain, as well as the lack of a research agenda on the popular culture associated with it (15).

3 There is a growing number of works on the relationship between sport and nationalism. Most transnational studies that focus on specific sports do so in football (see Liz Crolley and Vic Duke, and John Sugden and Alan Tomlinson). Another type of work emphasizes the type of society studied rather than the type of sport. A reference in this sense is Bairner and Sugden. There is a great variety of ways in which sport may be linked to nationalism. In this regard, Barnier writes that “the concept of” the national sport “is a slippery one. Most societies have their own peculiar traditions as regards sport and leisure activities.... The representation of the nation through sport can differ considerably from one nation to another” (166-167).
is bound up with the creation of popular belief, and the construction of a type: belief, since what makes “the myth true is the dreamer’s adhesion to his dream; a belief, a mythos, is only real when it has grasped the entire man;” and type, since “the nature and the finality of myth, or of the dream, is to incarnate itself in a figure. That is why myth and type are indissociable. For the type is the realization of the singular identity conveyed by the dream” (306).

Describing populism, José Luis Villacañas noted that it requires primarily the reduction and simplification of politics to mechanisms of imaginary identification that support communitarian desire, and that extend beyond the leader’s persona (65). From 1943 to 1946, during the first three years of the NO-DO — the audiovisual weapon of State propaganda — Pomar was constructed as an example, a mythical type to imitate. This populist construction was sustained by a dialectics between normality and heroism carefully exploited as a means of identification. As I will show, accounts of Pomar’s exceptionalism insisted on the boy’s normality to explain his abilities in relation to what he held in common with the audience, his being Spanish. Moreover, the control over the figure afforded by his existence, Pomar’s representational myth, was total: as it always happened with the NO-DO, in his multiple appearances we do not hear him but a background voice describing his activities, personality and thoughts; and, most importantly, the press accounts did not record his words. Pomar was the name of a myth — in the sense that Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe understand the word — fully invested in Francoism’s narrative.

What first strikes the eye in Pomar’s story are the formal concomitances with that of the boxer José Manuel Urtain thirty years later. It is as if Pomar and Urtain, both practitioners of marginal sports damaged by their respective processes of glorification and abandonment, opened and closed a narrative of myth creation at the crossroads of sports, ideology, media, and politics. Drawing from academic sources and personal experiences, Juan A. Ríos Carratalá analyzed the media process that led Urtain to become a popular icon of “la España con dos cojones que salía de la pobreza y el catetismo a base de hostias” (“the Spain that, with two balls, came out of poverty and boorishness through blows;” 151) Ríos Carratalá reconstructs his shared experience with fellow teenagers in the 70s, summarizing it as a period in which

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4 On Francoist relation between populism and media, especially in the NODO, see Araceli Rodríguez Mateos, especially pages 48-63. An overall account of Franco’s favoritism in Juan Pablo Fusi.
boys aspired to be told “estás hecho un Urtain” (“you have grown to be an Urtain;” 152). The boxer was then popular to the point of being a referent of the sentimental education of a generation, being the attachment to his figure such that when he won the European Championship, although some dissenting voices had alerted of a possible rigged match, they hardly had a popular echo because “ese día, primaba el entusiasmo de sabernos campeones, de lo que fuera” (“that day the enthusiasm of knowing that we were champions was what it was;” 153).

To reconstruct the popular influence of Pomar’s successes, we do not have many first-hand testimonies, so we need to recur to state-sponsored sources to understand what he meant for the Spanish postwar generation.5 Perhaps the strongest sign of his fame occurred during the soccer match between Real Madrid and Sporting of Gijón, on February 12th, 1946. That day, a full Chamartín stadium spontaneously chanted his name as he enthusiastically jumped to the center of the field to greet the crowd. Fifteen years later, the magazine Triunfo called that moment “la única vez en España que un ajedrecista se convertía en todo un ídolo popular” (“the only time in Spain that a chess player became an popular idol;” Cermeño 80).

Some of the few personal testimonies left are those of Román Torán and Francisco Umbral. Torán, chess champion of Spain in 1951 and 1953, and linked to the FEDA (Spanish Federation of Chess) since 1970 until his death in 2005 as member of the Board of Directors and president, recalls that the media appearances of Arturito Pomar introduced him and many others to the world of chess. Torán, fascinated by the child-
prodigy, recalls that he was in first line when Pomar visited Gijón in the 1944 tournament organized by the local chess club.\footnote{“Conocí los primeros pasos de Arturito cuando participó en el Campeonato de España de 1943. Yo, que apenas conocía el mate pastor, me convertí en hincha de Arturito y en primera fila me encontraba cuando se iniciaron las partidas del Torneo Internacional de Gijón, mi ciudad natal, en 1944. Muchos hemos sido los seguidores de Pomar, los que de un modo u otro llegamos apasionados al ajedrez, que experimentó un notable impulso para su desarrollo en España.” (I knew the first steps of Arturito when he participated in the Championship of Spain of 1943. I, who barely knew the Scholar’s checkmate, became a fan of Arturito and I was in the front row when the games began in the International Tournament of Gijón, my hometown, in 1944. Many of us have been the followers of Pomar, who in one way or another have become passionate about chess, who experienced a remarkable impetus for their development in Spain) I am grateful to Carmen Romeo, current chair of the FEDA History Commission, for providing me with the list of FEDA presidents reflected in the unpublished volume that Ricardo Álvarez Cela wrote to celebrate the federation’s 70th anniversary.} For his part, Umbral equates the “postwar generation” with “Arturito Pomar’s generation,” pointing towards the significance of the chess player in the 40s.

Los niños de la guerra somos de la generación de Arturito Pomar. Dimos un genio del ajedrez, ya que otras genialidades estaban mal vistas, incluso fusiladas. Una vez, Arturito Pomar (ahora me parece que trabaja en Correos) estuvo en Valladolid jugando unas simultáneas con los socios del casino y ajedrecistas locales. Yo, que no sabía nada de ajedrez, me metí allí, de pantalón corto y con las rodillas sucias, porque he experimentado siempre, como los judíos (y me parece que no tengo nada de judío, y lo siento), la fascinación por los grandes de la tierra. Arturito Pomar era un pequeño grande de la tierra quemada de la España de posguerra.

(“We children of the war are of the generation of Arturito Pomar. We gave a genius of chess, since other geniuses were unaccepted, and even shot. Once, Arturito Pomar [now it seems to me that he works in the Postal Service] was in Valladolid playing simultaneously with partners of the casino and local chess players. I, who did not know anything about chess, got in there in my shorts and dirty knees, because I have always experienced, like the Jews [and I do not think I have anything Jewish, and I am sorry about that], the fascination for the greatest of the land. Arturito Pomar was a little greatness of the burned soil of post-war Spain. 14).

Pomar’s multiple press appearances allow us to suppose that Umbral’s fascination was comparable to what other children experienced when
the child-prodigy and media sensation visited their towns, and offered exhibitions of simultaneous games. Arturito’s popular successes fueled the organization of national chess tours that were advantageous for both, his humble family and the State. Although it is unlikely that they could have protested, Jesús Boyero writes that Pomar’s parents understood that his son’s talents and renown would help them escape the hardships of the postwar years, and accepted all proposed exhibitions, disregarding the harm they could cause in the boy’s health. For its part, the Francoist regime exploited the chess prodigy for populist and ideological purposes.

“Exploited” is not a randomly chosen word. Pomar toured Spain uninterruptedly in events organized and financially backed by the DND (Delegación Nacional de Deportes, National Delegation of Sports), an institution politically and ideologically aligned with the Movimiento (Fascist movement) that controlled all aspects of sports organization and activities. At age twelve he began offering exhibitions in local chess clubs, visiting sick children, participating in tournaments at regional and national levels, and meeting with State authorities in private events. To understand Pomar’s mobility and intense activity around the peninsula during this three-year period, we can recreate his travels after the Gijón tournament mentioned by Torán. After the tournament he disputed simultaneous games that were reported in the press and the NO-DO recurrently. He offered two exhibition games in Madrid and six in Barcelona, with a total result of forty-six victories, twelve draws and four defeats. Afterwards, he played two friendly games against the champion of Spain, Antonio Medina (“Arturito Pomar, el prodigioso” 1). At his return to Palma de Mallorca, where he lived, he played simultaneously against twelve players in the Passatge Bar, winning eleven games and drawing one. Later, he went to the Club Ajedrez Mallorca, where he played a double session. On July 2nd he simultaneously faced twelve students from the Santa Catalina National Graduate School of Children. Days later, he moved to La Salle College, where he played another session of simultaneous games against a group of twelve teachers and students, winning all. July 15th he traveled to A Coruña stopping by Barcelona and Madrid, where he played exhibition games the 24th and the 25th. In A Coruña, after the session of simultaneous games, he played against the regional champion,
Venancio Carro (Bergas 42). Then he traveled to Santander, where
the Montañés Chess Club organized another simultaneous exhibition
game for the boy (“Ajedrez”). It is then that, “si no lo requieren de otras
ciudades del norte” (“if he is not required by other northern cities;”
“Ajedrez”), Pomar returns to Mallorca to prepare for the Madrid
International tournament, which featured players such as Paul Keres,
Friedrich Sämisch, and Alfred Brinckmann. In this tournament his
game with Brinkmann ended in a draw after two days and two hours.
Days later, he won against Agustín Ingelmo — then Spanish national
champion — and the audience carried him out of Círculo de Bellas
Artes on their shoulders (“El torneo final” 1) On his way back home, he
stopped in Barcelona to play a friendly game against Pedro Moner, and
inaugurate the Chess Club Arturito Pomar.

After the Madrid tournament, Pomar’s fame was international. At
age 13, he received offers to play in Argentina and the United States,
which the regime preferred not to accept in the name of national
commitments (“Ajedrez”). Indeed, the frenzy to exhibit the kid in the
peninsula continued at least for a year until September 25th, 1945,
when the government, concerned about Pomar’s physical and mental
conditions, decided to submit him to a psycho-technical analysis (“Un
nuevo éxito;” “En la sección deportiva”). All his chess activity was
stopped “hasta que se fijen por la Delegación Nacional de Deportes
los términos de su futura actuación” (“until the terms of his future
performances are decided by the National Sports Delegation;” “Arturito
Pomar no participará”). Two months later, he received authorization
to participate in a tournament organized by Real Madrid (“Noticiario
breve”) and, four months later, in February 1946, the newspaper ABC
made public the results of the psychiatric exam while Pomar was in
London playing an international tournament (“El resultado”). In
London, Arturito was astonished by the amount of bread he could eat —
that is, amazed at a country without cartillas de racionamiento, rations,
and famine. Upon his return, he won his first championship of Spain at
age 15. His London successes paired with the newly won national title
were too attractive for propaganda to let them pass without profiting.
It is for this reason that he was received by Francisco Franco in the
governmental Palacio del Prado (fig. 1), before his national tours of
simultaneous games began again, followed by written and audiovisual
accounts (Díez 5).
The Spanish media and propaganda touted every Pomar event. Already in April 1943, when the child-prodigy phenomenon hatched at the national level largely due to his first appearance in the NO-DO on February 19th and his participation in the Championship of Spain representing the Balearic Islands at age 11, the Asturias newspaper Pensamiento Alavés pointed out the “excesiva curiosidad por ver al niño prodigio Arturito Pomar” (“excessive curiosity to see the prodigy Arturito Pomar;” “El precoz Arturito”). A few days later, López Esnaola, a chess player from Avilés defeated by Pomar during the championship, confirmed that “con el niño Arturito Pomar se han llenado muchas páginas en casi todos los periódicos españoles.” (“Many pages have been filled with Arturito Pomar in almost every Spanish newspaper”). In addition to his multiple appearances in the local press, trend magazines such as Semana featured him on the cover as the “campeón

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8 Reproduced in Peón de Rey, vol. 6, 2002, p. 50.
de ajedrez más joven del mundo” (the youngest chess champion in the world). The NO-DO and sport specialized journals such as Marca and Mundo Deportivo routinely reported his activities. In 1943 Pomar appeared nine days on ABC and six on La Vanguardia; in 1944, twenty days on ABC and three on La Vanguardia; in 1945, twenty-nine days on ABC and eleven days on La Vanguardia; and in 1946, ninety-one days on ABC and nineteen on La Vanguardia. From 1947 onwards, his popularity declined. That year, his name appeared on ABC fourteen days, and none in La Vanguardia. In 1948, none of the newspapers mentioned him.

The following ABC excerpt succinctly illustrates Pomar’s ability to attract and congregate masses. Fallaciously linking the number of chess players with the number of spectators fascinated by the kid, the headline states that “Pomar alcanza el límite de la popularidad” (Pomar reaches the limit of popularity). In this account of a twelve-year-old Pomar (the text wrongly ascribes him thirteen), de Agustín shows his amazement at the child’s power to mobilize a whole town.

Arturo Pomar está alcanzado con su fama los extremos de la lógica. Recientemente, en la prensa española, se dio la noticia de una actuación del niño ajedrecista, en un pueblo norteño español. Con el laconismo peculiar en estas informaciones se decía: quede afirmarse que, prácticamente, acudió a presenciar la exhibición todo el pueblo. El caso, analizándolo, resulta paradójico. En España existen 20.000 ajedrecistas. Admitiendo la existencia de otra cantidad semejante sin organizar. Por lo tanto, no pasan de 100.000 entre ajedrecistas y los que saben jugar ajedrez (que no es lo mismo). Estas cifras se aglomeran, mayormente, en las principales ciudades. Sin que el optimismo nos ciegue sabemos que no pasan de las 100 las personas por cada 10.000 habitantes las que saben algo de ajedrez, pero eso no ha sido obstáculo para TODO UN PUEBLO [mayúsculas en el original], asista a presenciar una actuación del ajedrecista balear. El milagro ha podido realizarse gracias a dos cosas. Los trece años del ajedrecista y la cooperación de los medios de difusión y propaganda que en España no han regateado los más grandes elogios al niño.

(“Arturo Pomar’s fame is reaching the limits of logic. Recently, the Spanish press reported the news of a performance of the chess-child in a Spanish northern town. With the peculiar laconism of this sort of information, the account read: it should be said that, practically, the whole town attended the exhibition. The case is paradoxical. There are 20,000 chess players in Spain, and we can admit the existence of another similar quantity not registered in any club. Therefore, there
are no more than 100,000 people if we add up chess players and those who know how to play chess (which is not the same). These players are mostly concentrated in the main cities. That is, without letting optimism blind us, we know that no more than 100 people per 10,000 inhabitants know some chess, but that wasn’t an obstacle for A WHOLE TOWN (capital letters in the original), to attend a performance of the Balearic chess player. The miracle was accomplished thanks to two things: the thirteen years of age of the chess player, and the cooperation of the media and propaganda in Spain, which did not spare the highest praise of the child).

Legitimizing his abilities as a product of what he shared with the rest of Spaniards, the NO-DO and other newspapers linked Arturito’s excellency to his nationality. According to the common narrative, his extraordinary skills reflected the glorious Spanish national character. Consider, for example, this ABC excerpt that connects Arturito’s gift with the historic and characteristic Iberian fury: “Arturito Pomar, ese muchachito moreno, de cuño español, en cuyos ojos, entornados por la meditación del juego, se vislumbra la furia ibérica y que ofrece en su aire colegial un arquetipo de la Adolescencia acrisolada” (“Arturito Pomar, that little dark haired boy, of a Spanish mark, in whose eyes, half-closed because of thinking the game, the Iberian fury is discernible, offering in its collegial air an archetype of impeccable Adolescence;” de Castro).

Or consider this NO-DO description, in which Pomar is portrayed as “un niño normal, como los demás, que adquiere con entusiasmo la prensa infantil que corresponde a su edad” (“a kid like others, who enthusiastically acquires the press that corresponds to his age”), while showing images of him playing with other kids, and riding a bicycle. The insistence on Pomar’s normality rhetorically centers the myth he enables around his relatability. In La Vanguardia, Pombo Angulo points out that he is “un buen chico que no es el primero de la clase, y que incluso se muerde las uñas” (“a nice kid who is not the best of his class, and who even bites his nails”), someone who “es verdad que domina la técnica del ajedrez, pero igual lo suspenden en Gramática Latina” (“it is true that dominates the technique of chess, but he may fail Latin grammar;” 13).

The local press followed this scheme. The Zamoran Imperio, taking advantage of his presence in the city to dispute an exhibition of simultaneous games, shows surprise at the kid being a kid: “Arturito Pomar es un chico en toda la extensión de la palabra. Seguramente ya se habrán formado una idea de él a través de las fotografías publicadas
en los periódicos. Pero cuando vean al campeón pasearse por la ciudad van a impresionarse un poco: porque el Campeón de España, aunque solo cuenta en la actualidad con 14 años, representa poco más de 10.” (“Arturito Pomar is a boy in all the extension of the word. Surely, all of you will have already formed an idea of him through the pictures published in the newspapers. But when you see the champion strolling around the city today, you are going to be a little bit surprised: because the Spanish Champion, although currently is only 14, represents little more than 10; “Con Arturito Pomar”).

The 1946 London tournament consecrated Pomar. For the New York Times, “Arturo has been the center of attraction during the tournament. He drew two games against 53-year-old world champion Alexander Alekhine and the thick ring of spectators around his chair had no noticeable effect on his play,” continuing to add that “no young people of Arturo Pomar’s caliber have been found in recent years” (Vosser 14). For the Washington Post, “he is the number 1 box-office attraction.” In its account, the Post emphasizes that the salary of Juan Pomar, father of Arturito and employed in the service of Aviation, is “less than a thousand pesetas, around 110 dollars per month” (“Chess expert” 12). For the News Chronicle, Pomar’s presence in London diverted attention from the United Nations Conference being held to heal the wounds of World War II (Vicky). This phenomenon is illustrated in figure 1, where three men representing political power and nationalism — two of the key issues on the First UN General Assembly — face Pomar over a world map chessboard. Upon Pomar’s return, most Spanish newspapers dedicated the cover image to the official reception welcoming the national sensation. In addition to officials, La Vanguardia reported that a huge crowd awaited Arturito, so when the door of the plane opened and the boy from Mallorca appeared, he was greeted with a standing ovation. (“Arturito Pomar fue recibido triunfalmente”). According to Hoja oficial de los lunes, two days later, word of mouth had it that Arturo was present in the Chamartin stadium to watch his soccer idols, and caused a spontaneous chant of his name. During half-time, Pomar “correspondió desde el centro del campo de Chamartín a las clamorosas ovaciones de homenaje con que fue acogida su presencia” (“responded from the center of the Chamartin stadium to the clamorous ovations of homage with which he was greeted” (“Homenaje espontáneo” 1). Pomar becoming the image of Spain abroad, a central issue for the DND was to sell Pomar’s international successes as their own.
As Carles Santacana explains, the lack of relevant accomplishments in international scenarios had a double component: on one hand, it certified the low level of national competitors; on the other, it added a political frustration to the dictatorship’s battle for international recognition (229).

II. 1962. The Abandonment of the Hero

Between 1946 and 1962, Pomar won several national championships, played tournaments in Latin America, United States and Canada, invited by clubs and individuals. He got married, had children, and started to work in a post office in a State-granted job. Ricardo Lamarca, a friend that competed against him several times, emphasizes this fact along with the donation of a house to defend that the regime supported enough Pomar’s activities. In an unpublished handwritten manuscript, Lamarca argues that “fue Arturito y luego Arturo muy protegido y famoso entre los famosos, ídolo de años de estrecheces […] [El gobierno lo apoyó con] traslado familiar a Madrid, casa (escasas en la época), entrada en Correos, gratificación de la FEDA, etc.” (“it was Arturito, and then Arturo, very protected and famous among the celebrities, idol of difficult years […] [The government supported him with] a family move to Madrid, house (scant at that time), a FEDA gratification, etc.). Others such as Eduard Pomar, Leontxo García, Jesús Boyero, and Pepo Viñas denounced the regime’s attitude towards Pomar once he was no longer a child, emphasizing the government’s failure to support him during the Stockholm Interzonal Tournament of 1962.

At a time when chess was considered a key cultural and political element concerning international relations, a selection of the best world players, including Bobby Fischer, Tigran Petrosian, Viktor Kortschnoi, Efim Geller and Lajos Portisch, reunited in Sweden with the goal of classifying for the World Championship. During the Cold War, chess players competed for primacy on the chessboard, and media reports assumed a simple equivalence: the country that had the best player was also in possession of intellectual supremacy, which exponentially increased its prestige. A nation’s prestige was vital for many reasons, but fundamentally because it fostered a favorable consideration by other nations, predisposing them to the eventuality of a leadership. Moreover, it encouraged emulation in a scenario where imitation of a system of government guaranteed the political and economic stability

9 I thank Javier Asturiano for e-mailing me a scan of Ricardo Lamarca’s text “Pomar: su época y ayudas.”
of the central power. Given the cultural and political connotations of chess at this period, we can understand the amount of publicity and coverage the match between the American Bobby Fischer and the Soviet Boris Spassky had, brilliantly narrated in George Steiner’s *Fields of Force*. It is also understandable that the U.R.S.S. spared no expenses to maintain its leadership in the chess universe. In a period when chess channeled national libidinal attachment, players represented the body of a nation, which rejoiced and suffered with them and/or for them; especially in the U.R.S.S, they were national icons for whom large teams of people worked, with a dedication comparable to that applied to the development of aerospace technology.¹⁰

Pomar traveled to Sweden accompanied by his mother and a small book of endgames for amateurs. He did not have a team with him — trainers and analysts that worked overnight to recommend the best moves the following day in postponed matches. Moreover, far from receiving support, as it had been the case during his infancy, Pomar — son of a working-class family, mailman, and father of seven — had to cover all his expenses during the month-long unpaid leave granted by the government. Additionally, in order to travel, her wife Carmen had to spend family savings, part of which were dedicated to buying a gift for the employee that substituted Pomar while he competed. When Torán stood up for Pomar and complained about the situation to the authorities, he was sanctioned (Bergas 114).

Despite the obstacles, during the first eleven games Pomar ranked top five. His victory against Geller — who finished the tournament in second place —, and his draw in a two-day game with Fischer — who won the tournament — had the Soviet players call Moscow, and gather information about him. In the second half of the tournament, Pomar began losing and conceding draws in favorable positions due to the sleep deprivation caused by his lack of a team. While other players had trainers and analysts working overnight on postponed matches, Pomar had to do the job himself, and came back to the chess room the following day without having slept (“El cartero genial”). Pomar finished the tournament at eleventh position, half a point short of qualifying for the World Championship. Although we do not have data of his overall training for this tournament, we know that six months later, when he received the title of Grand Master, he said in an interview that “tengo muchísimo trabajo. Imaginate que solo puedo dedicar al ajedrez tres horas a la semana” (“I have tons of work. I can only dedicate three

¹⁰ For the impact of chess during the Cold War, see Daniel Johnson.
hours a week to chess;” Interview with Cermeño). When he returned to Spain, the first symptoms of the mental illness that would accompany him until his death in 2016 appeared.

Details about his condition are unknown. His son Eduard was not able to offer a specific diagnosis. It was referred to as an illness that involved memory loss and permanent fatigue, as it is reported February 15\textsuperscript{th}, 1966, in an ABC article that reads “el campeón de ajedrez, Arturo Pomar, ha sido internado en el Instituto Frenopático de Barcelona por agotamiento y pérdida de memoria circunstancial;” (“the chess champion, Arturo Pomar, has been hospitalized in the Barcelona clinic for fatigue and circumstantial memory loss; “Arturo Pomar: agotamiento”). Between the opinions held by Lamarca — for whom Pomar’s illness and the Stockholm tournament are two disconnected phenomena — and Garcia, Boyero, his son Eduard, Bergas, and Viñas — for whom Pomar’s illness was caused, partly or entirely, by the effort that supposed the Stockholm Interzonal and his previous exploitation —, Antonio López Manzano and Joan Segura Vila emphasize Pomar’s “genetical predisposition” to develop a condition consisting on an “excess of tranquility” (341-42).

Pomar was interviewed about his childhood and process of media iconification in 1992. He appeared laconic, apathetic, indifferent and phlegmatic. After spoken reluctantly about a tribute that the president of the Balearic Islands conceded him days before, the journalist Llorenç Capellà asked Pomar if he cared about things. “What things?,” answered Pomar. “Those that happen every day,” replied Capellà. “No, absolutely not. I do not care about anything at all,” the player concluded (“Arturito Pomar, ecos” 32). Regarding his political instrumentalization and subsequent abandonment, he sounded resig-ned and submissive. After remembering that in 1962 he was awarded the title of Grand Master — the first time the International Chess Federation (FIDE) distinguished a Spaniard with that credential —, Capellà asked Pomar if he thought that the Postal Service was the right place to develop his talent.

— Pomar.— Impartir classes se me va proposar. Es deia que ensenyaria a les escoles. Inclòs un ministre, anomenat Rubio, em va sondejar per veure si establia disposat a fer-me’n càrrec de l’organització. Després tot es va quedar en paraules.
— Capellà.— Li va saber greu?
— Cosa seva deuen ser els seus somnis.
— ¿Quins somnis?
— Els que té. O no té somnis?
— No. Que faria amb ells?
—....
— Què sentía davant una derrota, ràbia o resignació?
— Resignació, sempre resignació. Qualsevol contratemps, en aquesta vida, s’ha d’agafar amb resignació.
— Doncs, jo l’agafo com a tal. Però, a canvi de resignació, satisfaci la meva curiositat. A què ve aquest afany per perdre’m de vista?
— No el tinc.
— Se li nota.
— A mi tant em dona parlar com quedar-me mut. El que passa és que d’aquí a una estona tinc que anar a la feina. Classifico correspondencia. I m’entreten. No pot imaginar-se com m’entreten.

— (“Pomar.— They proposed to me that I teach. They wanted me to teach chess in schools. Even a minister, named Rubio, approached me to see if I was willing to take responsibility for the organization. But they were just words.
— Capellà.— Did you feel bad?
— No. Do you want me to teach? I agree. Do you prefer me not to teach? I agree. It is not my business to decide what I do.
— Your dreams may be your business.
— What dreams?
— The ones you have.
— No. What would I do with them?
— ...
— What did you feel after a defeat, rage or resignation?
— Resignation, always resignation. You have to accept with resignation every mishap of life.
— I accept it. But, in exchange of resignation, please satisfy my curiosity. Why do you want me to go?
— I don’t.
— It’s clear.
— It does not matter to me to speak or to stay mute. What happens is that I am going to work in an hour. I classify mail. That entertains me. You can’t imagine how much it entertains me.”)

García and Bergas asked why, later in life, Pomar did not denounced the Francoist attitude towards him as did his son, his biographer, his friends, and journalists such as Boyero or Leontxo García (“El cartero genial;” *Artur* 173). This question could be answered referring to his apathetic, disinterested and laconic personality, which supposedly disposed him to avoid conflict and confrontation. However, a political dimension
explaining his attitude must be added. In my view, Pomar never considered that his illness had a bio-political root, nor did he see himself as a populist tool, because he had fully internalized a separation between existence and desire. Having grown up in a postwar Spain financed, publicized and constructed as a governmental object, he did not believe that his life belonged to him but to the State. In Lacanian terms, Pomar’s *jouissance* seemed to consist in his total abandonment to the symbolic mandate of the government, which stood for the Big Other. For this reason, his public affirmation that it was not his business to decide what to do with his life could be understood as a sincere utterance. Consequently, the question is not why Pomar never complained about the treatment he received when he was no longer a child politically exploitable, but how could he have complained from this ideological standpoint.

One could argue that three factors determined the regime’s attitude towards Pomar in his adulthood: a) chess did not have the level of popularity that other sports enjoyed; b) the child prodigy became an adult, losing his Circensian appeal to mobilize the masses; and c) the empty scene of international sports successes of the 40s had somewhat filled. Between the 1946 London tournament and the 1962 Stockholm Chess Interzonal, several Spanish athletes gained worldwide renown: the cyclists Guillem Timoner and Federico Bahamontes, the gymnast Joaquín Blume and, above all, the soccer team Real Madrid. The importance of Real Madrid’s undisputed dominance in the first five European Cups was underlined by Jose Solís, ministry-secretary of the Fe de las JONS — the union of Falange Española and Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional, the only political party allowed in Spain — who encapsulated what international successes meant politically for the country’s international relations:

> Vosotros habéis hecho mucho más que muchas embajadas des-perdigadas por esos pueblos de Dios. Gente que nos odiaba ahora nos comprende gracias a vosotros, porque rompisteis muchas murallas [...] Vuestros triunfos son un legítimo orgullo para todos los españoles, dentro y fuera de nuestra patria. Cuando os retiréis a los vestuarios, al final de cada encuentro, sabed que todos los españoles están con vosotros y os acompañan, orgullosos de vuestros triunfos, que tan alto dejan el pabellón español.

(“You have done much more than many embassies scattered around the globe. People who hated us now understand us thanks to you, because you broke many walls [...] Your victories are a legitimate pride for all Spaniards, inside and outside our country. When you retire
to the changing rooms, at the end of each match, know that all the Spaniards are with you and accompany you, proud of your triumphs that leave the Spanish pavilion so high” [Boletín 112.]

Being of no use propagandistically, Pomar was abandoned by Francoism when he needed it most. As mentioned at the beginning of this essay, his is a case that retains morphological concomitances with that of the boxer Urtain. For example, if in the 70s, “el deporte español andaba huérfano de figuras” (“Spanish sports did not have any celebrities;” Ríos Carratalá 154), in the 40s, before the arrival of Bahamontes and the international outpouring of Real Madrid, Pomar was “uno de los pocos nombres que el regimen de Franco podía vender en el exterior” (“one of the few names that the Franco regime could sell abroad;” Ochoa 1). Also, two books were published in 1946 to mark the ascent of Pomar’s popularity while the years immediately preceding and succeeding Urtain’s victory in the European Championship emerged. Pomar and Urtain, are ultimately figures of defeat: one ended up with an unknown mental illness that affected him also physically, and the other committed suicide days before the opening of the Barcelona Olympic Games that marked the entrance of Spain into global modernity. They were both figures of defeat who, for a short period of time, mediated national hope for international recognition.

The poet Eduardo Scala interviewed Pomar when the player turned 60 years old. He recalled the words of Alexander Kotov, one of the main trainers of the U.R.S.S. National Chess Team during the Cold War, who affirmed that if Pomar had been born in the Soviet Union, he would have been a World Championship contender. The description of Scala’s arrival to the interview encapsulates the tension that defined Pomar’s adult life: his brilliance as chess player, and his State-granted mediocrity as mailman in charge of classifying correspondence. In _El Juzgador de Ajedrez_, Scala writes:

Llueve. Arturito Pomar ya tiene sesenta años, y a las dos de la tarde me espera. Peregrino hacia el gran maestro, la leyenda española del ajedrez, a través de Las Ramblas. Preparo el momento en un antiguo Café. Bebo, devocionalmente una copa de Hierbas de Mallorca: Felanitx, la vieja casa del Dr. Ticulat, la Plaça de la Palla de Palma, la butaca de terciopelo rojo del salón de actos del Instituto Nacional de Previsión, entre Cibeles y la Puerta de Alcalá (cuando nuestro héroe, junto a Gligoric y Portisch, me introdujo en el maravilloso ajedrez),
pulsan el corazón de mi memoria. Estoy en la oficina central de Correos de Barcelona.

— ¿Don Arturo Pomar?
— Tiene usted que dar la vuelta. Entre por el otro lado del edificio. Pomar está detrás, en el muelle de la Oficina de Cambios.

El Gran Maestro me aguarda en el centro de la larga galería que va a dar a su departamento, situado en la enorme nave. Se trata de un lugar desolador, de atmósfera kafkiana, procesual. Me ofrece su mano de caballero, distante, lánguida. Tiene en su mesa una torre de sobres que debe introducir en sus casillas correspondientes. Me invita amablemente a sentarme en su taburete de trabajo; él prefiere permanecer de pie, como si fuese a jugar una partida simultánea conmigo. Me observa desde la ausencia, flotante. Parece gozar de quietud de espíritu; sin embargo, enciende un cigarrillo tras otro, mientras me mira atentamente con su mejor ojo. Es Job —el Job del final del Libro—; se lo digo; él lo sabe. Comenzamos el juego.

(“It is raining. Arturito Pomar is already sixty, and at two o’clock he is waiting for me. I pilgrim through Las Ramblas towards the great master, the Spanish legend of chess. I prepare the moment in an old cafeteria. I drink, I devotionally imbibe a cup of Majorcan herbs: Felanitx, the old house of Dr. Ticoulat, Palla de Palma square, the red velvet armchair of the auditorium of the Instituto Nacional de Previsión, between Cibeles and Puerta de Alcalá [where our hero, along with Gligoric and Portisch, introduced me to the marvelous sport of chess], pulsate the heart of my memory. I am at the central office of the Postal Service in Barcelona.

— “Mr. Arturo Pomar?”
— You need to turn around. Enter through the other side of the building. Pomar is behind, on the dock of the Exchange Office.

The Grand Master is waiting for me in the middle of the long gallery located in the enormous warehouse that leads into his office. It is a desolate place, with a Kafkaesque, procedural atmosphere. He offers me his distant, languid hand. Over his table lies a tower of envelopes that must enter into their corresponding boxes. He kindly invites me to sit on his work stool; he prefers to stand, as if he was playing a simultaneous game with me. He looks at me from the absence, floating. He seems to enjoy a certain stillness of spirit; however, he lights one cigarette after another, while he looks at me with his best eye. He is Job — the Job at the end of the Book; I tell him; he knows. We start the game; 25.”
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Abstract: This article aims to examine the hypothesis of political-identity isomorphism between the main Spanish football clubs and their fans. This hypothesis makes it possible to expect a connection between the political orientations that have traditionally characterized FC Barcelona, Athletic de Bilbao, and Real Madrid and the main traits of the political culture of their fans. The study is empirically supported by the data from a survey carried out in 2014 by the Centre for Sociological Research (CIS, 2014). The results show a high convergence between the political and ideological aspects associated with these three clubs and the political culture of their respective fans. Therefore, they confirm the political-identity isomorphism hypothesis. They results also show, however, the need to reject an excessively homogeneous and unitary view of the followers of these clubs because, in all three cases, relevant percentages of fans were found to be in ambivalent positions or diametrically opposed to what would be expected according to the political-identity isomorphism hypothesis.

Key words: Football, politics, Spain, sociology of sport.

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1. Introduction

Football was brought to Spain at the end of the 19th century, following the trajectory of British economic expansion. Records show that it was first played in 1872, with its introduction being attributed to British workers in mining companies in Huelva (Polo; Pujadas and Santacana). In the last decade of the 19th century, football began to be played in Bilbao and San Sebastian. In this context, big clubs, which still exist today, were established through a joint effort between Spaniards and foreigners: Athletic de Bilbao in 1898, FC Barcelona in 1899, and Real Madrid in 1902. These were the first stages of a sport whose competitive context, in little more than a quarter of a century, would be organized at the national level, with the consolidation of the Spanish Championship (1903), the adoption of the First Regulations in professional football (1926), and the creation of the League (1928) (Bahamonde 2011).

To a large degree, part of the rise of football was based on the progressive adoption of regional and socio-political symbolism by the clubs. The clubs became identity referents for a society that saw them as a way to express their feelings of belonging to a community. This tendency was exacerbated by the fact that, in most large Spanish cities, two football clubs emerged, which over time became staunch rivals, intensifying the feelings of identification with each club. The rivalries at the beginning of the 20th century, therefore, did not arise from social stratification processes; instead, they were a reflection of representation and integration mechanisms in the new urban dynamics that were developing in Spanish society at the time (Domínguez 85). However, the high level of symbolism acquired by the clubs provided the matches with a seriousness and sense of transcendence that were previously unimaginable (Llopis-Goig 2015).

Currently, neither time nor the enormous social and economic transformations that have affected the world of football seem to have eliminated the regional symbolism or political connotations associated with clubs such as FC Barcelona, Athletic de Bilbao, and Real Madrid. This seems obvious if we focus on the declarations of some of the managers and the images and messages circulating about them in the media, social networks, and numerous sport and informative publications. However, can the same thing be said about the fans and people who identify with each of these football clubs? Are they characterized by political and identitary orientations that agree with those traditionally attributed to the clubs? In other words, is there political-identity isomorphism between the football clubs and their fans? The confirmation
of this hypothesis would show that the socio-political potential of the Spanish clubs is still active, in spite of the merchandising processes experienced by European football in the past twenty years (Giulianotti), and that their socializing potential has not declined.

Based on this proposal, the main objective of this article is to examine the degree to which the fans of the main Spanish football clubs are characterized by a certain political and nationalist/regionalist orientation. It analyses the degree to which the political orientations of the fans are related to those that have traditionally been projected by or attributed to their clubs. To do so, it is necessary to trace the links these clubs have historically shown with the political sphere and analyse, based on the data from a representative statistical survey of the adult Spanish population, the main opinions and political attitudes of their fans. Therefore, the study has both a historical and a quantitative-sociological purpose, although the latter is its main objective. This objective has not been addressed by any other previous study. It is true that the relationships between football and politics have been studied on many occasions, but always from different approaches, such as the historical perspective (Shaw; Díaz Noci; Bahamonde, “El Real Madrid”; Llopis-Goig, “Identity”; Madrid; Burns, “De Riotinto”; Quiroga) and the qualitative perspective (Crolley and Hand, “Football”; “Spanish”; “Football and European”; Gómez; Vaczi “Their skin”), and by studies that have focused on only one club (Colomé; Unzueta; Walton; Burns “Barça”; MacClancy, “Nationalism”; “Nacionalismo”; Santacana, “El Barça”; Castillo; González Calleja; Miravitllas) or on the Spanish national team (González Ramallal; Vaczi, “The Spanish”; Sanz Hoya). Exceptions are the contributions by Llopis-Goig (“Clubes”; “Identificación”) and Tuñón and Brey, all of them carried out from a quantitative perspective, although with different objectives and based on data from a survey carried out in 2007.

This article is dedicated to the football clubs that have historically had the greatest political connotations, FC Barcelona and Athletic de Bilbao, and the one that has had the highest degree of identification in Spanish society (and has not been exempt from political ties throughout its history), Real Madrid, with 37.9% of the total number of fans. FC Barcelona and Athletic de Bilbao are second and fourth, respectively, in this regard, representing 25.4% and 3.3% of the population that follows a football club. Thus, these three clubs make up 66.6% of all the identification with football clubs in Spain. It should be taken into account that identification with football clubs reached more than
two-thirds of the adult population in Spain: in 2007 it reached 66.8%, and in 2014, 67.1% (own processing based on CIS, 2014).

When talking about political culture, three elements are used that largely synthesize its main dimensions in Spanish society (Botella): national identity (degree to which the population feels Spanish or from the region to which they belong), preferred type of state, in terms of the degree of territorial decentralization considered appropriate for Spain, and ideological orientation (self-positioning on the left-right axis). The data used in this study come from the June 2014 Barometer conducted by the Sociological Research Centre (CIS 2014). This survey was carried out from the second to the twelfth of June 2014 in 239 towns from 46 provinces in Spain. During the survey, 2,485 people of both sexes over the age of 18 were interviewed in their homes. A multistage sample with stratified clusters and primary sampling units (municipalities) and secondary sampling units (sections) was randomly and proportionally chosen. The final units (individuals) were found according to random assignment and sex and age quotas. The sampling error for a confidence level of 95.5 per cent (two sigma), a \( p = q \), and based on a simple random sample was ±2.01%.

The article is made up of four sections. The first one includes the historical background for the study. Then, three other sections examine: first, the national/regional identification; second, the type of state preferred in terms of the degree of territorial decentralization; and third, the ideological self-positioning of the followers of the main football clubs. The article ends with a section that summarizes the main findings and formulates some conclusions.

2. Politics and Collective Identities in the History of Spanish Football

Athletic de Bilbao dominated Spanish football during the first decade of the 20th century and in the years prior to the Civil War. From its origins, the image of Athletic de Bilbao was based on the idea of a club that represented the city and its surrounding area. This image was strengthened by the executive committee’s decision in 1919 to hire only Basque players (Shaw 21). Not in vain, from its foundation in 1899, the club had managers and players linked to the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV). During the Second Republic, the identification between Athletic de Bilbao and Basque nationalism increased, and the club supported the campaign led by PNV in favour of Basque autonomy.
Athletic de Bilbao, along with other Basque clubs, supported Basque autonomy. With the outbreak of the Civil War, it became a member of the Euzkadi national team, making its first appearance in Paris in April and playing matches in Czechoslovakia, Poland, the Soviet Union, and Norway. Later, when the Basque country had been invaded by the nacionales (rebel military), the team moved to Mexico where it played in the National League before dissolving (Shaw 22). However, the identification between Athletic de Bilbao and Basque nationalism had some nuances that should be mentioned because certain sectors of the PNV were against football and preferred Basque pelota. Furthermore, in the 1920s and 1930s, many Basques frequently expressed both Spanish and Basque identities with no apparent problems, as demonstrated by the acceptance of the Spanish national team in various Basque cities during that time (Quiroga 50).

In Catalonia, in spite of having been founded by a Swiss man, Hans Gamper, FC Barcelona soon became a symbol of Catalanism, unlike its city rival, RCD Espanyol, which was regarded by most Barça supporters as a centralist team. With these identity characteristics, it is not surprising that matches between these two teams have been real local battles since the beginning of the 20th century. Nonetheless, the greatest clashes were produced by the centralist bias of some political decisions and policies. The symbolism of FC Barcelona increased during the dictatorship of General Primo de Rivera, who came to power in 1923, marking the beginning of a military dictatorship that would foreshadow the later Francoist period. Previously, in 1919, FC Barcelona had supported the pro-autonomy campaign organized by the leader of the Regionalist League, Francesc Cambó, who had adopted Catalan as the official language of the club and raised the senyera—the Catalan flag— in the stadium of Les Corts (Quiroga 48). Primo de Rivera eliminated Catalan from the public sphere and prohibited the senyera. The senyera was replaced during public demonstrations by the Barça flag, thus generating a symbolic fusion of the two flags that would be repeated during the dictatorship of General Franco. The persecution of Catalan symbols by the Primo de Rivera regime clashed with the social reality of an entity that found itself in a golden age (Pujadas and Santacana 1999, 36). This could be seen in the club’s 25th anniversary celebration in 1924, an occasion that the club took advantage of by publicly declaring its relationship with Catalanism. An incident that had a strong impact during this period occurred in June 1925 when, after some whistling and booing by fans.
during the Spanish national anthem, the military governor closed the old FC Barcelona stadium, Les Corts, for six months (Colomé 172). After the fall of Primo de Rivera, FC Barcelona supported the campaign in favour of the Catalan autonomy statute and maintained its link to the Catalan movement during the Second Republic (Quiroga 48). At the beginning of the Civil War, the president of FC Barcelona and deputy in the Spanish Courts for Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (the Republican Left of Catalonia), Josep Sunyol, was shot by a group of Francoists after the vehicle he was traveling in entered an enemy zone by mistake. This assassination caused great upheaval in Catalonia. As in the case of Athletic de Bilbao, many FC Barcelona players joined the fight against the insurgent military in 1936, and in April 1937 the club went on tour around Mexico (Shaw 23).

After the end of the Civil War, sport became part of the state’s machinery in Franco’s dictatorship. For the first time, there was a radical shift in the conception of sport, which became a political tool at the service of the totalitarian State (Santacana, “Espejo” 206). Sport was subordinated to the state and impregnated with fascist terminology. Football finally adjusted its rules to the development of the political regime, and only in the last period of Franco’s dictatorship could the clubs start to reassert their influence (Shaw 38).

The consecutive victories of Real Madrid in the first five editions of the European Champion Clubs Cup contributed decisively to improving the image of Franco’s Spain abroad, as pointed out by numerous academics and researchers specializing in the period (Botines; Shaw; Bahamonde, “El Real”; Ball). This was true not only due to the five convincing European Cup victories, but also to the results achieved against their rivals, their playing style, and their capacity to overcome adverse scoreboards. Alfredo Di Stéfano, Ferenc Puskas, and Francisco Gento were the main stars on a team whose fame and prestige went beyond Spanish borders. Without meaning to, Real Madrid acquired strong political symbolism during the Francoist period, to the extent that they came to be considered the regime’s team (González Aja 198).

However, Real Madrid was not the only club that acquired a strong political profile during Francoism. The Basque and Catalan clubs, in particular, acquired a high level of regionalist significance, and they even became channels of expression for part of the political opposition to the regime. Apart from the regionalist significance that clubs like Athletic de Bilbao or FC Barcelona had acquired previously, Basques
and Catalans mainly adhered to the Republican cause during the Civil War. Consequently, Franco neutralized any institutions that could have a separatist motivation. The Basque and Catalan languages were marginalized, and their use was prohibited in schools and other official institutions. The flags of the Basque Country and Catalonia, the \textit{ikurriña} and the \textit{senyera}, respectively, were also banned, along with many other manifestations of regional identification (Llopis-Goig, “Spanish Football”).

During the 1940s and 1950s, football clubs – including Athletic de Bilbao and FC Barcelona – were directed by Falangists or local business owners who had declared their loyalty to the Caudillo at the end of the Civil War. However, after two decades of institutional convergence with the political regime, football achieved some degree of autonomy (Bahamonde, “El Real” 186). The managers and members who led the football clubs in the 1960s and 1970s were less tolerant of the centralist arrogance and anti-democratic authoritarianism of the regime, and they were closer to the political and cultural opposition movements that began to develop in regions like Catalonia and the Basque Country. Taking into account the enormous difficulties created by the powerful repressive machinery of the Franco regime, it is not surprising that football stadiums were one of the few places where they could hoist their regional flags, express themselves in their native languages, and express their opposition to a centralist and repressive regime that threatened their regional identities.

FC Barcelona, mostly made up of local footballers until the 1960s, started to contract foreign players as a way to assert its rivalry with Real Madrid. Although this new hiring policy did not produce significant sporting results until the mid-1980s, FC Barcelona became the “national team” of Catalonia and was regarded as one of the most important Catalan institutions, in both economic and political terms. The repression in Catalonia after the Civil War had contributed to this special significance. Barça matches in the old Les Corts stadium became powerful nationalist \textit{performances}, an orderly way for thousands of Catalans to wave their \textit{senyeres}, sing songs such as \textit{Els Segadors}, and speak in their scorned mother tongue. The 1960s and 1970s saw the transformation of FC Barcelona into the true catalyst of the nationalistic aspirations of the Catalans. The Franco regime did not mind that football could serve as a scenario for expressing regional tensions. In fact, as the writer Manuel Vázquez-Montalbán highlighted
on many occasions, during Francoism, football was a “relief valve” through which opposition to centralism was channelled (Vázquez-Montalbán). With the presidency of Agustí Montalt (1969-77), the club began an ambitious policy of Catalanisation. In 1972, the senyera flew in the stadiums, Catalan was heard over the megaphones, and one year later the entity recovered its original name. The club increased its nationalist orientation at the same time that it increased its capacity to integrate the waves of immigration from other regions of Spain in the 1950s and 1970s (Llopis-Goig, “Spanish Football”).

With the advent of democracy, FC Barcelona increased its catalanising function. Thus, for example, on the 13th of April 1977, the general assembly of the club passed a resolution that demanded an autonomy statute for Catalonia (Santacana, “El Barça” 310). Two days later, the celebrations of the European Recopa, won by the club in Basel, turned into a political demonstration demanding an autonomy statute for Catalonia. However, although the link between Barça and Catalanism was strong during the last quarter of the 20th century, it never reached the strength it was going to acquire with the arrival of Joan Laporta to the club’s presidency. Josep Lluís Núñez (president of the club from 1978-2000) always remained on the fringe of the hegemonic party in Catalonia, Convergència i Unió (CIU), and he maintained fairly tense relations with the President of the Catalanian Government from 1989 to 2003, Jordi Pujol (Burns, “Barça”; Miravitllas). His successor, Joan Gaspar (president from 2000-2003) did not hide his political inclinations toward the main right-wing Spanish party, the Partido Popular (PP) (Quiroga 185).

However, things took on a different tone with the arrival of Joan Laporta to the FC Barcelona presidency in June 2003. This young lawyer — who had the support of Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC) and certain sectors of the Catalan right — developed a discourse with strong independence connotations, in which the Catalan nation appeared as a victim of a prolonged injustice perpetrated by a Spanish state that continued to asphyxiate Catalonia and impede its progress. Laporta began a programme of re-catalanisation of the club that made him a favourite figure of the independence movement, although it also produced distrust among some of the club’s fans (Quiroga 188).

Meanwhile, the club’s extraordinary playing and excellent results in recent years have turned FC Barcelona into an international reference. Contributing to this is the consolidation of Lionel Messi as one of the best players of all time, as well as the elaboration of high quality football
under the management of the coach Pep Guardiola. In addition, the
evolution of the political situation, with a majority of deputies in the
Catalan Parliament currently favouring the creation of an independent Catalan state, has been a determining factor in the direction taken
by the club.

The support for nationalism also grew in the Basque country during late Francoism. One month before the Government of Spain legalized the *ikurriña* — the Basque flag —, the captains of Athletic de Bilbao and Real Sociedad had already carried it in front of thousands of fans who had attended Atocha stadium in San Sebastián to watch a match between the two teams (Quiroga 206). The gesture was repeated on many occasions, and at the end of May 1976, the newspaper *El País* stated that the players on these teams had done as much as the political parties to recover the *ikurriña*. In addition to supporting the Basque autonomy and the spread of Euskera, Athletic de Bilbao developed a home-grown sport policy — based on hiring only Basque and Navarran players — which made it an important emblem of Basque nationalism. It should be taken into account, however, that Athletic de Bilbao was not alone in this endeavour, as other Basque clubs such as Real Sociedad also defended the *ikurriña* and followed a home-grown sport policy. In any case, Athletic de Bilbao continued to be a symbol for all Bilbaoans, regardless of their degree of support for Basque nationalism.

Although the policy of hiring only Basque and Navarran football players was developed without controversy in the last two decades of the 20th century (Unzueta), in the mid-1990s — when Athletic de Bilbao was about to descend to second division — it was questioned by some sectors (MacClancey, “Nationalism”). However, the club’s President at the time, José María Arrate, defended this sport policy and considered it an essential element of the club’s identity (Quiroga 219).

The Board of Directors of Athletic de Bilbao was under the control of the Basque Nationalist Party in the 1980s and 90s (Leguineche, Unzueta and Segurola, 1998) and at the beginning of the 21st century, which facilitated the club’s good progress in economic terms, the renovation of its sport city, and the construction of the new San Mamés stadium. The defence of the grassroots was formalized in a document known as Plan DENA in 2001, which highlighted the priority of hiring Basque and Navarran football players: first, those coming from the reserve and, second, those coming from other clubs (Castillo). Athletic de Bilbao has maintained this sport policy until the present day — unlike
Real Sociedad, which returned to hiring foreigners in 1989—, making it a unique case at a global level.

Although the booing of the royal family and the Spanish anthem by Athletic de Bilbao fans during the final games of the King’s Cup in 2009 and 2012 demonstrated the resentment of some of the Basque fans toward the main symbols of the Spanish nation, the socio-political situation of the Basque Country is quite different from that of Catalonia. On the one hand, after almost four decades of criminal activity, the terrorist group ETA renounced its armed conflict in 2011. On the other, the current Lendakari of the Basque Government, Íñigo Urkullu, has stated on many occasions that the independence of the Basque Country is not one of his main objectives. All of this establishes a clearly different political situation from what is present today in Catalonia.

3. Regional/National Identification and Pride in the Spanish Team

After presenting the main historical coordinates that have determined the evolution of the ties of FC Barcelona, Athletic de Bilbao, and Real Madrid with the political sphere and, more specifically, with the space of regionalist/nationalist feelings, this section aims to examine the opinions and political attitudes of their fans in order to find out whether there is convergence between them and the clubs. The objective is to discover, on the one hand, whether the FC Barcelona and Athletic de Bilbao fans maintain a political orientation of identification with their own regions (rather than with the whole of Spain), if they declare themselves in favour of strongly decentralized forms of territorial organizations of the state, and whether they place themselves in left-wing ideological positions, given that these positions are where decentralization of the state has traditionally been proposed, compared to a more unitary and centralist vision that has characterized right and centre-right positions. On the other hand, another objective is to test whether Real Madrid fans consider themselves mainly Spanish, choose more centralist state forms, and ideologically consider themselves more on the right, in consonance with the traditional image of this club, especially due to its consideration as the “regime’s team” during the Francoist stage.

As mentioned above, the empirical information available refers to the degree to which the fans of each club feel Spanish or of the region where they reside (national identity), the degree of territorial decentralization of the state they consider most appropriate for Spain,
and their position on the left-right axis (ideological self-positioning).
In relation to national identity, there is a fourth indicator related to
the degree of pride experienced every time the Spanish national team
performs well in a sport championship (pride in the national team).

Next, a comparative analysis is presented of these indicators for the
fans of FC Barcelona, Athletic de Bilbao, and Real Madrid, that is, the
population over 18 years old that self-identify with these football clubs
on the survey. Taking into account that the fans of these three clubs are
dispersed throughout the Spanish territory, the statistical information
corresponding to each of them is subdivided: first, the results obtained
in the whole of Spain and, second, the results registered in the region
where the club is located: FC Barcelona in Catalonia, Athletic de Bilbao
in the Basque Country, and Real Madrid in the Community of Madrid. It
is important to keep in mind that, according to the survey on which the
study is based, 49.2% of the FC Barcelona fans live outside of Catalonia,
30.4% of the Athletic de Bilbao fans live outside the Basque Country, and
76.5% of the Real Madrid fans live outside the Community of Madrid.

The data represented in table 1 show that a majority of the fans of
the three clubs feel equally as Spanish as belonging to the region where
they live. In the case of FC Barcelona, 42.8% of its fans in all of Spain
and 35.2% of its fans residing in Catalonia state that they are both
Spanish and from the region. The exclusive feeling of being Spanish is
clearly higher among the fans living in Spain than among those living
in Catalonia (15.3% and 9.7%, respectively). Although quite low, these
latter numbers reveal that the condition of culé is not incompatible
with the feeling of being Spanish, as can be derived from the schemas
and stereotypes often used to address these questions in the news
media and in numerous informative publications. In any case, those
who feel exclusively or more from the region make up 28.4% in the
whole of Spain, whereas in Catalonia the percentage is 45.4%, and both
percentages are much higher than those presented by, for example, the
fans of Real Madrid.

Among the fans of Athletic de Bilbao all over Spain, the majority
feel just as Spanish as they do from the region (35.7%), although this
proportion is lower than what is obtained by FC Barcelona. In the Basque
Country, the number of fans who feel more attached to their region is
higher than those who feel more Spanish, and along with those who
only feel tied to the region, represent 56.4% of the population. None of
the Athletic de Bilbao fans in the Basque Country defined themselves as
exclusively Spanish, although the percentage reached 10.7% in the whole
country. In any case, the results also show that being a fan of Athletic de Bilbao is not incompatible with feelings of being Spanish: 16.1% and 7.7% of their fans in Spain and the Basque Country, respectively, define themselves exclusively as Spanish or as more Spanish.

The national identity of Real Madrid fans is quite different from those of these two clubs. In fact, 55.7% in Spain and 37.6% in the region of Madrid consider themselves both Spanish and from their region. Likewise, 23.8% and 35.6%, respectively, consider themselves only Spanish. There is, then, a predominance of a dual identity and, above all, a percentage of Spanishness that was not as high in FC Barcelona and Athletic de Bilbao fans.

Table 1: National and regional identity feelings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Football club</th>
<th>FC Barcelona</th>
<th>Athletic de Bilbao</th>
<th>Real Madrid</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fans from…</td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>Catalonia</td>
<td>Spain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only Spanish</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Spanish than native of the region he/she lives in</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As much Spanish as native of the region he/she lives in</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>35.2</td>
<td>35.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More native of the region he/she lives in than Spanish</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only native of the region where he/she lives</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>26.4</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of the above</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NK/NA</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: own processing based on CIS (2014)
A second approach to feelings of national identity is provided by a more strictly footballistic indicator, the degree of pride experienced by the fans of the different football clubs when the Spanish national team performs well. As the data from table 2 show, the majority of the fans of the three clubs have feelings of pride (very and strongly proud), although they are much higher in Real Madrid fans, and they obtain the lowest scores among the fans of Athletic de Bilbao. In the case of the latter, 41% of the fans in this territory feel not very or not at all proud of the successes of the Spanish national team, a percentage that is around 32% in the case of FC Barcelona. However, in both cases, a majority state that they are proud of the successes of the Spanish national team: 51.3% of Athletic de Bilbao fans and 66.7% of FC Barcelona fans in their respective regions.

Table 2: Feelings of pride when the Spanish national team performs well

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Football club</th>
<th>FC Barcelona</th>
<th>Athletic de Bilbao</th>
<th>Real Madrid</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fans from...</td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>Catalonia</td>
<td>Spain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very proud</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>23.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly proud</td>
<td>37.4</td>
<td>36.6</td>
<td>39.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very proud</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>17.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not proud at all</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NK/NA</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: own processing based on CIS (2014)

The numbers are quite different among the fans of Real Madrid, both in the whole country and in the region of Madrid. As table 2 shows, the proud fans make up 93.6% in the former case and 89.2% in the latter. By contrast, the percentage who state they are not very or not at all proud is reduced to 4.6% and 7.4%, respectively.
4. Preferences Related to the Territorial Organization of the State

After examining the differences related to identitary feelings, this section is dedicated to the analysis of the preferences related to the territorial organization of the state. The data that appear in table 3 show the existence of important differences among the fans of the three football clubs. The Real Madrid fans in the region of Madrid were mainly in favour of a state with one central government with no autonomy for the regions (30.9%). Next, 24.8% state that they are in favour of the current system, and 21.5% believe that it would be advisable to reduce the autonomy the regions currently have. The fans of Real Madrid in Spain overall are slightly more in favour of the current system (39.8%), although 37.6% support reducing the autonomy the regions currently have.

The situation is quite different among the fans of Athletic de Bilbao. Its fans — both in Spain and in the Basque Country — are equally in favour of maintaining the state as it is currently set up (41.1% and 41%, respectively). However, the other preferences move toward wanting greater autonomy for the regions (35.8% and 43.6%), whereas the percentages of those in favour of reducing the autonomy reach only 12.5% in Spain as a whole and 5.1% in the Basque Country.

Finally, among the fans of FC Barcelona, a clear demand for greater regional autonomy is detected. In fact, among the club’s fans living in Catalonia, the preferred option is one where the autonomous regions could become independent states, with 42.6%. This is followed by a state where the regions have greater autonomy than they have now, with 19.9%. Thus, 62.5% of the FC Barcelona fans in Catalonia demand greater territorial decentralization from the central state.
Table 3: Preferred type of state (degree of territorial decentralization)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Football club</th>
<th>FC Barcelona</th>
<th>Athlete de Bilbao</th>
<th>Real Madrid</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fans from...</strong></td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>Catalonia</td>
<td>Spain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A state with one Central Government without autonomous regions</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A state in which the regions have less autonomy than they currently have</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A state with autonomous regions as in the current system</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>41.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A state in which autonomous regions have greater autonomy than they currently have</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>30.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A state in which autonomous regions could become independent states</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>42.6</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NK/NA</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: own processing based on CIS (2014)
This indicator also shows that the fans are not merely “transmission belts” of the political positions projected by the football clubs with which they identify. Only in this way is it possible to understand that 21% and 12.5% of the Barça fans — in Spain and in Catalonia, respectively — are in favour of a state where there is no autonomy for the regions or less autonomy than there is now. In the case of Athletic de Bilbao, these two positions are held by 12.5% and 5.1% of its fans in Spain and the Basque Country, respectively. Finally, the Madrid fans feel inclined toward a state with a degree of territorial decentralization like the current one or much less, but they also support positions that demand greater autonomy for the regions — 7.2% in Spain and 6% in the region of Madrid — or even the possibility that these regions could become independent — 2.5% and 2%, respectively —.

5. Ideological Orientation (Scale of Self-placement on the Left-right)

The last indicator selected to examine the political culture of the fans of the three Spanish football clubs has to do with the political ideology. The variables commonly used to measure this construct consist of asking interviewees to place themselves on a ten-point scale, where one corresponds to the position on the far left and ten to the one on the far right. To synthesize the information recorded, the ten positions were grouped in five categories defined as left (1+2), centre-left (3+4), centre (5+6), centre-right (7+8) and right (9+10).

Table 4 collects the scores for each of these five ideological categories for the fans of the three football clubs in Spain overall and in their respective regional territories. It can be highlighted, first, that the Real Madrid fans place themselves in the categories of centre-right and right significantly more than the fans of the other two clubs. These two categories register 18.1% and 15.5% of the Madrid fans all over Spain and in the region of Madrid, respectively. However, twice as many are situated on the left and centre-left, specifically 31% in Spain and 33.6% in the region of Madrid, which contrasts with the stereotype associating Real Madrid fans with positions more on the right. The Barça fans in the centre-right and right positions are half as numerous — 7.5% and 6.9%, respectively — compared to 3.6% of Athletic de Bilbao fans in Spain and none in the Basque Country. The Barça fans, however, stand out for reaching the highest scores in the position on the left: both the followers of this club in Spain overall (14.6%) and in Catalonia (14.8%) represent a much higher percentage than Athletic de Bilbao.
and Real Madrid fans in this position. Finally, Athletic de Bilbao fans lead the other two groups in the centre-left and centre positions. In the former, they reach 35.7% in Spain and 35.9% in the Basque Country, whereas in the latter, they represent 32.1% and 30.8%, respectively.

Table 4: Ideological self-placement (left-right scale)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Football club</th>
<th>FC Barcelona</th>
<th></th>
<th>Athletic de Bilbao</th>
<th></th>
<th>Real Madrid</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fans from...</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td></td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td></td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Catalonia</td>
<td></td>
<td>Basque Country</td>
<td></td>
<td>Madrid Region</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td></td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre-left</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td></td>
<td>35.7</td>
<td></td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td></td>
<td>32.1</td>
<td></td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre-right</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td></td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td></td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NK/NA</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td></td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td></td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: own processing based on CIS (2014)

Nevertheless, beyond the differences described, it should again be pointed out that identification with a certain football team does not imply incompatibility with certain ideological adscriptions. Thus, for example, 9.1% and 7.8% of the Barça fans in Spain and Catalonia — respectively — are defined as centre-right or right, whereas 29% and 33.6% of the Real Madrid fans consider themselves on the left or centre-left. Therefore, it seems clear that one thing is the political orientation of the club, and another is that of the fans.
6. Conclusions

The study presented in this article empirically examined the hypothesis of political-identitary isomorphism between football clubs and fans, based on which we would expect to find a statistical relationship between the political orientation traditionally associated with the main Spanish football clubs (FC Barcelona, Athletic de Bilbao, and Real Madrid) and the main traits of the political culture of their fans. Addressing this objective has required a dual task, consisting, on the one hand, of carrying out a historical review of the links of these football clubs to the political sphere, in order to extract the main political coordinates associated with the clubs, and on the other hand, of examining the political opinions and attitudes of the fans of these clubs, based on the data provided by a survey whose field work was performed in the year 2014 (CIS, 2014). This survey has provided indicators about national/regional identity, preferences about the degree of territorial decentralization of the state, and self-placement on a left-right scale.

The results of the study show that — except in some cases mentioned below — there is a relationship between the political orientations historically associated with the three football clubs studied and their fans, both in Spain overall and in their respective regions. With regard to FC Barcelona, although the majority of its fans in Catalonia consider themselves both Spanish and from the region (35.2%), 45.4% feel exclusively or more from the region than Spanish. In spite of this, it should be kept in mind that 12.3% show a feeling of Spanishness, and that 66.7% feel very or fairly proud of the successes of the Spanish national team. These fans are, however, clearly in favour of a territorial organization of the state that gives more or complete autonomy to their regions (62.5%). Nevertheless, 16.2% seem to be satisfied with the currently existing degree of autonomy, and 12.5% prefer less decentralization than the current level. In addition, more than half of the fans in the Catalan territory define themselves as left or centre-left (56.7%). The Barça fans are, therefore, the fans most on the left and most in favour of reforming the current state by increasing the autonomy of the regions.

The Athletic de Bilbao fans in the Basque Country are, in terms of collective identity, much less Spanish than the Catalans: here, 56.4% consider themselves exclusively or more from their region than Spanish. The fans who identify with the club also exhibit a lower level of pride in the sport successes of the national team (51.3%). Moreover, 43.6% demand a greater degree of territorial decentralization of the
state, where the regions would have greater or complete autonomy, and 46.2% define themselves as left or centre-left. Thus, also in this case, the political culture that the survey analysed attributes to the fans of this club seems to support the hypothesis of political-identitary isomorphism between the club and its fans.

Finally, the results do not show a different direction in the case of Real Madrid fans. The statistical analysis carried out in this article shows that they mainly define themselves as Spanish (35.6%) or equally as Spanish as from their region (37.6%), with a very small minority prioritizing their regional identity over their Spanish identity. These fans, in addition, feel greater satisfaction about the performance of the Spanish national team: 89.2% feel proud of its good results. In another vein, 77.2% of Madrid’s fans feel satisfied with the current degree of autonomy of the Spanish regions or think they should have less. Finally, although the Real Madrid fans surpass those of the other teams in the position of right and centre-right, the study showed that those who place themselves on the left and centre-left — contrary to what would be expected taking into account its traditional image as a central team or of the establishment — double those who place themselves on the right and centre-right.

The results obtained in this study show a high level of convergence between the political and ideological aspects traditionally associated with the clubs and the political culture of their fans. This result provides clear evidence of the socio-political symbolism these clubs have, in spite of their progressive transformation into powerful business machines, as well as their efficacy as agencies of socialization, integration, and social support. However, this is not an obstacle to rejecting a homogenous and unitary vision of each club’s fans that does not coincide with the heterogeneity that has been identified in the study presented in this article. Although the results obtained have shown the relevance of the political-identitary isomorphism hypothesis between clubs and fans for the three clubs, relevant percentages of fans also occupy ambivalent or opposite positions to what would be expected by the political-identitary isomorphism hypothesis. In fact, among the fans of these three clubs in Spain as a whole, a majority feel they belong equally to Spain and to the regions where they live (dual identity), feel very or fairly proud of the successes of the Spanish national team, and are in favour of a state with a degree of decentralization like the current one.
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Identities at Play: 
Non-Basque Supporters’ Reflections on 
Athletic Bilbao’s Basque-only Signing Philosophy

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Abstract: Athletic Club plays a relevant role as an identity maker based on its policy highlighting the value for local talent in two ways: through territorialization, and its youth academy. However, the club’s significance goes beyond the geographical limits of the Basque Country. It is the fifth most followed team in Spain, and has fan associations worldwide. Castilla y León has traditionally had strong bonds with Bilbao due to the massive immigration that took place at the end of the 19th century and in the second half of the 20th. Besides, it hosts the largest number of peñas, fan clubs, outside of the Basque Country. This article aims to shed some light on the views non-Basque fans from Castilla y León have on Athletic’s Basque-only philosophy. It explains why people cheer for an institution that apparently discriminates against them and their soccer players for not being Basque. Additionally, the paper shows fans’ order of preferences when it comes to Athletic Club victories, Spanish national team triumphs, and the success of their local teams.

Key words: Anthropology, Soccer, Basque Country, Spain, Identification, Immigration.

Resumen: El Athletic Club juega un papel relevante como generador de identidad basada en una política que destaca el valor por el talento local de dos maneras: mediante la territorialización y su cantera. Sin embargo, el significado del club va más allá de los límites geográficos de Euskadi. Es el quinto equipo más seguido en España y tiene peñas por todo el mundo. Castilla y León ha tenido, tradicionalmente, sólidos vínculos con Bilbao debido a la masiva inmigración que tuvo lugar a finales del siglo XIX y durante la segunda mitad del XX. Además, alberga el mayor número de peñas fuera del País Vasco. Este artículo pretende arrojar algo de luz acerca de la opinión que los aficionados no vascos de Castilla y León tienen sobre la filosofía del Athletic Club, según la cual solo pueden jugar vascos. Trata de explicar por qué la gente apoya a una institución que, aparentemente, les discrimina por no ser vascos. Asimismo, el artículo muestra el orden de preferencias de los aficionados cuando se trata de las victorias del Athletic Club, los triunfos de la Selección Española o el éxito de sus equipos locales.

Palabras clave: Antropología, Fútbol, Euskadi, España, Identificación, Inmigración.

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Introduction

When I was a teenager, walking around the streets of my home city León wearing my Athletic Club de Bilbao’s jersey made me experience a series of situations that have kept me wondering until today.

One such event is when people completely unknown to me, people whom I would barely exchange greetings with unless some social reason would lead us to do so, had the imperious necessity to come and say hello to me in a very particular way: *Aúpa Athletic!* (Go Athletic!). Indeed, I used to sense (and still do) the need to act similarly when I saw someone with some item representing the red-and-white team. But why is that? Why do we have such an urge to proclaim ourselves as belonging to the same community, the Athletic Bilbao community? Why are we so proud of letting others know that we were *athleticzales* — in Basque, Athletic fans?

The other episode was the recurrent and sometimes annoying question asked by those who were not Athletic Club fans. “Are you from Bilbao? Are you from the Basque Country?” After replying “no” and adding that I was as from León as they are, the next enquiry was about my family. “Are your parents Basques? Have you got relatives in the Basque Country?” Again, my response was “no,” and actually it took me several years of Athletic fandom before visiting the Basque region for the first time in my life. People could not hide their surprise, and straight away came back with the last interrogation, like a definitive penalty-shot: “So, why do you cheer *el Bilbao*?”

If there is anything that hurts an Athletic fan, it is someone referring to the team as *el Bilbao*. Many studies highlight naming practices as identity construction. In fact, it is worth noting the quickness with which the club retook its original name after the end of the Franco era. The dictatorship prohibited the use of foreign terms, and it decided to Hispanicize them all, thus Athletic Club became Atlético Bilbao. However, it is still quite common to hear the despised name whether one is outside of the Basque Country, or from people who do not follow this centenarian institution. Why was my identification with one of the only three squads that have never been relegated to second division so strange? Were they not, after all, following Real Madrid or Fútbol Club Barcelona? Why did I have to be from the Basque Country to support *los leones* (the lions as the Biscay side is known), and why is it perfectly normal to support *merengues* and *culés* without being from Madrid or Catalonia?
This auto-ethnography, as with Mark Groves, may have happened to any other fan. The detail of underlining that it took place in León is not in vain. This city, belonging to the Autonomous Community of Castilla y León, in the northwest of Spain, has strong historical links with the Basque Country. Many people from this Autonomous Community, particularly from rural enclaves, emigrated to the wealthy and industrialized Basque zone during the two main migration waves: the end of the 19th century, and the second half of the 20th century (González Portilla & García Abad). In fact, Athletic’s founding (1898) coincides with the first wave.

By using this historical connection as justification, this article aims to collect an ethnography of Athletic Club’s non-Basque supporters: their views and understandings of the team’s philosophy, and potential changes they would implement to it. This approach will consider Athletic Bilbao’s dimensions beyond Basque borders. The paper also aims to achieve and propose a deeper comprehension of sports in general, and soccer in particular, as identity-makers related to a specific territory. In other words, in the light of what Grant Farred called “long distance love,” why do people identify with a far-located team, that is to say, a club that does not belong to one’s land? Let us keep in mind that Athletic Bilbao’s policy of players establishes that only those born in Euskal Herria, or trained as youth footballers in one of the seven Basque territories can play in the club. Therefore, according to this signing policy, most of the fans I examine, their children, and their soccer players could not aspire to play for the club. Why do people cheer for a squad that, apparently, excludes their community on the field? Finally, I will look at the clash of personal identities within these followers by exploring their order of preferences when it comes to Athletic Club victories, Spanish national team triumphs, and the success of their local teams.

1. Methodology

This paper predominantly uses a qualitative perspective to examine how the birthplace and ethnic background conditions the motivations to identify and adhere to a certain community. For that reason, even though it works out as an exploratory and preliminary analysis of further research, including three main variables (origin, age, and sex), the only variable taken into account, for this particular contribution, is origin.
This study is based on in-depth semi-structured interviews with 10 non-Basque Athletic Club supporters. Specifically, they are native to the provinces of León, Zamora, and Salamanca (Autonomous Community of Castilla y León, Spain), and belong to any of the 13 peñas\(^2\) (fan associations) located throughout these territories. The age range is 28-55, and the group comprises two women and eight men\(^3\). These conversations were held from May 17\(^{th}\) until May 30\(^{th}\) 2017. Besides, I conducted fieldwork including participant observation within these supportive organizations for the last four months. Throughout this time, I have both watched the team play as one of them, and I participated in discussions about the future of the club, its particular philosophy, and everything it implies. Moreover, I provide quantitative contribution in order to contextualize the information, and thus present more accurate results and conclusions. On the one hand, I will explore data regarding the immigration from Castilla y León to the Basque Country in the two big waves mentioned above. On the other hand, I will examine the number of red-and-white peñas around Spain, classified by provinces and Autonomous Communities, with special emphasis on the selected region of study.

2. Sport, Identity, Territory

As Johan Huizinga (1987) stressed in his seminal book Homo Ludens, sport is central in the development of civilization. The question is why do people love it so much to the point of following certain clubs, enroll in different associations, and even construct the meaning of their lives through them.

Many authors attribute fandom to factors like self-realization within a community, the traditions it involves, acquisition of values by socializing, or just a simple escape from routine (Vaczi “Soccer,” 190). Likewise, it might serve to create civil consensus by means of shared feelings, needs and subjectivities framed in patriotic sentiments. (Alabarces 73). In addition, there is an element of epic dimensions in it. As Eduardo Archetti writes, “Sport, like wars and expeditions through inhospitable places, paves the way for heroic narratives” (116).

Particularly referring to football, many people appreciate its peculiar sense of justice whereby David can beat Goliath at his own game.

\(^2\) Data taken from Athletic Club website.

\(^3\) The initial attempt was to have sex parity. However, it has not been possible due to the higher percentage of men supporters in these associations. Nonetheless, one of the interviewed women is the chief of one of the associations.
(Vaczi “Soccer,” 23). But fandom also works as an effective tool to produce a sense of belonging (Alabarces, Gil Araújo), often interacting with other sociological variables such as gender, age, social class (Souza 20-22), or ethnicity (Ramonet 14, Brune 30).

**Soccer Cultures and Identity-makers**

Ramonet (14) and Brune (30) agree with regards to soccer’s capacity to affirm collective identities and local, regional and national antagonisms. Its power relies on its capacity of mobilization. Why is soccer so important when making identities? According to Gil Araújo (63), its success is based on factors like the mixture of possibilities, its role in enlightening symbolism, the value for individual skills as well as collective solidarity, the role chance and fate, and the previously mentioned justice. Llopis-Goig defines this soccer culture as the “orientations, practices, and feelings whose central axis would be identification with a football club” (237). Fandom creates a social imaginary, and determines specific patterns of behavior not only individually, but also collectively. As Mariann Vaczi explains, “at the heart of fandom, there is a compromise: you choose to support a team and never to abandon it” (“Bilbao Catch-22,” 190). This decision leads to a special relationship with the club, a proprietary relationship where it is your club, where the club belongs to you and fans like you (Farred 30). Something like that happens with Athletic Club, whose almost 40,000 socios (members) own and govern it.

Survey number 2,705 conducted by the Sociological Research Centre (CIS in Spanish) in 2007 shows that residence and birthplace are the main factors in identification with a team (32.3%). As Llopis-Goig (247) analyzes it, this means that clubs still generate a strong sense of adscription for Spaniards by symbolizing a solid link with their territory. As an illustration of this, Agiriano (33) notes how the Biscayan press used to (and still does) remind Athletic players of their responsibility as representatives of the city of Bilbao.

**Commercialization vs. Identification**

The approval of the Bosman-ruling was a significant event with powerful consequences in this team-territory connection. On December, 15th 1995, the European Court of Justice (ECJ) passed a sentence (named after the Belgian player Jean. Marc Bosman) whereby the workers’ right to freedom of movement within the European Union was extended over
footballers, because they were also considered as labor force. In 1998, there was a similar sentence in favor of the Hungarian midfielder Tibor Balog, and in 2000 another one backing the female Polish basketball player Lilia Malaja. Both results allowed the aforementioned right to come into effect. It also covered athletes from countries that had signed association/collaboration treaties with the European Union — by then, Poland and Hungary were among those nations (Gil Araújo 80-81).

The Bosman-ruling became a threat for the configuration of local identities. Clubs will search for young, gifted players outside of their own academies and countries due to lower costs, or avoiding the strict legislation imposed in Europe on hiring terms (Schaffhauser 4-5). Meanwhile, their own academies with regional talents become weaker. Therefore, there would be a potential lack of identification as fans tend to be acquainted with his team through a complex complicity wherein sharing ethnic backgrounds plays a major role (Vázquez Montalbán 19-20). In other words, the less local players, the less identification with the club. Let us not forget that in a situation where so many international players make up the team, followers look for links with the territory, or develop a special relationship with the few local actors (Vázquez Montalbán 25).

**Athletic Club: Basque Nationalist or Regional Symbol?**

In order to get a more accurate knowledge of what non-Basque supporters think of Athletic Club’s policy, how they view it and why they identify with a team that, apparently, excludes them as players, it turns out relevant a brief underlining on the two main perspectives it has in local people.

Several authors have shown a nationalistic angle in the particular philosophy held by the team. Zákravský (11) speaks about the Basque nationalist family De la Sota in charge of the team as well as the club’s promotion for the oficialdom of the Basque national team. Shulman (65) presents an interpretation of Bixente Lizarazu’s hiring as a move to join the French Basque Country with the abertzale (patriot) purpose. This footballer is from the French Basque Country, which means that for non-Basques or non-nationalist Basques he is a French international, whereas for nationalist Basques he is part of the Basque Country. Athletic has routinely engaged nationalistic ideas, the prime example being Iribar and Kortabarria entering the field with the Basque flag.

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4 Captains of Athletic Club and Real Sociedad of San Sebastián, respectively. Date don December, 12th 1976, that is, barely a year after Franco’s death, in the middle of the transition to democracy, the ikurriña still being a forbidden symbol.
(Quiroga Fernández 203-204). Jeremy MacClancy ("Nacionalismo") and Mariann Vaczi ("Soccer") offer a detailed study on how the club’s policy has shifted in parallel with nationalistic comprehensions of Basque identity.

Some scholars have endorsed a view that this football institution is a symbol of the province of Biscay rather than a Basque one. Quiroga Fernández (209) questions if those nationalists from Guipuzcoa province, and its population at all would agree on Athletic representing them. Unzueta (148-149) explains that its philosophy became a tradition and it has been shared generation after generation by the population of Biscay in general, ideologies aside, due to its capacity to create social cohesion. Agiriano (103-106) contends that the pride of Bilbao, and of the province to some extent, was behind such identity exacerbation rather than an ideological attempt. He also wonders what could be more satisfactory for locals than winning other teams with just local kids. Mariann Vaczi ("Subversive," "Bilbao Catch-22") backs this idea of pride and emphasizes the factor of the team being owned by its socios.

3. Sociohistorical Context

At the end of the 19th century, British workers settled in Bilbao and its surroundings in order to get resources, especially iron, which they used in their factories back on the island. One of their main contributions was the importation of football. It is in this heavily industrialized context that Athletic Club was born in 1898. However, industrialization was not the only transformation that this Basque city was experiencing during that epoch.

Newcomers from rural areas started to arrive and settle in the newly industrializing city of Bilbao. According to González Portilla and García Abad, the two big waves of immigration are the periods 1876-1930 and 1950-1975. Based on a meticulous check of the census, the authors underline that the population of Bilbao’s riverside multiplied by 13.6 in just a hundred years. Another key factor to highlight from this data is that towards the end of the 20th century, 84% of the people living by the Nervión river bank were either immigrants or descendants of immigrants. By the 1970s, only two-third of the Basque Country’s population was born there (Győri Szabó 532).

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5 The song Alirón, the first Athletic’s anthem and recurrently used by Athletic fans to cheer for the team and to celebrate its triumphs, comes from the expression ‘all iron’ dating back to the time when British industrials were looking for such a mineral.
Castilla y León was one of the main origins of these migrants. The following chart shows the increase of their number, as well as its provincial breakdown:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Nº</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Nº</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>Burgos</td>
<td>2,776</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>1st</td>
<td>Burgos</td>
<td>31,896</td>
<td>15.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9th</td>
<td>Soria</td>
<td>602</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>4th</td>
<td>Palencia</td>
<td>11,171</td>
<td>5.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10th</td>
<td>León</td>
<td>543</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>5th</td>
<td>Valladolid</td>
<td>10,827</td>
<td>5.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11th</td>
<td>Palencia</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>9th</td>
<td>Salamanca</td>
<td>6,161</td>
<td>2.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13th</td>
<td>Valladolid</td>
<td>316</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>10th</td>
<td>León</td>
<td>5,681</td>
<td>2.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11th</td>
<td>Zamora</td>
<td>5,561</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chart 1. | Source: González Portilla, García Abad.

It is noteworthy that León is present in both waves of immigration, whereas Zamora and Salamanca only show up powerfully in the second one.

**Athletic ‘peñas’ Around Spain**

In order to understand the significance of Athletic Club around Spain, it is worth noting the support it receives throughout the country. 7.3% of the Spanish population identifies with the Biscay province team either as their first team or second. This places Athletic Club in fifth position in terms of the volume of its fandom just after Real Madrid C.F. (39.6%), F.C. Barcelona (32.3%), Valencia C.F. (8.1%), and Atlético de Madrid (7.7%) (Llopis-Goig “Identificación,” 242).

Another component we must examine with regards to Athletic fandom beyond the Basque Country is the number of peñas, or official fan clubs the club has Spain-wide. These supporter associations are central to the club. They represent a link with the entity, and a way of self-perception. Such is their impact and volume that several conferences are held annually all over the Iberian Peninsula to discuss their activities around soccer. One of the most important reunions is the Congreso Internacional de Peñas (International Congress of Fan Clubs), officially organized by the institution. It is hosted every year by
a different group, and this year (2017) it celebrated its 45th anniversary in Ibiza on the Balearic Islands. Actually, the reason why the idyllic island was proposed had to do with the club’s plan to rejuvenate its social base. Given that Ibiza is an attractive destination due to its beaches and good weather, the board thought that many young people would feel more encouraged to attend the event and be seduced by the red-and-white cause (November, 11th 2015, Diario de Ibiza).

Six of such conferences were held in Castilla y León (Palencia, 1977; Segovia, 1980; Burgos, 1989; Ponferrada, 2007; León, 2010; and Astorga, 2015). Indeed, this Autonomous Community is home to the largest number of peñas outside of the Basque Country: 45 out of the 450 worldwide officially recognized associations, equivalent to 10% of the total.

As it happened with migration, Castilla y León seems to be the most connected territory to the Basque land in terms of Athletic Bilbao following. The city of León is home to 11 fan clubs, whereas the other domains considered in the survey, Zamora and Salamanca, are tied, with four fan clubs in each city.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RANKING</th>
<th>AUTONOMOUS COMMUNITY</th>
<th>NUMBER OF PEÑAS (unofficial and disappeared)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td>Basque Country</td>
<td>165 (329)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>Castilla y León</td>
<td>45 (63)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>Valencian Community</td>
<td>41 (53)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th</td>
<td>Castilla – La Mancha</td>
<td>33 (45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th</td>
<td>Andalusia</td>
<td>32 (48)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6th</td>
<td>Extremadura</td>
<td>26 (32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th</td>
<td>La Rioja</td>
<td>17 (22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8th</td>
<td>Navarre</td>
<td>16 (25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9th</td>
<td>Madrid</td>
<td>11 (15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10th</td>
<td>Murcia</td>
<td>9 (22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11th</td>
<td>Galicia</td>
<td>8 (19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11th</td>
<td>Cantabria</td>
<td>8 (14)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Data taken from Athletic Club website.
* There are 756 including official, unofficial and disappeared ones according to the main Athletic Club forum AupaAthletic.com.
Chart 2 and Map 1 show the location of these groups throughout Spain. The Basque Country (165) tops the ranking as the province of Biscay has 141 of them. Following Biscay province is Castilla y León (45), and the Valencian Community (41). It is quite striking to detect that the communities bordering on the Basque Country (La Rioja, Navarra, and Cantabria), with the exception of Castilla y León, are not among the leading ones. The most powerful regions in terms of Athletic Club following are located in the southern half of the State.
There are fourteen fan clubs outside of Spain. The United States (4 fan clubs) leads this distribution followed by France (3), Argentina (1), Belgium (1), Cuba (1), Italy (1), Mexico (1), the United Kingdom (1), and Venezuela (1). Alternative sources such as the main club forum, AupaAthletic.com, also include countries like Japan (1), Poland (1), and Sweden (1).

4. Long Distance Love

What motivates a person to follow a remote club? Grant Farred defines such attachments as “long distance love.” This is produced when “you over-identify, when loyalties are created in the absence of a physical but not a psychic spectacle [...] It is about the depth, the intensity, and the enduring passion of that imagined other, far off (but not so far off) space” (33). Farred also recalls how he was “an anti-apartheid adolescent, protesting the racism of the South African regime, and yet fan of a club (Liverpool) that — for all intents and purposes — practiced a whites-only policy” (53). He wonders why could Liverpool not hire a black player? Why could himself not play for his beloved team? He concludes that for the peripheral fan, love (in this case identity with a team) may be stronger than politics.

This article addresses the same paradox. How is it possible that people who as players could not play for Athletic due to its ethnically exclusive policy, and yet they identify with it as fans?

Motivations to Become Athleticzale

Reasons attributed to support Athletic Club throughout Spain are ordered as follows: I) birthplace or residence (51,8%); II) childhood (11,8%); III) general values (11,8%); IV) NS/NC (9,2%); V) familiar and social atmosphere (4,7%); VI) political values (4,7%); VII) I like (2,4%); VIII) sport-related reasons (1,2%); IX) sentimental reasons (1,2%); and X) other or no reasons (1,2%) (Llopis-Goig 243).

The motivations why these fans from Castilla y León started following Athletic Club include a wide range of factors. Some joined the red-and-white family because of home tradition. These fans have close relatives who already cheered for the club, and so they got their sympathies as a kind of heritage. As a supporter explains, “when Athletic won the last leagues and cup, I was 7 and my older brother was 21, already an Athletic supporter, so did I have any other chance? He fed

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8 Twenty-four according to AupaAthletic.com.
me with it since then. We shared the same room and it was completely wrapped in red and white.” Let us remark that only a few of these fans have family relations in the Basque Country, so this “bloodline” continuity is not necessary territory-influenced.

Social relations play an important role in adhering to a community. Therefore, some fans adopted admiration for the club after becoming friends with people from Biscay province, who inculcated them the sentiment for Athletic. “Due to a friend from Portugalete (Biscay town) who lives in Salamanca, I started following Athletic Club more closely,” a fan said. “I began watching Athletic games, and actively pursued relations with its fans.”

A few decades ago, the Bilbao squad was very successful, which kept enlarging its fandom all over Spain, as children identify with winners. Nevertheless, Real Madrid and Barcelona have remained the teams with more titles in Spanish football, to the point of setting a hegemony in Spanish fandom: two thirds of all soccer fans root for these two clubs. Going against mainstream tendencies, such as supporting a “loser team” as Athletic was described when it almost sank to second division in 2006-2008, also generates fondness and attachment.

A particular player may also inspire attachment for a team from a distant geographical area. The epic atmosphere around sports makes it propitious to the advent of heroes, and a great example of this is Maradona. El Pelusa did not only emerge as an idol for Argentina, with his performances and legendary goals such as those scored against England in the 1986 World Cup in Mexico, he was also a local-regional idol in Italy. It was through him that the reviled South could beat the cocky North, that wandering Naples could defeat glorious Juventus or Milan (Alabarces 150-154). Athletic Bilbao also experienced such situations, as back in the 1970s the legendary Basque goal keeper Iríbar had similar influence. As one interviewee states, “I remember my dad telling me 'look, what a goalkeeper Bilbao has’. I do not know if it was his spectacular saves, or his stature as an impressive athlete...when I was asked what team I followed, I could only reply Iríbar. And that is how it started.”

Scholars also point out other causes why the Basque club prompted admiration, like its direct and strong physical playing style (Györi Szabó 528; Llopis-Goig 58) before the Spanish Civil War, or the relative lack of economic interest players had decades ago. Regarding the latter, the club fostered a policy where players were not allowed to get excessively rich (MacClancy “Expressing,” 142). The emotional bond with previous amateurism was more important than money. This economic
approach has slowly disappeared ever since the club ended its friendly neighborhood relations with Real Sociedad, and started hiring the talents of the San Sebastián side. This pushed Athletic to offer attractive wages to newcomers. Consequently, the already existing squad began demanding rising salaries too, a query the club could not but accept in order to keep them. Nevertheless, there have been cases in recent years still attesting to the old ideas of football. The latest one was the striker Joseba Etxeberria’s decision to play the 2009/2010 season, his last one, for free.

**Views on Athletic Club’s Policy**

Mariann Vaczi perfectly summarized a perspective about Athletic’s identity: “one must accept to lose games and goals in order to win tradition and identity” (196). Vázquez Montalbán (23) pondered whether people would keep feeling the colors if too many “foreigners” played for the team. He concluded that only victories could keep the same level of attachment, and as soon as the team lost, a lack of identification would take place. In the same line, Castillo (718) presents a series of arguments about whether to abolish or maintain the Basque-only policy. Among arguments for the former feature the lack of competitiveness; the absence of enough Basque players due to low birth rate, and the increasing strength of other teams in the area; and the failure to represent the current plurality within Basque society. On the other hand, arguments for keeping the signing philosophy feature poor competitiveness because of bad administration; foreign players do not necessarily lead to sportive success; and the fact that sentimental attachment, fan loyalty, as well as uniqueness, are a consequence of such policy.

Most fans, however, prefer keeping the Basque-only policy. They define it as “unique,” since no one else can say they are similar to it; “brave” for believing in old ideas and values of loyalty, when modern football is going in a different direction; or “special,” for the respect other people profess for such conception of sports. Fans particularly highlight two aspects. On the one hand, the defense of what Castillo (681) called playing local, in other words, the safeguard of the land’s talent as well as backing and giving opportunities to their people. As one interviewee says, “why should things from outside be better than ours?” This sense of belonging is much accentuated, which connects with the other aspect of identification, the defense of la cantera, the Academy. Giving chances to your own youth, making your successor generation be part of a process, or acknowledging their value and
placing hope in them to the point that some would stop cheering for the squad in case it was abolished, as a fan warns: “I share its policy and I believe we must keep and follow it. If Athletic decides to be the same as Madrid and Barça based on money and hiring, I would stop supporting Athletic, and the feeling would probably decrease a lot.”

At the same time, a minority considers this philosophy as “outdated” and in need of a change. “Because of its fans, its city, its history... Athletic must be a club aspiring to something more than just the 4th, 5th or 6th place in the league. It must compete for titles, so I think it should hire either nationals (all over Spain), or foreigners (internationals) like everyone,” a fan believes.

Most fans outside of the Basque Country would like to see their local team employ the same localist signing philosophy as Athletic Bilbao. As a fan remarks, “hiring stars, the best in the world, only for the sake of having them, would stigmatize and separate.” It shows the idea of belonging rather than being pulled off by counting on local talent. However, those who prioritize success to values perceive the philosophy as inefficient, and underline that it would depend on the club’s purpose. “If the team does not want to be relegated, it can be enough to play with local people. If the team wants to succeed, then it will have to check if it is fine with local people or not. In that case, they should get the best ones.”

There is certain unanimity in accepting an international as a coach, although there are many who question it. “Are there not enough trainers in the Basque Country to lead the squad? Why does the philosophy not apply to the manager as well?” complains one such follower. Shulman (66) explored this issue and, as many fans, suggests that it is already an accepted practice, and that some people even feel it is preferable.

**My Community vs. Athletic Club vs. Spain**

Schaffhauser (7) states that there are fans who support a club unconditionally, back its values against all odds, and yet refuse to follow the national team. Quiroga Fernández (2014) analyzes how Spain’s victory in the 2010 FIFA World Cup triggered some uncertainty among Basques about celebrating it or not, thus causing a study of double identities within the Basque Country.

Athletic is the primary identification for the surveyed individuals. Almost everyone prefers Bilbao’s team success to their local clubs or that of the Spanish national team, while also wishing all of them to happen. Therefore, it is not a challenging decision, but a question of
priorities. The aforementioned triumph in South Africa, as well as the double title at the 2008 and 2012 Euro Cups play in favor of Athletic. “I would prefer a trophy for Athletic because we have not won anything in a while, and Spain has recently won something,” a fan justifies. Others do not really care about La Roja and only look for Bilbao’s team glory: “I would be much happier if Athletic won a trophy because it is the club of my love, against all odds.”

In a hypothetical match between Athletic Club and their local teams, fans have it clear that they would cheer for Athletic. Among these three territories, the latest one to compete against the Basque team in La Liga was UD Salamanca. Some fans confirmed that they went to the stadium El Helmántico, and cheered for the Bilbao squad. The situation changes when the encounter involves a Basque team (other than Athletic), and one from Castilla y León. In that case, the majority of the fans favor the victory of their territory simply because “it is my land.” This is very revealing, as it evokes the power of origins when it comes to positioning oneself in a contest. Notwithstanding, there are two factors conditioning their answers. Firstly, they underline the fact that it depends on the team, as most go against Valladolid, the capital city of the Autonomous Community, whose development and centralism is seen as going against their own interests. This is a striking example of intraregional rivalry through football. Secondly, many highlight the lack of identification with the whole region. “I like the Basque Country, the love they [Basque people] have for their land, for their people...We do not have that feeling in other regions. Here, maybe Salamanca, Valladolid, Numancia...a team gets relegated to second division, and we do not care that much. These teams are from this region, and we do not have such strong love,” a follower observes. This lack of passion might have to do with the configuration of the Community after the Franco dictatorship.

Changes in Philosophy

Unzueta (152-153) collected a series of changes in Athletic’s policy along the years. Thus, in the 1920s they were amateur players, in the 1930s they became professionalism, in the 1970s the club recruited from other Basque provinces and Navarre as well. This, however, is not a philosophy carved in stone, and its scope has shifted around throughout its centenarian history. Although they are unable to play for Athletic unless they train as footballers in the Basque Country, non-Basque supporters have their opinions about the future that they would
like for the team they identify with. Apart from the already mentioned signing of foreigners preferred by those who prioritize success over values, most of the alterations they would apply have to do with either opening a bit more the policy to other people, or defining limits once and for all in order to avoid debates about whether certain footballers can or cannot play for Athletic.

Many of the interviewees would have loved to play for Athletic, and so they wonder why they cannot take part in it, and defend its jersey. “Someone who adores the team since being a kid might feel the colors much more than a player who is Basque by chance,” they justify. The question of players with Basque antecedents also comes up. As Vaczi (“Soccer,” 30) notes, the club entertained the idea of diaspora recruitment back in 2004. Every now and then, there is a debate about whether those born of Basque parents in the Basque diasporas could play for Athletic or not. For these non-Basque fans, there is no doubt that players from the Basque diasporas should be able to play, as they define Basque identity in primordialist terms. “They can perfectly play as they have Basque blood and it has always been like this,” states one such fan. Therefore, this understanding of Athletic’s policy shows a transmission of values and belonging through biological heredity.

5. Conclusions

Athletic Club, undoubtedly, plays a relevant role as a land and identity maker based on its policy highlighting the value for local talent in two directions: territory and youth academy. However, the club’s significance does not only affect the Basque Country. As shown, Athletic fandom transcends the region, and inspires lots of admiration beyond its geographical borders to the point of generating identification even in people who are excluded by its particular philosophy. Although many can be the reasons to support a team from a distance (family, social relations, childhood, success, particular footballers), the causes of attachment in a globalized soccer world for non-Basque fans are mainly addressed in one particular direction: a sense of belonging. Because it backs its own land and promotes local players, these followers see in Athletic a kind of example they would wish to see in their homeland. As Castillo (2007) and Groves (2011) argue, Athletic is not seen as an institution that excludes foreigners, but rather a reaction against the globalization of football, and its counterproductive effects on sports.
Works cited


A Panther Among Lions: Iñaki Williams, Race and Basque Identity at Athletic Club de Bilbao

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Abstract: In this article, I discuss the implications of the presence of a Black player, Iñaki Williams, at the Spanish professional football club Athletic Club de Bilbao. Athletic Club, which has historically employed a Basque-only recruitment policy, has the ability to define Basqueness through its player signings. Like other national teams, Athletic is the ultimate arbiter of which bodies are included within the nation and which are not. While the team’s definition of who is and is not Basque has changed over the years, the exceptional signing of two Black players — one of whom is Iñaki Williams — over past ten years has caused a bit of stir. Though it is unclear the extent to which Black Basqueness will become normalized, Williams’s presence on the team offers such an identity category as a possibility. Like Athletic, his performance of Basqueness shapes and redefines the borders of the nation and offers a reconceptualization of which bodies can represent a Basque identity. Through analysis of the press and other media, I argue that Williams’s self-aware performance of Basqueness has, though not always successfully, tried to create an environment in which these two categories are not mutually exclusive. Though he occupies an in-between space, that very in-between-ness gives him the space to create new meanings of what it means to be Basque.

Key words: Basque, race, Spain, football, Athletic Club de Bilbao.

Resumen: En este artículo se plantean las consecuencias que la presencia de un jugador de color tienen en un equipo de fútbol profesional como el Athletic Club de Bilbao. Tradicionalmente el Athletic contrata únicamente a jugadores “vascos”, lo que implica que el equipo tiene el poder para decidir quién es y no es vasco, decidiendo así qué cuerpos se incluyen en la nación y cuáles no. Aunque el concepto de “vasquedad” ha cambiado a lo largo de los años, el hecho de que el equipo haya contratado a dos jugadores de color —entre ellos a Iñaki Williams— en los últimos diez años ha sido histórico. No queda claro hasta qué punto llegará la “normalización” del ser persona de color y vasco a la vez. El ejemplo de Williams viene como anillo al dedo para analizar esta nueva resemantización del concepto. A pesar de que Williams ocupa un espacio liminal, esta misma condición es precisamente la que permite crear nuevas concepciones de lo que significa el “ser vasco”.

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In November 2016, Spanish television aired a mini-documentary entitled *Informe Robinson: Revolución Williams*. Towards the end of the twenty-five-minute program, the film took a walk through the Bilbao neighborhood of San Francisco, which in recent years has come to house most of the city’s immigrant population. The film crew interviewed a number of African men, who, the voiceover announced, “express[ed] opinions that may surprise you when they discuss ... the team of their heart.” “[Athletic Club de Bilbao] is my team,” says one; another announces that Athletic is “my number one team in Europe.” “Athletic doesn’t spend millions buying players,” says a third, tapping his chest. “Heart. This is what Athletic is” (*Informe Robinson*). To the uninformed observer, these statements do not seem particularly odd or surprising — it makes sense that these men would root for the team of the city in which they live, even if they are immigrants. The question, then, becomes this: what sort of team is Athletic Club de Bilbao? Why would it be odd for African immigrants to support it? The answer is simple: only Basques play for Athletic.

Athletic Club employs an extraordinarily restrictive localist recruitment policy, restricting its player pool to those born or raised in the Basque Country. This policy, as well as other narratives of difference that have historical roots in Basque narrative discourse, have established Athletic as one of the foremost and most enduring symbols of Basque cultural nationalism. For most Spaniards (or Basques), who tend to see Basqueness as implicitly white, it would seem incomprehensible for these men to support a team that does not represent them at all — in fact, a team that actively excludes them.

The documentary’s title is apt, though: there is a revolution happening in Bilbao, and the revolutionary in question is one Iñaki Williams, the second Black player and the first non-white child of immigrants to play for Athletic. Williams has become something of a star on the team, and the men on the street had noticed. “We want more African players there ... if one has started, more can follow,” said one. Another spoke of Williams fulfilling his childhood dreams: “I like it, it’s what I wanted to do many years ago ... I want my son to be playing there [in the future].” For these men, Williams’s presence on the team was not simply an empty gesture. It meant something, “Chico, I am Basque!” said one of the men (*Informe Robinson*). Iñaki Williams, for these men,
represented their access to an ethnonational identity that has for many years constructed them as unassimilably foreign. While the number of immigrants in the Basque Country is yet small, it has increased six-fold since 1998, and that number will probably only increase. “We are also sons of the Basque Country,” they said, and Iñaki Williams’s Black Basqueness appears to confirm that statement. The debut of two Black players on Athletic in the past ten years appears to be pushing the boundaries of who can be considered “Basque,” making that definition broader than it has ever been.

Athletic’s so-called “Basque-only” policy has greatly restricted the team’s available player pool since it was adopted over a century ago. While the definition of who can and who cannot play for the team has shifted over the course of the years, the category remained stubbornly white until 2009. That year saw the debut of fourteen-year-old Jonás Ramalho, who became the first mixed-race man to play for the team. Iñaki Williams, the team’s first Black goal scorer, debuted five years later and experienced a meteoric rise, quickly became an integral member of the first team. While Ramalho’s career with the club was short-lived, Williams has become a regular starter and has even been the subject of transfer rumors to bigger clubs around Europe like AC Milan and Liverpool. He is a fan favorite and a highly visible member of the team, appearing in promotional videos and photos. He has become an integral part of Athletic’s offense, and though he only scored eight goals in the 2016/2017 season his assists were indispensable. His star is only beginning to rise.

There are a number of questions central to examining the implications of Williams’s success at Athletic Club. What does Williams’s Blackness do to Basque identity? Does his inclusion on the team widen the borders of the Basque nation? How does he represent himself in interviews and in the media more broadly? Examining both his own self-presentation — his performance — as well as fans’ and the media’s reactions to him can help us achieve a deeper understanding of what it means to be both Black and Basque, two categories that historically have appeared to be mutually exclusive. I will be applying the concept of performativity to argue that both Williams and Athletic Club perform race and nation in a variety of ways; their performance of Basque identity defines and redefines what Basqueness means. At the core of my inquiry, however, is the fundamental question that is central to many nationalist projects: whose body is allowed to represent the nation, and what happens when that body is that of an Other?
National Teams and Race: Performing the Nation

While there is a wide literature on sports and race across the social sciences, much of it tends to focus either on the (British) colonial or in the American context. Scholars that do focus on race and sports in Europe have historically been concerned more with how the British empire retained power over its colonial possessions through sport and its national teams, and how certain sports themselves became racialized. Anti-black and Anti-Asian racism have been discussed in the context of club teams in professional leagues; these expressions of racism have been garnering more attention in an increasingly global players’ market. While these are all fruitful lines of inquiry, I am more concerned with the work that national European football teams do in representing – or not – the nation. Unlike professional club teams, national teams are explicitly intended to be symbolic representations of their respective nation-states; the nation thus becomes embodied in the players as they move about the pitch. While the Basque Country is not a nation-state, many consider it a nation, and in many respects Athletic Club has become its de facto national team. Thus, Athletic Club players are not simply professional football players, they are representatives of Basqueness.

In this way, national sports teams – particularly football, for most European countries – function in much the same way as national beauty pageants like Miss America or Miss Italy in terms of national representation. While there are gendered differences, of course — female pageant winners of color from majority-white nations tend to receive more virulently racist attacks than their athlete counterparts — both beauty pageant winners and soccer players on the national team are tasked with embodying and representing the nation. They represent “both a potential for national crisis and a source of national stability” and respond to “moral panic over the .... state of national identity” by identifying who does and does not belong in the nation — though this belonging is often conditional (Banet-Weiser). While national soccer teams’ physical prowess is the most obvious reflection of the strength of the nation, the team’s racial makeup can have an equally strong effect. While the presence of ethnic and racial minorities on national teams does not guarantee structural changes for those who are not elite athletes, a racially diverse national team has a powerful symbolic value that should not be discounted.1

1 For more on beauty pageants and national identity, see: Sarah Banet-Weiser, *The Most Beautiful Girl in the World*; Rebecca Chiyoko King-O’Riain, *Pure Beauty;*
The increasing presence of Black and brown peoples on national European football teams has thus received quite a bit of media attention in the last decade, signaling as it does the destabilization of a normative white European identity. Perhaps most famously, the 1998 French World Cup victory by a “black-blanc-beur” national team was heralded throughout French media as the triumph of multiculturality and French republicanism — though the Fédération Française de Football has in the years since been mired in a number of racially-charged incidents, including in 2011 the leak of a recording in which a number of senior officials proposed limiting the number of Black and Arab players to thirty percent of the whole for trainees as young as twelve years old.

More recently, the high number of Muslims or other immigrants of color who played for their national teams at the 2016 UEFA European Championships was taken by many media outlets as a sign of an increasingly diverse and tolerant Europe, despite the growing number of far-right nationalist parties plaguing the continent. One commentator implored Europe to be “more like its soccer teams” in its acceptance of diversity, noting football’s potential to “popularize a more inclusive national identity” (Karon). The final match between France and Portugal was “the blackest UEFA European Championships final we’ve ever seen,” signaling to some a new willingness to broaden the racial boundaries of European-ness (Yates). Yet the tournament also showed the limits of this inclusion: Karim Benzema, a player of North African descent, was not called up to represent France despite being widely regarded as being one of the best French players in the world — he later accused Didier Deschamps, the current coach of the French national team, of “folding to the pressure of a racist part of France” (Olmedo). The far-right Danish Danes’ Party used a photograph of the unexpectedly successful (and all-white) Icelandic national team in a Facebook post urging readers to share “if [they] thought that ‘France’ should play in the African Nations’ Cup” (“Iceland’s football team...”). In the leadup to the tournament, a right-wing German politician said that he would “not want to have [Jerome] Boateng as a neighbor.” This prompted Boateng, who is of Ghanaian descent, to respond: “To be
honest, it’s sad that something like that still gets said nowadays . . . I’m happy to be German” (Sport).

Like beauty pageants and beauty pageant winners, both national teams themselves and the players on those teams have become a cultural performance of the nation-state. The possibility of equal membership within the nation is contingent upon this performance. For this reason, I find performance and performativity theory to be an especially apt theoretical framework with which to consider the case of Athletic Club and Iñaki Williams. Though Erving Goffman was the first to use the imagery of theater in order to describe social interaction, my work owes more to Judith Butler’s conceptualization of gender, which she famously saw as “the stylized repetition of acts through time” in response to various systems of power (Butler 147). There is no sexed subject who learns gender roles; instead, the subject is itself constituted through performance. In a similar way, I argue, the “national body” is made and enacted through football. The “nation” is no longer fixed or abstract: it is enacted through the calling-up of athletes to play for the national team, the way those athletes present themselves, the media responses to those presentations, and those athletes’ performances on the pitch. Thus, both Athletic Club, in its self-conscious presentation as the de facto Basque national team, and Iñaki Williams, in his capacity as a player for that team, are actively constructing and performing Basqueness. Williams’s inclusion or exclusion from a Basque identity depends largely on his prowess in representing the Basque nation on the pitch and his continued presence on the Athletic Club roster. While it is unclear whether his definition of what it means to be Basque will be unconditionally accepted by white Basques, he is an active participant in the creation and reproduction of his own Basque identity through his presence on Athletic and in the wider media.

Creating Basques: The Cantera Policy

Athletic Club — like most national teams — enacts Basqueness most significantly through its signing policies. Indeed, the club’s recruitment policies are precisely what establish it as a national team in the first place. Unlike the majority of top-flight professional clubs, whose local homegrown players are often supplemented by players bought in the international players’ market, Athletic Club is committed to an extremely localist signing policy which limits its potential player pool to only those who were either born or raised in the seven historic Basque provinces. This policy, which is also known as the “Basque-only” policy or the
cantera, is undoubtedly the single most well-known feature of the team and is consistently invoked as a marker of the team’s uniqueness. While the cantera has received plenty of attention from scholars, they tend to emphasize the way in which it has “relaxed the definition of a pure Basque” and the actual mechanics of player selection. I am more concerned with the way in which discourses surrounding the cantera define who is and who is not Basque. In selecting its players, Athletic Club creates a national Basque identity. Indeed, the team’s philosophy even has the power to impose Basqueness on those who might not otherwise claim it.

While localist player recruitment policies like that of Athletic are extremely unique today, Athletic is not the first nor the only club to adopt such a stance. In fact, for the first forty or so years of the existence of the Spanish professional league, teams with entirely local squads like Athletic’s were quite common. In the 1950s, as football became increasingly professionalized and thus increasingly globalized, Athletic’s determination to field only local players became more and more noteworthy. The club also began to promote the policy more self-consciously: a new club anthem developed during this decade celebrated the team’s “clean tradition,” and players began to be turned away because they had not been born in the province of Bizkaia (Vaczi 41). This conservatism was not sustainable, however, and the team’s definition of who is Basque enough to play has been broadening ever since.

The central concept and desire behind the development of the team’s recruitment policy system has changed little in the hundred or so years it has been in place. “That old and beloved Athletic Club, which has once again been assembling a good team; always with people from the land [i.e. Basques], following a policy to which it was never been unfaithful”: so read a 2005 editorial celebrating Athletic’s successes (Relaño). The symbolic value of the cantera policy resonates with popular Basque nationalist narratives that assert that Basques are different from Spaniards on a fundamental (genealogical?) level. The cantera is popular with people across the political spectrum and has become a powerful symbol of Basque exceptionalism, resilience, and strength in the face of overwhelming odds. Athletic Club was not the only club to attempt fielding only those players born within the confines of Euskal Herria. San Sebastian’s Real Sociedad did so as

\[a\] While “cantera” in this context refers simply to a team’s youth systems, in the context of Athletic it has come to mean its recruitment policy as a whole.

\[b\] For example, as in Vic Duke and Liz Crolley, Football, Nationality and the State.
well, until 1987, when it was forced to seek players beyond the national borders in order to remain competitive — the Basque country was not large enough to sustain two soccer teams in La Liga’s first division, and Athletic Club was the bigger, more successful organization.4

As with any other national team, Athletic Club has the power to decide whose body is fit to represent the nation. Basque identity, like many European nationalisms, is often constituted as being primordial, in-born and unchanging—though contemporary Basques do not often mobilize narratives that cast them as the “original Europeans” as a justification for their difference. Athletic, however, considers genealogy less important than land: a player can be made Basque when they play for Athletic, even if they embody Spanishness the rest of the time. Athletic’s current policy states that a player is eligible for the squad if they are either born or developed in the Basque country, espousing a Basqueness that is at once primordial and constructed. Curiously, the primordial nature of this Basqueness does not extend to blood. Diaspora Basques cannot play for the team; Diego Forlán, former star of the Uruguayan national team and grandson of a Basque woman, was famously refused a spot in the roster.

The primordial nature of Basqueness is evident in Athletic’s signing of Fernando Llorente and Ander Herrera, both of whom were born in the Basque country but raised elsewhere. Llorente was for many years the team’s star forward and was known as “the lion king” — as Athletic Club are known as the lions, this nickname was especially apt. Llorente’s Basqueness, however, was accidental: the hospital where his mother had intended to go to give birth was full and so his family was forced to go to one in Pamplona, instead of where they lived in la Rioja. Accidental or not, the Pamplona birth was enough for Athletic Club, and he was brought to the team’s youth academy in Lezama at age twelve. Llorente never identified as Basque, and despite living in Bilbao from the age of twelve, he never studied Euskera, the Basque language. When he announced his desire to leave in 2012 after sixteen years with the club, some saw his lack of Euskera knowledge as symptomatic of his lack of commitment to the team (and to Basqueness as a whole). A meme that circulated after his departure for the Italian team Juventus

4 The next 35 years at Real Sociedad were marked by a very Basque policy: players from the international market could come from anywhere, but those acquired in the domestic market could only be Basque — no Spaniards. This changed in 2002 with the signing of Sergio Boris, who was born in Ávila. Since then, Real Sociedad has had less of a compunction to avoid Spanish players; at this very moment they even field two Spaniards who played for Real Madrid — the ultimate Basque enemy.
encapsulated this sentiment: “His entire life with Athletic and he’s never spoken Euskera .... his first day at Juve he already speaks Italian.” Herrera’s story is similar in some ways, though his departure was not as dramatic. Born in Bilbao in 1988, his family moved to Zaragoza when he was very young. He spent his whole career playing at Real Zaragoza, but he was eligible to play for Athletic because of his place of birth and was bought for the hefty sum of eight million euros in 2011. Like Llorente, Herrera was born in the Basque country but had lived much of his life elsewhere before moving to Bilbao to play for Athletic. He left in 2014 for Manchester United, a move which fans did not appreciate. Neither of these players performed Basqueness — Llorente never identified as Basque —, yet they were constructed as representatives of the Basque nation by both the team they played for and the fans that cheered them on. Their apparent rejection of the team became a rejection of the nation itself.

Athletic has also in recent years greatly enlarged the territory of what has traditionally been considered the Basque country as such. Though the term Euskal Herria encompasses the whole of the seven provinces in which the language of Basque is spoken (Bizkaia, Gipuzkoa, Araba, Nafarroa, Nafarroa Behera, Lapurdi, Zuberoa), the administrative region known today as el País Vasco (or Euskadi) only includes Bizkaia, Araba, and Gipuzkoa. Both Nafarroa and the French provinces are separate political administrative units. Athletic has traditionally restricted itself to the Spanish side of the international border: though in recent years it has begun recruiting quite heavily from Nafarroa, only rarely has it ventured to the French provinces in search of talent. Excepting one player who played for Athletic in the early years, the first French Basque footballer to play for the team was Bixente Lizarazu, who was signed for the 1996/1997 season. Lizarazu’s signing, like that of players from Nafarroa, was “a symbolic statement that the Basque country included the French provinces as well as the Spanish” — regardless of how the residents of those provinces might identify (Vaczi 47). While Lizarazu soon left the team to sign with Bayern Munich, in 2012 fellow Frenchman Aymeric Laporte was called up to play for the first team as a central defender. Laporte, born and raised in the non-Basque region of Aquitaine, was recruited to Athletic at sixteen years old after playing at CD Bayonne for a year. While Bayonne does indeed fall in the Basque region of France, not a few commentators have alleged that his brief stay at the French Basque club was a calculated attempt to fulfil the club’s requirements before
his formal recruitment and not a reflection of any natural or even incidental Basqueness on Laporte’s part (Orain). The construction of Laporte as a Basque — and the resistance to that construction on the part of some fans — indicates the extent to which Athletic’s recruitment policy has become a referendum on what it means to be Basque.

The Black Basque

While the boundaries of who Athletic Club considers Basque enough to play for them have shifted over the years, there is one thing that has remained constant throughout the team’s long history: its whiteness. Modern large-scale international immigration into the Basque country has been a recent phenomenon, thus for many years nonwhite bodies were few and far between. Yet they did exist, and the way Athletic Club treated Miguel Jones is illustrative of a broader pattern. Jones, a Black man born in Equatorial Guinea but whose family migrated to Bilbao when he was four years old, played a single unofficial match for Athletic in 1957. Though Jones had spent most of his life in Bilbao and was apparently a marvelous player, he was not admitted onto the team — allegedly — because he has not been born in Bizkaia. Jones himself has given interviews in which he apparently harbors no ill-will towards the team for not being able to play: “That thing about it being because I’m black is crap… [I wasn’t allowed to play] because I wasn’t Bizkaian. Those were the rules at that time” (“Miguel Jones”). While earlier in the century Athletic Club had allowed people born outside the Basque country to play on the team, it is true that a more conservative interpretation of the cantera was active during this period, one which turned even white players away. It would be a mistake, though, to attribute the team’s decision not to field Jones as simply a matter of colorblind policy. To do so would be to ignore the fact that Basqueness has for most of its history been a white identity — in fact, many of the foundational myths of traditional Basque nationalism are predicated on indigenous whiteness and on Basques’ ability to resist Moorish invasion. To have a Black man represent a historically white nation like that of the Basques would have been beyond the realm of possibility until extremely recently.

It is for this reason that the promotion to the first team of first Jonás Ramalho in 2009 and then Iñaki Williams in 2014 attracted a great deal of both national and international attention. They were exceptional signings not only because they made history as the first Black people to play for Athletic’s first team, but because of what their presence on the team
meant for the Basque nation. While Ramalho is an important part of the story of Black Basqueness, I have chosen to focus on Williams because his career at Athletic Club has been much more successful. Public discourses surrounding Williams and the meaning of his playing for Athletic have been plentiful and enduring. As the first non-white son of immigrants to wear Athletic’s iconic red-and-white stripes in an official match, Williams represents a test for Athletic’s ability to create Basqueness. Though most Basques seem to have moved away from a biological understanding of a Basque identity, never before has a body so far outside the imagined norm been chosen to represent the Basque nation. Williams’s presence on Athletic does not guarantee that African immigrants’ lives will improve in any material way; it does suggest, however, that a Black Basque body has become thinkable for the first time. The phenotypic boundaries of Basqueness have widened for good.

At the center of Williams’s success has been his extreme physical prowess, in particular his speed — a quality which the press has emphasized, and which can at times play into racist tropes of Blackness and athletic ability at the expense of mental acuity. Indeed, a profile on Williams in El País from August 2016 implied that his lack of tactical skill could perhaps be blamed on his African heritage: “His potential was indisputable, but one could think that Iñaki’s own admission that ‘half of my soul is African’ would prevail” (Rodrigálvarez). I have only rarely seen such an explicit connection drawn between Williams’s athleticism and his race, but the press’s continued emphasis on his speed continues to subtly reify these narratives. He has been described as “the son of the wind” (García), “the bullet of Bilbao” (Rivas), and, perhaps most tellingly, “the [Usain] Bolt of la Liga” (Viñas). He has all the makings of a star center forward and is being actively groomed by Athletic to take over for aging striker Aritz Aduriz when Aduriz finally decides to retire. Williams’s star has continued to rise over the years: he has become an undisputed starter and was named the season’s “Breakout Player” by the Spanish Association of Sports Press in 2017. His success as an athlete has undoubtedly contributed to the ease with which Athletic fans have accepted him, and I would suggest that it is the reason he has been allowed to claim a Basque identity in the first place.

Williams’s family story is markedly different from that of many of his teammates, and has received quite a bit more attention as a result. His parents met in Ghana; his mother was a refugee fleeing
civil war in Liberia. The couple moved to Spain in search of economic opportunity in 1993 and Williams was born a year later in Barakaldo, a suburb of Bilbao. His mother Maria named him “Iñaki” after a friend of the family and because, as she says, “I liked a Basque name for my child” (Informe Robinson). Indeed, as names go, “Iñaki” is one of the Basquest, as it were — it is immediately recognizable as a Basque name, one which gives him access to a sense of belonging in the Basque country that might otherwise be out of his reach. Curiously “Iñaki” is also the generic name Bilbaoans have assigned to the African street vendors who have in recent years become a common sight in Spain’s larger cities. Williams’s given name is notable on a number of discursive fronts: it at once marks him as a native and as an unassimilable foreigner. Soon after Iñaki’s birth, the family moved to Pamplona, where they struggled to make ends meet. Eventually, a lack of work forced Williams’s father, Felix, to move to London and work in a warehouse there. Iñaki began playing football, and an Athletic scout took note of him. When he was fourteen he started playing for Pamplona FC, an Athletic feeder team, and joined the official Athletic organization when he was eighteen. By age twenty had debuted with the first team. His first official contract with Athletic was significant not only because it signified the team’s trust in his abilities but because it meant his family could be reunited. This narrative of familial hardship that was overcome by Iñaki’s hard work and dedication to his sport discursively establishes the Williamses as respectable and ultimately nonthreatening immigrants who are extremely thankful for everything that their adopted country has deigned to give them and will not ask for more.

The first year of Williams’s career marked the period during which the mainstream media was most involved in the discourses surrounding his Basqueness. His debut for Athletic in December of 2014 was widely reported in both the Spanish and international media, and was understood to be proof of the “colorblindness” of Athletic’s cantera policy, which had long been accused of racism. Over and over again the press drew attention to his Blackness: he was called “Athletic’s black diamond” (de León), “the black pearl” (Santamaría), “the black star” (ABC) in a number of headlines over the course of the 2014/2015 season. Clearly, Williams’s Blackness was too foreign for him to be accepted as a non-hyphenated Basque by the press. Even those accounts that tried to normalize his presence on Athletic invoked a kind of rhetoric of aggressive colorblindness that was ultimately just as othering. For example, an article in El País describing his excellent performance in a
match in March of 2015 bore the wry headline “Williams, de Bilbao de toda la vida” and ended with the smug “by the way, he’s Black” (“Iñaki Williams, de Bilbao...”). “Iñaki Williams is Black? Wow, we hadn’t realized,” announced a Basque blog proudly that same year (aboutbc). Instead of truly providing a space for the diversity Williams represents, these discursive practices of forced colorblindness only serve to emphasize just how far outside of normative Basqueness Williams is and erase his own experiences of racism. While there have been no instances of high-profile, vulgar racism from Athletic fans themselves — nor has Williams ever openly complained of it — he is not afforded such courtesies elsewhere. In August of 2016, for example he was the victim of racist shouts during a match in Gijón and was forced to ask the referee to halt the match. In addition, by not recognizing the historic nature of Williams’s career, the discourse of colorblindness unconsciously reifies Basqueness as fundamentally white. In the Basque country, and in Spain more generally, Blackness is still coded as profoundly foreign: Williams himself has said that “many people find it strange to see a Black player on Athletic — on top of that, one whose name is Iñaki” (Informe Robinson).

Perhaps the best symbol of Williams’s incomplete ability to occupy Basqueness is his nickname of “pantera,” which was given to him by teammate and close friend Iker Muniain (San Cristóbal). The use of this nickname has replaced the press’s more explicit racialization, and it has become quite widespread, both in the media and among his teammates. As racialized metaphors go, referring to Williams as a panther is extremely apt: as I have mentioned, Athletic Club are famously known as “the lions” both at home and around the league. The report of a September 2017 match between Athletic Club and Girona FC, for example, referred to Williams as “a panther among lions” (Ledesma). Williams’s nickname is an explicitly racialized indication that he is superficially within but fundamentally outside of the Basque collective — his Basqueness is conditional. Though he is a big cat like his fellows, his Blackness makes him irreconcilably different. Williams himself has never given an explicit indication that he dislikes the moniker, but it discursively places him outside of a common identity that his teammates share. “Pantera” is the perfect representation of the liminal space Williams occupies: while he would not otherwise be accepted as a member of the nation, playing for Athletic Club makes him a representative for Basqueness. Yet despite this apparent inclusion, he remains a racial Other. While Williams is no longer racialized in quite
the same way as he was when he debuted, the color of his skin remains a critical point of difference.

Thus, Williams operates in a particularly complex place: he plays for a team that demands Basqueness, but that very same Basqueness has been historically codified as a category of whiteness — one which excludes him. Unlike Ramalho, whose mother is Basque, he has no blood-based “claim” to this white identity. Because of this, Williams is forced to make more explicit claims to his Basqueness than any other white player I have seen; even those who, like Fernando Llorente, made no claims to Basqueness at all. Though he does not apparently speak Euskera, he performs Basqueness in a variety of other ways: an interview with the team in 2015, for example, saw him call his mother amá, in the Basque manner, and he often makes reference to the day when he received his very first Athletic kit, at three years old (TVAthleticClub). Though being a fan of Athletic is not as ironclad a symbol of Basqueness as a surname like Etxeberria, Williams’s youthful devotion implies that his Basque identity has been strong since the very beginning.

Whether or not he is self-conscious of this performance, he is certainly aware of his position as a Black Basque, and has revealed a desire to widen the category of Basqueness — specifically to include Black people. “I feel Basque,” he said in an interview shortly after he scored his first goal in 2015, “but part of me is African” (Crespo). He continued: “I was born here. I’ve lived here for twenty years, but you don’t forget your origins, your roots. My parents were born in Liberia, and I feel like my whole family is there.” Claiming both Basqueness and Africanness, Williams argues implicitly that these two identities are not, in fact, mutually exclusive—and, more importantly, that he has an equal claim to both of them. A telling scene in the “Revolución Williams” mini-film I introduced at the beginning of this paper shows Iñaki and his younger brother, Nicolás, discussing their identities — in fact, whether they are Navarran or Bilbaoan. “Bilbaoan, Bizkaian, or Navarran?” asks Iñaki; his brother replies that he was “born in Navarra, and that’s it ... I’m Navarran” (Informe Robinson). Nicolás, who is nine years younger than Iñaki, also plays for Athletic, though in the youth division. Iñaki relishes the possibility of playing with his brother at Athletic: “I’ve already made history in a small way at this great club, it would be the shit to see two Black people who are also brothers play. I would love it” (Martínez). A bit later, the film shows Williams and his white teammate Óscar de Marcos discussing an upcoming trip to
Ghana, during which Williams joked that de Marcos would be his “little white brother.” Williams is clearly secure in his identity as an Black Basque, one who has become a symbol of Basqueness through football but who also feels that it is necessary to cultivate his African identity. “I represent change and evolution,” he says in the film. “There is a lot of diversity now” (Informe Robinson). In performing his Basqueness publicly, Iñaki Williams creates new narratives not only for the legitimacy of his own Basque-African identity, but for all of those who have felt themselves excluded from being Basque. While it is true that his simple presence on the team is not enough to defeat the vulgar and structural racism that plagues the Basque Country and Spain more generally, he has created a new space for alternative visions of Basqueness that did not exist before.

**Conclusion: Starting a Revolution**

“I realize that I am something for them to be proud of,” said Iñaki Williams in the closing minutes of Revolución Williams. He is responding to the African men on the street I discussed earlier, the men who said they were sons of the Basque country. He echoed the man who hoped his son could play for Athletic — he hopes young Black boys, the children of people like his parents, can look to him and say “wow, there’s a Black player on Athletic, one who represents us, and why shouldn’t I also be an Athletic player?” “I identify a lot with them,” he said. While he cannot materially improve the lives of families like his, he can at least offer them symbolic membership in a nation that remains skeptical about their inclusion. His performance of Basqueness is an explicitly Black performance, one that is very aware of his race and what it means, even if he does not foreground it. As a representative of the Basque nation, Iñaki Williams has the power to change what that nation looks like — though I should note that that power is ultimately conditional on his excellent athletic performance.

As I have argued here, national football teams are fertile grounds of national identity construction and performance. By choosing the bodies that can represent the nation, these teams define the borders of national inclusion. Yet the players, as representatives of the national body, also have power to define and contest national borders. Athletic Club and Iñaki Williams are excellent examples of this. While Athletic Club is not a national team in the technical sense — it does not represent a state, it is not recognized by FIFA — its localist cantera policy has established it as an arbiter of Basqueness. Through the players it
chooses to sign, the team performs nationalism by defining whose body can represent the nation. Indeed, Athletic Club is intimately involved not only in the perpetuation of Basqueness but in its very creation, as its cantera policy will, by definition, only recruit players that are Basque. The presence of Black players like Iñaki Williams on the team alters the white image of Basqueness and widens the boundaries of who can, theoretically, embody the Basque nation. Williams’s actions, both on the pitch and in the media, perform a new idea of Basque nationalism, one that may offer a challenge to the current European environment of colorblindness. This new idea of Basqueness, one that is racially inclusive, forces Basques to redefine what Basqueness means and posits the possibility of an ethnonationalism that is racially diverse.

While Williams at first glance occupies an uncertain space between Blackness and Basqueness, his embrace of that in-between-ness is the very thing that gives him the space to create new meanings about Basqueness and, thus, new ways to conceptualize primordialist European nationalisms.

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Bulls, Bullfighting and Its Discontents

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Abstract: Although the bullfight as a public spectacle extends throughout southwestern Europe and much of Latin America, it has attained its greatest political, cultural, and symbolic salience in Spain. It is not easy to categorize the bullfight. For its defenders, it is an art, for detractors a cruel public display of animal abuse. In Spain, bullfights are televised on sports stations, which allows for their more or less neutral categorization as a sport. Reviled by some segments of the Spanish populace, revered by others, the bullfight is highly controversial, more so today than ever. This article begins with an examination of media reactions to the very first mortal casualty in the bullring during the current century: the death of torero Víctor Barrio in 2016. To some commentators, Barrio was a hero. To others, however, the fighting bull was the hero, a victor in a bloody battle against a vicious human enemy. The article continues with an analysis of opposition to bullfighting from three overlapping sectors of Spanish society: (1) Catalan nationalists, (2) Spaniards who identify with the new Europe, which they consider more advanced or civilized than traditional Spain; and (3) animalistas, or animal rights advocates. It concludes with public attitudes and nationalist sentiments towards other bull-related public spectacles, especially the Catalan correbous, or traditional bull-running, some versions of which involve setting a bull’s horns on fire and chasing the flaming animal through town streets.

Key words: Spain, Catalonia, Bullfight, National Identity, Animal Rights.
artículo prosigue con un análisis de la oposición a la tauromaquia por parte de tres sectores interrelacionadas de la sociedad española: (1) nacionalismo catalán; (2) españoles que se identifican con una Europa nueva que consideran más progresiva y civilizada que la España tradicional; y (3) animalistas o activistas de los derechos de los animales. El artículo se cierra con el comentario de una serie de actitudes públicas y sentimientos nacionalistas hacia otros espectáculos públicos en los que los toros participan de forma activa, como los "correbous", en Cataluña, o el espectáculo del toro embolado.

**Palabras clave:** España, Cataluña, tauromaquia, identidad nacional, derechos de los animales.

**The Death of a Bullfighter**

On July 9, 2016, bullfighting made international headlines when award-winning matador Víctor Barrio, 29 years old, was gored to death in the bullring at Teruel, a provincial capital in eastern Spain. The event occurred as part of the city’s annual festival, the Feria del Ángel, which city officials suspended as a result of the tragedy. This was the first mortal goring of a Spanish bullfighter that had transpired in eleven years. Not surprisingly, it evoked considerable interest by the media, especially since it was televised live, videotaped, and viewed by thousands of citizens afterwards on the internet. It also received special billing as an event that coincided and, some would say, competed with the more famous running of the bulls in Pamplona. Barrio’s wife, a journalist, encouraged her friends to attend the bullfight and organized an excursion via coach to the Teruel bullring. There she and the group looked on in horror as the terrifying event unfolded. Press reports provided dramatic details: the weight and name of the bull (Lorenzo), the name of its cattle breeder (Los Maños), the precise nature of Barrio’s wounds, the public’s polarized reactions.

Barrio’s violent death brought forth a torrent of media commentary highlighting divisions within Spain about bullfighting. Consider just a few readers’ opinions that were published in the country’s leading newspaper, *El País*, the very day of Barrio’s demise. There were those who demonstrated compassion for the bullfighter, as with one reader who wrote, “What a disaster, what a tragedy to lose a life so young, I am not a bullfight fan but I respect those who are” [http://elpais.com/2016/07/09]. Another stated that bullfighting “in Spain is a tradition that arouses feelings and passion, just like...soccer, automobile racing, etc. It is true that the bull is the great protagonist who defends himself in the ring, but that is his fate, for this he was
raised, well treated until the ultimate sacrifice, without which he would have been killed two years earlier” [ibid.]. On the other hand, bullfight detractors, like another contributor to El País, declared that “what is sad and regretful is that there are ‘people’ who take pleasure in the suffering of an animal under the pretext that it is art or tradition; some of those who consider it art have a strange conception of art” [ibid.]. The word ‘people’ (personas) in quotes speaks for itself: those who enjoy bullfights do not deserve to be called human.

It is perhaps surprising that a large number of anti-bullfight commentators actually reveled publicly in the death of Víctor Barrio. To those contributors, a reader simply responded, “There will always be some bad seed (mal nacido) who doesn’t regret the death of an individual” [ibid.]. Immediately following Barrio’s goring, Twitter pages were filled with pro and anti-bullfighter testimonies: “a bullfighter has died. One less torturer, today the planet is a little cleaner from so much shit;” “The death of Víctor Barrio is also art;” “I want to see the video of Víctor Barrio in which the bull goes him, in the same way that they [the bullfighters] show themselves glorious when they kill the bull” [http://www.europapress.es/sociedad/noticia-antitaurinos-celebran-twitter-muerte-torero-victorbarrios-20160711143352.html]. The commentaries were so vitriolic that the Civil Guard started an investigation of “tweets that made fun of the death of the bullfighter Víctor Barrio” [http://20minutos.es/noticia/2794688/0/tauromaquia-acciones-legales-burlas/muerte-victor-barrio/]. Investigators uncovered tweets that insulted not only Barrio himself, but also his widow and family members. The Fundación del Toro de Lidia [Fighting Bulls Foundation] declared that many of these tweets constitute “true hate crimes, punishable by up to 14 months in prison...” (ibid.). Rafael Catalá, the Spanish Justice Minister, intervened by classifying the attacked against Barrio as “intolerable,” and reminding readers in a article published in the major Spanish newspaper ABC of the legal consequences to those who engage in irresponsible character defamation via social media [http://www.abc.es/cultura/toros/abci-ministro-justicia-tacha-intolerables-ataques-contra-victor-barrio-201607142111_noticia.html]. Mariano Rajoy Brey, current Prime Minister and leader of the Partido Popular, added a tweet of his own to the fray: “My condolences to the family and friends of Víctor Barrio, bullfighter who died this afternoon in Teruel. Rest in peace” [http://www.europapress.es/sociedad/noticia-antitaurinos-celebran-twitter-muerte-torero-victor barrios-20160711143352.html].
This widely publicised controversy entered the international domain. Bloggers to the British site dailymail.co.uk almost universally commented in opposition to bullfighting: “Maybe the death of Victor Barrio might finally see an end to this horrific ‘sport’ of bullfighting. #bannbullfighting,” “Terrible news ref #VictorBarrio however this cruel barbaric IDIOTIC sport...needs to be stopped. It’s hideous.” Notice references in these two interventions to the term “sport,” used in the first case first with quotation marks to imply that bullfighting is not necessarily the healthy, invigorating exercise that sports are supposed to embody, and in the second case simply to classify the spectacle. The question of whether bullfighting is sport or art seems to turn partially on the speaker’s point of view. Fervent supporters of bullfighting overwhelmingly point to its artistic qualities, while others are more likely to refer to this activity as sport. If one follows television broadcasts as a guide, however, it is evident that bullfights are shown on sports stations, never on those that feature cultural events. As one journalist put the matter, “before someone tells me supporters [of bullfights] don’t call it a ‘sport’, it’s an art, if you pay for satellite TV here in Spain, you could end up having three bull fights a day on the Spanish ‘sports’ channel” (www.canaryforum.com/oc/bull October 18, 2016).

Another telling word appears repeatedly in the foreign press among anti-bullfighting commentaries: “barbaric.” A Greek blogger writes, “Barbaric acts Barbaric culture uncivilised and cruel! stop all bullfights now!” Boogie from England writes, “One day this barbaric ritual will end; “Someone finally got their comeuppance.... Because someone has died due to a barbaric sport, everyone’s going mad. Stab a bull and he’ll stab you back. Guess the guy found that out the hard way;” “Evil barbaric sport like this. Despicable!” [http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/matador-mauled-death-horrifying-footage-8387090].

Bullfighting, though it exists elsewhere, is symbolic above all of Spain. It is evident that Victor Barrio’s death triggered a rash of anti-Spanish sentiment, which focused particularly on apparently widespread feelings that Spaniards have been and still are an inferior to their European neighbors. Many bloggers portray Spaniards as virtually barbaric. Writes Brayjay, “Animal cruelty is illegal in civilized countries yet an EU country carries on and ignores it. Better we in the UK voted out. Stupid man, stupid people.” In the words of SiPero, “If torturing animals to death is integral to the Spanish cultural identity, then Spain is a shit stain on this planet.” Together with Spanish cultural
identity, comments from foreigners cast aspersions on the presumed courage and virility represented in the bullfight. Consider the following comment from the United Kingdom, only one of dozens published in the British *Mirror* in response to Barrio’s death.

Disgusting vicious bloodsport How can these ‘men’ think that they are so special to slaughter an animal that has been stabbed, drugged & run into the ground...real men don’t torture and murder animals.. Look at that bull, blood running down its body from all the stabbing & torture..Sorry, but that guy got what he was looking for, Trouble... Then they slaughter the bull’s mother? [They do.] How stupid are these people? They got just what they breed for, a big, strong bull (http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/matador-mauled-death-horrifying-footage-8387090).

To any foreigner seeking evidence that Spaniards are an inferior race, Víctor Barrio’s death in the ring and bullfighting in general seem to supply sufficient proof of that presumed prejudicial belief.

In fact, few observers would deny that bullfighting is inherent to Spanish national identity. As is well known, the bullfight as a public spectacle extends throughout southwestern Europe (e.g., Campbell 1932, Colomb and Thorel 1932, Saumade 1994), particularly southern France and Portugal. It also exists in various forms in the western United States and in several Latin American countries, notably Mexico, Peru, and Columbia (Saumade and Maudet 2014). It is in Spain alone, however, that this custom has attained notable political, cultural, and symbolic salience. For some Spaniards, the bull is a quasi-sacred creature (Pérez Álvarez 2004), the bullfight a display of exceptional artistry. Garry Marvin puts the matter well when he writes that the cultural significance of the bullfight is “suggested by its general popular image as something quintessentially Spanish, by the considerable attention paid to it within Spain, and because of its status as an elaborate and spectacular ritual drama which is staged as an essential part of many important celebrations” (Marvin 1988: xv). Marvin also observes that the torero, or bullfighter, has “long been a heroic figure who occupied a special place in Spanish popular culture” (*ibid.*). Marvin’s observations are borne out by the enormous number and variety of proverbs that focus on bulls and bullfighting (e.g., Correas 1924, Rodríguez Marín 1924, 1930, 1934, 1941; Ugarte 2003-2005). Tourists consider bullfights virtually synonymous with Spain and flock to these events as a source
of exotic entertainment. Timothy Mitchell terms the bullfight “The Fiesta Nacional” (Mitchell 1991: 120-153), the “prime example” of a sign representing Spanish national identity (ibid.).

The Osborne Bull

We can appreciate the significance of the bull and bullfighting to Spanish national identity by examining the history of the starkly black Osborne bull, symbol of the Osborne corporation producing Veterano Brandy. Starting in 1957, Osborne bull billboards lined Spanish highways, starting first at 13 feet high and emerging in the 1960s as an imposing ironwork silhouette standing 45 feet high and weighing 9000 pounds (Block 2007). In time, this monumental sculpture has become one of the most recognizable and unique icons of the Spanish countryside and highway system.

The Osborne bulls were threatened with extinction when in July 1988 the Spanish government passed a law (Article 24.1 of Law 25) imposing a complete ban of commercial advertising on national roads. Infractions of this law were fined. Despite the new highway regulation, Osborne bulls continued to be displayed, now with the bulls painted solid black, thereby completely obliterating the original text, “Osborne-Sherry and Brandy.” In 1994, Spain’s Council of Ministers imposed on Osborne the lightest fine permitted by law (about US$7,800 at the time). Despite the reconditioned appearance of the bull as a simple black silhouette, the Spanish government declared the enormous
structure to be illegal. The bull had become such a widely known and powerful symbol that, even devoid of advertising copy, Spaniards interpreted the silhouette as a commercial poster promoting Osborne liquor. In legal terms, government officials considered the billboards to constitute an advertisement, and ordered all of them torn down.

This step was met by an immediate outcry throughout Spain, particularly from the Osborne company and its supporters. Probably the most convincing defense of the Osborne bull appeared in leading newspaper ABC in December 1989. Author Antonio Burgos (1989) reaches almost poetic heights in his plea to restore the Osborne bull to what he considered its rightful place as a national icon.

The bull, like so many advertising symbols, formed part of the Spanish countryside. Foreigners take away memories of the Escorial, the Giralda, the Acueduct, the thigh of a dancer in a flamenco show... and the Osborne bull, seen from an air-conditioned bus. In this Spain, which destroys the landscape, which degrades cities, the Osborne bull camped out in the heights of a hill was a landmark, indicating to us where we were.... Our highways increasingly appear like those of Los Angeles or Frankfurt. They have become impersonal, and there scarcely remains to us the humanity of an inn with some trucks parked at the entrance, which serve unforgettable fried eggs with chorizo. In this Spain which by jolts and haste is contributing so much to Europe, without receiving anything in return, we must preserve the Osborne bull. Just as bullfights are preserved although in Brussels [capital of the European Union] they might be upset [aunque en Bruselas digan misa]. This bull must be pardoned and left as an advertising stud, lest we become a colony of Madison Avenue. Although I believe that we already are.

In “Pardon for a Bull," the title of Burgos’ widely disseminated essay, he demonstrates a generally accepted symbolic connection between Spain, on the one hand, and the bull and bullfighting, on the other. It is a nationalistic piece of writing. The references to the highways of Los Angeles and Frankfurt are meant to denigrate the homogeneity and uniformity that supposedly characterize the post-modern world, as exemplified by Germany and the United States. A significant dose of nostalgia pervades the article as well. According to the author, Spanish highways today are almost without personality, compared with those of yesteryear. Everything that has made Spanish highways distinctive — in the full article, the author cites, for example, painted highway signs and quaint truck stops decorated with colorful tiles — all of this
has disappeared, except for the Osborne bull. That sole remaining mark of Spanish identity, according to the Burgos, must be preserved.

Burgos, moreover, taps into a variety of competing instincts that co-exist among Spaniards today. The author argues in favor of the bull on the grounds of conserving something of Spain’s distinctive identity. And yet he is not above pandering to commercial instincts, as with the reference to the favorable impact of the Osborne bull on tourism. Finally, the author argues implicitly for maintaining not only the Osborne bull, but also that which the bull represents: the bullfight. The bullfight, under persistent attack by representatives from the European Union, places the author in a defensive position, as indicated by his dismissive reference to Brussels, seat of the European Parliament. Burgos’s argument, in fact, proved effective in that it eventually helped to secure the billboard’s survival.

The legal case brought by Osborne against the Spanish state reached all the way to the Spanish Supreme Court. In December 1997, the Court ruled in favor of Osborne by acknowledging that the bull has indeed become an integral part of the Spanish countryside, that it “has gone beyond its initial advertising purpose” and consequently has become part of the landscape. The actual words of the judicial sentence read:

Objectively considered, it is evident that the figure [of the bull] no longer transmits a direct message to the observer. There is neither text nor graphics to indicate the identity of a product or service, given that the express reference which formerly denoted a designated type of brandy has completely disappeared. At this time, for the general public which gazes upon it, even with full knowledge of its original significance, it has stopped being the emblem of a brand, and become something decorative, integrated into the landscape. Although indirectly it might bring to mind some symbols of a commercial firm, the first visual impact which is produced upon the great majority is that of an attractive silhouette, superimposed on the environment, which, more than influencing consumption, refreshes the view, commemorates “la fiesta”, emphasizes the beauty of the strong animal (Tribunal Supremo 1994).

As a result, the bull was in effect declared a part of Spain’s National Heritage. Through declaration by the Spanish Supreme Court, this animal has become essentially synonymous with Spain. As indicated by the judicial sentence, the Spanish Supreme Court itself acknowledges the unwavering association of the bull with “la fiesta,” a shorthand term for “la fiesta nacional,” that is, bullfighting.
Even now, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the Osborne bull is the sole advertising structure permitted on most, but significantly not all, Spanish roads. This legal decision offers just one example of how deeply ingrained and nationally representative the symbol of the bull has become within most of Spain today. Nonetheless, the virtually ubiquitous association of the bull and bullfighting with Spain does not obviate the existence of controversy concerning bulls and bull games. It is to this matter that we now turn.

**Bulls and Bullfighting in Catalonia**

Central as the symbol of the bull might be, the bullfight and even bulls themselves have come under serious attack from several politically active segments of Spanish society. Particularly vocal opposition has come from the northeast autonomous region of Catalonia, where nationalist sentiments in recent years have expressed themselves as a full-blown separatist movement. In Catalonia, the *toro bravo*, or special breed of large, ferocious fighting bull, has come to represent Castille. That is, these beasts have become virtually synonymous with the oft-despised Spanish central state. In fact, right wing opponents of enhanced autonomy for culturally distinct regions such as Catalonia, Galicia, and the Basque Country, have adopted the silhouette of the Osborne bull as a unifying symbol. The familiar image of the black bull is embossed on everything from baseball hats to refrigerator magnets and coffee mugs. Spaniards who display this symbol openly and conspicuously are immediately identified with right-of-center national politics. In Catalonia, the special variety of modest, hardworking, gentle donkey known as the *burro catalán* has emerged in response to the *toro bravo* as representative of Catalan national identity. Although bloggers differ as to whether the Catalan donkey functions as a bona fide Catalan national symbol (Bassols 2004), virtually every commentator interprets this animal to act as a counterpoint to the Castilian *toro bravo*.

It is fair to say that at this point, most Catalans, and certainly all Catalan separatists, object to public displays of the Osborne bull. A journalist for the popular newspaper *La Razón* (Ruiz-Hermosilla 2003) has noted that Catalan separatists feel ire not only for the *toro bravo* in general, but also for the version of the Spanish flag that bears at its center the Osborne bull, rather than the official seal of Spain. The author explains that the enormous success of the flag displaying the Osborne bull derives from the fact that “the national flag lacked a popular symbol, because the seal is very complicated; a child could not
draw it….Everyone has a hymn, a flag, a seal, and a mascot. We [Spaniards] lacked a mascot....”

In 2003 separatists launched a campaign against the Osborne bull. Their initial line of attack was to paint some of the billboards lining Catalan highways with white, cloud-like designs, thereby making the bulls look like cows (Woolls 2007). Still unhappy with the remnant of this Castilian symbol in their midst, they sawed off the bulls’ legs and, piece by piece, entirely dismantled the humungous inanimate creatures. The last remaining Osborne bull in Catalonia fell in early December 2003.

Catalan nationalists have been even more adamant in their opposition to bullfighting — as we have seen known as the “fiesta nacional” — than to the Osborne bull. To be sure, some Catalans recognize that bullfights draw tourism and therefore act as an economic catalyst. A town councilor in Tossa del Mar argued that bullfights should be promoted because tourists found Catalan culture to be “sosa,” or insipid. But few Catalans share this opinion. In the words of one newspaper contributor writing in a mixture of Castilian and Catalan, “Coridas en españa porque son españoles, a catalunya no volem ni españols ni toros....” [Bullfights in Spain, yes, because they are Spaniards; in Catalonia we want neither Spaniards nor bulls] (abc.es/comenta 2006).

In Barcelona, capital of Catalonia and center of the most fervent regional militancy, the present century has seen numerous attempts to ban bullfighting. Originally frustrated in these efforts, the Catalan Parliament [Generalitat] in 1997 declared that children under 14 could not attend bullfights because they might find the violence and gore traumatic. In response to protests, the law was modified the following year to state that children of 14 could attend only if accompanied by adults. Journalist Antonio Marzal (2000) wrote afterwards that “Decidedly, children and bulls do not live together peacefully in Catalonia. I do not know if it is because we are more civilized than the rest [of the country] or if people are determined to make a ‘no to the bulls’ the mark of our distinctiveness.”

Despite hearty opposition to bullfighting within Catalonia, bullfighters and fans alike have attempted to fight nationalist leaders. In June 2007, José Tomás, one of the most highly acclaimed bullfighters of all time and a native Castilian, emerged from retirement to return to the ring. He chose the principal Barcelona bullring, La Monumental, for his debut. The report in Castilian newspaper El Mundo stated, “José Tomás returned and triumphed. The afternoon in Barcelona
was a double vindication: of bullfighting itself and of bullfighting in Catalonia” (Valdillo 2007). The article continues, “La Monumental was converted into an altar, with the shadow of the Sagrada Familia and Agbar building close by. Everything was full of symbolism: the selection of the Catalan capital was not purely accidental” (ibid.). Star entertainers, including Catalan Joan Manuel Serrat and Andalusian Joaquin Sabina, attended the event, as did the Duchess of Alba. Thousands of protesters both inside and outside of the ring showed up in opposition. In unison, protesters publicly destroyed recordings of Serrat and Sabina’s music, crying out, “They’ve deceived us!” (ibid.).

Protesters also invoked the familiar idea that bullfighting represents an inferior state of civilisation, unacceptable to more advanced Europeans like the Catalans. In the words of one blogger, “Bullfights only interest cuatro retrasados mentales,” that is, a few mentally backward people (Micrófono 2006). Using the language of social evolutionism, a writer to ABC states, “It is not very logical that, at the heights we have reached, they continue to kill bulls in a city [Barcelona] as advanced as ours” (ABC.es/comenta 2006). States Angel in ABC, “I hold nothing against the Spanish and their bullfights but they should do in Spain what pertains to their country. In Catalonia, we want to be civilized Europeans” (ibid.). Another blogger condensed 500 years of history by proclaiming “First they [the Spaniards] burned Jews, later the Inquisition burned Catalans, now they kill bulls. In the forties they killed Catalans, Catalan separatists. Spain no, Europe SI” (ibid.)!

As part of a recently unified Europe, Catalan opponents of bullfighting have felt increasingly tethered to a nation state, Spain, which does not represent their own sense of affiliation with what they believe to be more advanced western societies. To them, bullfights not only conflict with Catalan values, but also reduce the people of Catalonia to an inferior position on the great march to European civilization. Spanish entry into the European Union has only served to exacerbate Catalan anti-bullfighting sentiments. For decades, Spaniards — located on the margins of Western Europe, ruled by a fascist dictatorship, and suffering under economic stagnation and social retrogression — thought of their country as different from the rest of the continent. In the new Spain, where EU standards largely prevail, bullfighting seems particularly anachronistic, to many a survival of an earlier stage of civilization. Yet there are still numerous bullfight fans, within and outside of Catalonia, who cling to their unique traditions as a source of identity. When in 2007 ABC solicited reader opinions as to whether
or not the city of Barcelona should ban bullfights altogether, a pro-bullfighter responded, “This [the anti-bullfight movement] must be the work of that castrating nationalism imposed on citizens by separatist Catalan philologists... in the finest fascist-anglosaxon-sephardic style of intimidation” (EFE 2007). The reference here to Anglophones and Jews serves to emphasize the intimate connection in some people’s minds between a pureblooded Catholic, Castilian Spain, on the one hand, and bullfighting, on the other.

The Bullfight Ban

In recent history, bullfights involving the public slaughter of the animals have been banned in a number of countries bordering on Spain. Portugal has a long, well-established tradition of bullfighting, although a 1928 law prohibited the killing of the bull, the climax of any Spanish bullfight. When in August 2007, famous Portuguese bullfighter Pedrito de Portugal killed a bull during a celebrated bullfight just south of Lisbon, he was fined 100,000 euros [about US$137,000]. “Bullfighting in Portugal is like a play with the end missing,’ says the elegant 32-year-old, whose father was also a bullfighter. ‘Killing the bull is an art, and the way we do it in Portugal deprives the bull of his dignity’” (Dan Bilefsky, NY Times, August 8, 2007). In France, bullfights that involve killing the bull are prohibited throughout the country, where it is considered a form of animal abuse, sanctioned by up to two years in prison. However, an exception to this ban applies in several towns located in southern France, including Nîmes, Arles, Bayonne, Montpellier and an assortment of small villages throughout Provence and Languedoc, places where bullfighting began in the mid-nineteenth century, and where the French government has declared this sport to be a regional tradition. French Prime Minister Manuel Valls has famously and controversially declared himself a fan of bullfighting. As a child immigrant from Barcelona in the mid-1960s, Valls infuriated animal rights activists by stating that bullfighting is “something I love, which is part of my family’s culture” (Zara 2012).

Within Spain itself, the Canary Islands for many years have never hosted bullfights, but this did not result from an explicit prohibition. Rather, the inhabitants of this archipelago have never shown much interest in bullfighting. Nor has the sport ever been profitable, given the high cost of transporting toros bravos, or fighting bulls (a particular breed of bull), across the Atlantic from the Iberian Peninsula. The last bullfight in the Canary Islands took place on Tenerife Island in
1984, significantly the most touristic island of the archipelago. Still, in 1991, the Canary Islands enacted a law prohibiting “the utilization of animals for fighting, in festivals, spectacles and other activities which involve mistreatment, cruelty, and suffering” [http://www.abc.es/cultura/toros/abci-mentira-prohibicion-corridas-toros-canarias-201610221807_noticia.html]. This rule has been widely interpreted in Peninsular Spain as a ban on bullfighting, even though it does not explicitly mention bullfighting. In fact, the law does specifically target protection of “domestic animals” and “companion animales,” hence raising the perplexing issue of whether or not fighting bulls are included in at least the first of these categories (ibid.). Nonetheless, whether for economic, social or legal reasons, bullfighting no longer exists in the Canary Islands.

In Catalonia, the growing antipathy toward bullfighting reached its head on July 28, 2010, when the Catalan government passed a law definitively prohibiting bullfighting within its boundaries. The final bullfight in Catalonia took place in La Monumental bullring, Barcelona, on September 25, 2011. It was significant that José Tomás, the most celebrated bullfighter of the times, and Serafín Marín, a local Catalan bullfighter, both participated in this event. Serafín Martín lamented the decline of bullfighting in Catalonia, attributing the general lack of interest in the sport to the law prohibiting 14-year olds to observe this event. In the newspaper La Razón, he wrote: “I lived in Barcelona as a child and my life was very different then than it can be now. I went with my father every Sunday to La Monumental, and lately…the youth who aspire to be bullfighters...are not permitted to bullfight in the parks. And this isn’t because of society...these are political issues” [http://larazon.es/espana/el-triunfo-de-la-libertad-JD 13769880#. Ttt1xaEMKChOyw]. Serafín Marín was so moved by that final bullfight that after winning and carrying around the ring two of the bull’s ears in public recognition of an extraordinary performance, he knelt down and kissed the sandy floor in humble, sacred devotion (ibid.)

As of this writing, there has been no bullfight celebrated in Catalonia, whether in Barcelona or elsewhere, since that time.

Throughout Spain, and even within Catalonia itself, there occurred a significant outcry against the bullfight prohibition. Protesters pointed out what they saw as the hypocrisy of the ruling, given that there existed (and still exist) festivals that incorporate potentially harmful bull games, even if they do not result in the death of the animal. Notable in this regard was the so-called correbous, a Catalan term that could
be termed ‘bull running.’ There are precisely 78 towns and villages throughout Catalonia, mainly in the south of the region, where the correbous continues to be practiced. The correbous is even protected by a 2010 law, which allows for the continuance of bull games that are considered integral to Catalan tradition. One version of this festival event has become a specific target of public outrage: the bou embolat, in which burning flares are placed on the horns of the bull, causing the bull to run around a bullring in apparent desperation. Bullfight fans cannot understand a ruling that outlaws bullfights but allows the bou embolat to continue. The justification for its continuance comes from its declaration as traditional and integral to Catalan culture, as opposed to bullfighting, which most Catalans nowadays deemed an intrusive Castilian custom. Animal rights activists, on the other hand, consider the correbous to be equally cruel to the bull. In the words of one half-sarcastic blogger, “Ah, no, the correbous, don’t touch it because it represents local culture and it favors nationalist feelings. Bullfights, yes, abolish them. I see a lot of opportunism here and little worry about the suffering of the animal” [eldiario.es/usuarios/perfiles/105643/Blonkblonk.html].

The fate of bullfighting and bull games in Catalonia, however, is not yet over. On October 20, 2016, the Constitutional Court of Spain, with 11 members, voted 8 to 3 to overturn the Catalan bullfight ban. The majority of judges on the Court rested their lengthy opinion mainly on cultural criteria. Their document claims that “it cannot be denied that the Fiesta of Bulls (Fiesta de los toros) or the Bovine Spectacle (espectáculo taurino) has a national character and forms part of the cultural heritage (patrimonio nacional) of Spain” (2). The sentence cites the works of venerated literary icons, among others Federico García Lorca and Ramón María del Valle-Inclán, to demonstrate that “All of them signal that the fiesta de toros is a constituent element of our social reality, forming part of traditional and popular culture (4). The document reiterates over and over that the judges wish to preserve a “common cultural patrimony (5) and they cite the Spanish State Constitution as “requiring public action to stimulate, guarantee, and promote the enrichment of cultural patrimony, for which the very Fiesta de los toros is transformed into a value to nourish, stimulate, and protect” (ibid.).

The majority opinion also points out that the correbous, under Catalan law, is allowed to persist, and that without bullfights the very animal in question — the toro bravo, the animal that the Catalan law
pretends to want to protect — would not even exist (6). Indeed, the *toro bravo* is a kind of cultural product, the outcome of generations of breeding practices designed specifically for the purpose of bullfighting and other bull-related spectacles. The Constitutional Court in addition recognizes the economic benefit that bullfighting brings: “The *fiesta de los toros* is also a market for the production of goods and services in which diverse interests and subjects of economic activity, and is configured as a major sector of the national economy, affecting the agricultural and ranching sectors” (7). Finally, the Court makes a judicial argument, stating that the Constitutional Court has jurisdiction over the entirety of Spanish territory, constituting a higher legal authority to that of the Autonomous Communities, including Catalonia (15-22).

After the death of dictator Francisco Franco in November 1975, Spanish citizens from all social classes and geographic regions began to assert their divergent material interests and cultural identities, most of which had been severely suppressed throughout the four decade-long fascist era. The political and ethical positions these groups held and, in fact, continue to hold are reflected nowhere better than in their attitudes towards the bullfight.

In the face of severe opposition from animal rights movements and the European Union itself, the Spanish state, with the support of Spanish nationalists, holds on to the bullfight as a symbol of its unique traditional heritage, something that distinguishes that country from other member states in the EU. Given that the bullfight is a reliable tourist attraction, this sport also contributes significantly to the Spanish economy.

Catalonia, with its own language and close cultural affinities to Western Europe, has expressed the most extreme opposition to bullfighting of any ethnically distinct region within Spain. Arguments against bullfighting in Catalonia range from sympathy with the universal animal rights movement; to longstanding feelings of greater affinity with northern Europe than with their own Spanish compatriots; to the assertion that bullfighting represents yet one more despicable imposition of the Spanish state into Catalan regional affairs. In the face of the recent Supreme Court ruling that nullifies the Catalan ban on bullfighting, the Catalan government has shown determination to retain the prohibition. Only the passage of time can tell if its will can be maintained.
Correas, Gonzalo. Vocabulario de refranes y frases proverbiales y otras fórmulas comunes de la lengua castellana en que van todos los impresos antes y otra gran copia que juntó el maestro Gonzalo Correas... Van añedidas las declaraciones y aplicación adonde pareció ser necesaria. Al cabo se ponen las frases mas llenas y copiosas. Madrid, Tipografia de la Revista de Archivos, Bibliotecas y Museos, 1924 [Originally published 1627].
———. 12.600 Refranes más no contenidos en la colección del maestro Gonzalo Correas ni en “Más de 21.000 refranes castellanos.”
Madrid: Tipografía de la Revista de Archivos, Bibliotecas y Museos, 1930.
———. Todavía 10.700 refranes más no registrados por el maestro Correas ni en mi copiosas colecciónes... Madrid: Prensa Española, 1941.
Pulling Up Stakes? Sport and Sub-National Solidarity for Catalonia's Independence

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Abstract: As of 2017, the pro-independence Catalan government prepares the region’s secession in spite of a constitutional ban. The Catalan sovereignty process has been particularly intensive between 2009 and 2017, and frequently relied on sport and physical culture to mobilize people behind the idea of independence. Drawing on the agonic nature of both sport competition and politics, Lluís Llach’s famous resistance song L'estaca (“The stake”) emerges as a new metaphor for state-region antagonism and sub-national solidarity. The song’s logic of pulling a stake from multiple sides until it yields allows us to consider the binary and agonistic aspects of center-periphery oppositions, while also acknowledging that such struggles do not take place in isolation. Secessionist projects pulling away from a state often draw support and inspiration from analogous movements, in this case Basque nationalism, especially when directed at a common opponent. Historically and for the past years (2009-2017), several sport events featured Basques and Catalans as they accumulatively conspired towards the weakening of their sub-national ties to what they see as Spain’s “stake,” ultimately contributing to the current breakaway situation.

Key words: Basque Country, Catalonia, nationalism, solidarity, sport.

Resumen: En el 2017 el gobierno independentista catalán preparó la independencia de la región a pesar de su prohibición constitucional. El proceso soberanista catalán ha sido particularmente intenso durante los años 2009 y 2017, y ha contado a menudo con los deportes y la cultura física para movilizar a la gente tras la bandera de la independencia. Aferrándose a la naturaleza agónica tanto de las competiciones deportivas como de la política, la famosa canción de resistencia de Lluís Llach L’estaca (“La estaca”) sirve como metáfora para interpretar el antagonismo estado-región y para la solidaridad subnacional. La lógica de la canción nos permite considerar los aspectos binarios y agónicos de la oposición centro-periferia, aunque tales luchas no se dan de forma aislada. Más concretamente, durante los últimos años (2009-2017), se han producido varios eventos deportivos en los que vascos y catalanes han perseguido el objetivo común de debilitar los mencionados lazos subnacionales, contribuyendo así en última instancia a la situación actual de ruptura.

Palabras clave: País Vasco, Cataluña, nacionalismo, solidaridad, deporte.
Early June 2016, my human tower team Castellers de Barcelona was invited to perform in the Basque province of Gipuzkoa, in the north-west of Spain, at a non-binding referendum about the region’s independence. Basques held a symbolic referendum inspired by the Catalan precedent two years before, and they invited the castells, this intimately Catalan, folkloric traditional sport, to help vindicate the right to vote about independence. By then, I had spent two seasons with the Barcelona colla (“gang”) doing ethnographic fieldwork on the interfaces of pro-independence politics and physical culture. On our way on the bus, the team leaders asked us not to wear any political signs when we perform. “But why,” a performer exclaimed. “We are going to a political event!” There is a sense in which, I always found, nationalism dares not speak its name in Spain, and the campaign for a “yes” vote was carefully wrapped in a campaign for voting rights. Because “building a human tower is like building a nation,” as Catalans would tell you, Basques invited a castells team to help them visualize, instead of verbalize, their own nation building ambitions through the iconicity of building these ambitious human structures.

Basques greeted us with great cordiality and friendship, and performed the aurresku, a dance honoring the visitor, on the village squares of Arrasate and Azpeitia. When the two five-year-old “crowners,” child performers who top the towers, pulled out an ikurrina and a senyera, the Basque and Catalan national flags, emotion and applause overtook the square. “We are so happy you came,” a local woman told us. “It shows that we are not alone in this [pursuing independence from Spain].” “First you become independent,” a man added, with reference to the intensity of the current Catalan sovereignty process, “and then we follow suit. Let’s get away from this mammoth state!” While we were building human towers, Basques lined up to vote on a question: “Would you like to be citizen of an independent Basque state?” Several Catalan politicians and pro-independence NGOs were present, amicably socializing and observing the vote. “Basque urns with a Catalan accent,” a local headline went the following day, and noted the cordial relationship between the two autonomous communities with marked historical nationalist and secessionist desires.

It is a truth universally acknowledged among ethnographers that the best revelatory incidents emerge in the cracks of grand display events, when the cameras are turned off, the journalists are gone, and the stage is dismounted. After locals went home for their Sunday lunches — the obliging rhythm of life asserts itself in villages —, a group of elderly
ladies and a man with an accordion emerged in the facilities where our team of about 120 people was having lunch. They were a local choir. They asked if they could disturb for a second, as they had prepared a song for us. After the first few accords, Catalans broke out in applause, ovation, and tears in their eyes with recognition: it was L’estaca (“The stake”), the Catalan liberty song written in the fashion of American ballads:

Grandpa Siset was talking to me
Early in the morning, by the front door,
As we were waiting for the sun to rise,
And watched the carts passing.

Siset, don’t you see the stake
To which we are all tied?
If we can’t break loose from it,
We will never be able to walk.

But if we pull it, it will fall down.
It can’t last very long.
It will surely fall, fall, fall,
It must already be rather declined.

If you pull it strong here,
And I pull it strong there,
It will surely fall, fall, fall,
And we can liberate ourselves [...]

The song was written in 1968 by Llach, in the depth of the Franco regime and the year of European freedom movements. It became widely known as a song of resistance, solidarity and common struggle against larger political forces. The call for collective conscience culminates when Siset dies, and the singer has to pass on the spirit of unity and struggle to the new generations. The Basque choir’s performance received a storm of emotional applause. Rarely does a spontaneous revelatory incident achieve such dramaturgical perfection in its understanding of not only a rally, I thought, but also all that which “dares not speak its name.”

A year later, just when the Spanish government raided printing shops, arrested high Catalan governmental officials, cut Catalonia’s bank accounts, strengthened police presence, and Europe was observing, increasingly nervous, what would happen on referendum day, a new video of “The stake” song performed by Basque musicians swept
through the social media. Once again, the metaphor emerged before me as a heuristic device through which to approach contemporary nationalisms and sub-national solidarity. Anticipating objections about removing the resistance song from its original context, Francoism, and applying it to contemporary Spain, we must remember that Spain transitioned to democracy forty years ago, and socio-political circumstances are widely different today. And yet, Catalan president Carles Puigdemont wrote this in the Washington Post about the central government’s crackdown on the preparations of the October 2017 referendum: “Four decades after the death of the dictator Francisco Franco, we still find that authoritarian instincts rule at the heart of the Madrid government” (Puigdemont). The democratic transition notwithstanding, pro-independence individuals and entities continue to consider Spain a “stake.”

The Agônic Metaphors of Sport and Politics in Spain

A common element of both politics and physical culture in Spain is what Roger Caillois would call agôn: competitive combat. In the words of John Hargreaves, “the contest element in sport is especially significant because it allows opposition, conflict and struggle to be experienced and represented in extremely dramatic and spectacular ways, whereby sports can be made to map national struggles” (13). Sports turn into a favorite political allegory because, unlike in politics, their agôn takes place under more ideal conditions: an “artificially created equality of chances” (Caillois 14). This premise drives peripheral minorities to compete through sport as subjects against larger, centripetal political environments. In Spain, the “field” (Bourdieu) of sport is a system of social positions and agents whose interaction is determined by power relations and the specific character of the field: agôn. Spanish, Basque and Catalan nationalists are agents of this field and, by way of their varying historical trajectory, have aligned in a competitive-antagonistic relationship through sport.

For those familiar with past century Basque-Spanish relations over regional autonomy, it may come as only fitting that the first sport in which the Basque Country should become “independent” from Spain, i.e. present its own national team at international competitions, would be the most agonic “body technique” (Mauss) of all: the tug-of-war (sokatira). “The tug-of-war of nationalism for a national team,” the pro-Spain daily ABC hurried to observe, alluding to Basque-Spanish political dynamics as the Basque Country national team prepared to
compete in the world championship in 2014. With a similar aim to highlight an agonic relationship, film director Julio Medem deployed the Basque pelota game to frame Basque-Spanish relations in his documentary *The Basque Ball: Skin Against Stone*. The pelota game is most noted for its head spinning interchange of a leather ball until one of the players fails to send it back (González Abrisketa). The dynamics of the game serve as analogy for the former “action-reaction cycle” (Fearon and Laitin 857-858) in the political terrain between Basque separatists and the Spanish state, as if each ball returned was passing on the responsibility of violence back to the other.

The Catalan body techniques adopted by the nationalist movements are less confrontational and agonic. The round dance *sardana* condenses values that bourgeois Catalan nationalists appreciated: harmony, democracy, brotherhood, union and continuity, including “their own despised stereotype as selfish capitalist accumulators” (Brandes “The Sardana”), inasmuch as dance rules emphasize quantification. Its spread corresponded with a period of growing Catalan consciousness in the nineteenth century, and one felt already in certain intellectual circles “the necessity to bestow a weightier significance to the traditional heritage of the land:” the *sardana* offered a “symbiosis between a musical and a choreographic product and a specific idea” (Martí i Pérez 40-42). The current Catalan independence movement, however, drew on the castells’ performative iconicity to rally disparate social groups behind the idea of independence. The operative values of human tower building, strength, balance, courage and common sense (*força, equilibri, valor i seny*), building metaphors like fer pinya “make a foundation,” and the sport’s ethos of collaboration for a common objective feature heavily at political events in the hope of building a new political community.

For much of history, football was Spain’s greatest embodiment of national virility and masculinity in its national team the “Spanish Fury,” as I and others (Delgado, Vaczi “The Spanish,” O’Brien) note elsewhere. The forceful and physical game of the Spanish national team throughout its history inspired Spanish nation-building purposes: the nobility, courage, enthusiasm, vigor, energy and spirit of the national team’s game served analogous for the well-being of the Spanish state. The irony of the national soccer team is, however, that some of its emblematic players have been Basque or Catalan nationalists who were openly antagonistic to the idea of Spain. A rather under-researched, but nevertheless fitting sport for politics and nation building in the Spanish context is chess. Structurally, chess has special evocative power
for strategizing in politics. Before the hegemony of soccer, chess and emblematic chess players served as political sentimental education of the post-war generation. Strategizing as a Spanish political tool was fundamental for Spanish nationalist and civilizing processes.

In order to extend on the agonic, binary nature of sport and politics as reflected by the above, I will use Llach’s metaphor of the stake to approach sub-national solidarity and center-periphery dynamics in Spain. On the one hand, the effort required to pull and loosen the stake is analogous with the binary, agonic, and physical exertion required in sport, and most characteristically in tug-of-war. However, the stake also points at something that other analogies miss in their fixation on binaries: the accumulating impact of each individual’s binary struggle on a third party. Thus, the logic of pulling up a stake allows us to acknowledge the binary and agonic aspects of center-periphery oppositions, while also considering that such struggles do not take place in isolation, as secessionist projects often draw tangible or intangible support and inspiration from analogous movements elsewhere, especially if they single out a common opponent. Finally, the stake metaphor points at the temporal dimensions of secessionist projects. From this perspective, isolated display events do not only serve to give visibility to the nationalist agenda, but are also part of discreetly accumulating pulling efforts. After reviewing contemporary Catalan secessionism (2009-2017), I will identify a series of such pulling efforts as they accumulatively conspire towards the weakening of sub-national ties to the Spanish state.

### Basque Inspirations for Catalan Nationalism (2009-2017)

In a Europe that is witnessing rising demands to reconsider state-region relations (Duerr), Spain is facing the greatest challenge in the post-Franco era to the nation’s constitutional unity. Basques and Catalans have been claiming regional rights and liberties with varying degrees of intensity since at least the late 19th-century (Payne, Conversi, Gui bernau). The Spanish center-periphery dialectic (Muro and Quiroga) is concerned with a basic question about the unity of Spain, and is characterized by two contrary impulses: the centrifugal impulse of unification, espoused by Spanish centralist nationalists who argue that Spain is one and indivisible, and the centripetal impulse of diversification, espoused by peripheral nationalists driven by various degrees of secessionism (Comas). The current economic crisis has led to significantly greater support among Basques (Gómez and Cabeza) and
Catalans (Dowling) for political movements that pursue independence, and the 2011 cease-fire of ETA (Whitfield, Murua) is directing Basque nationalist efforts into formal politics.

In the current section, my main focus is on the Catalan secessionist movement due to its current intensity, and how the Catalan sovereignty process draws from Basque politics. The former is catching its breath, as it were, after decades of political violence, as it is focusing on its “elusive peace” (Whitfield, Zulaika and Murua) after the end of ETA. The revitalization of Basque identity politics is taking place through the integration of formerly banned leftist nationalist parties into the political arena, Basques carefully follow Catalan and Scottish developments. Catalan politics has chosen more assertive strategies (Elias) for the past few years. “Things have changed here lately in Catalonia,” an interlocutor told me as we were cruising the streets of Barcelona at a massive pro-independence rally in September 2015. “Only a few years ago, most of us were either closeted independentistes, or were not independentistes at all.” What has changed in Catalonia?

After the end of the Franco dictatorship in 1975, Spain embarked on its democratic transition. The 1978 Spanish Constitution was drafted, put to referendum, and approved by 90% of the voters in Catalonia. Since at least the 1990s, however, Catalonia has experienced growing tensions with Madrid as a result of several identity-related conflicts. The push for the greater presence of the Spanish language in Catalan public education; the difficult institutional relations and debates about linguistic policy with Catalan-speaking neighbors; and the battle over the Salamanca papers, the Civil War documents Catalonia wanted back to heal the historical wounds caused by Franco, contributed to a polarization between Catalonia and Spain.

Antagonism was further aggravated by what Catalans see as the consistent disregard by Madrid of their Autonomous Government’s decisions. In 2003, the Catalan government started to push for a reform of the 1979 Statute of Autonomy with a view of extending its competences of self-government. In 2005, the Catalan Parliament approved a reformed Statute by a majority vote of 91%. The Spanish General Courts, however, overruled the decision by requiring important modifications to the text. In June 2006, a new draft was put to referendum and approved in Catalonia. After four years of deliberation, the Spanish Constitutional Court rejected the Statute in 2010. Among other things, the Catalan Statute was deemed unconstitutional for referring to Catalonia as a “nation” while from a Constitutional perspective, there is no nation
other than the Spanish nation. Regions may only refer to themselves as “nationalities.” The rejection of the Spanish Constitutional Court substantially altered the political landscape resulting in a series of pro-independence demonstrations. The Constitutional Court decision to de-legitimize Catalonia as a “nation” drove 1.5 million Catalans into the streets under the banner “We are a nation. We decide.” What appeared a minor semantic detail majorly contributed to the current Catalan pro-independence fervor.

While Basque nationalist politics was busy disbanding ETA at this time, it had previously served as inspiration for Catalonia in at least two ways. First, it played an important, if indirect, role as historical precedent for the Catalan claim for a new economic agreement with Madrid. The Basque Country was the only autonomous community that negotiated an economic agreement during the Transition. Basques acquired their pacto fiscali in 1981, which allowed them to have control over their own treasury. In 2010, the Catalan government decided to acquire a new model of finance similar to the Basque pacto fiscali. With the 2008 financial crisis, the Basque agreement became a coveted arrangement for Catalan independentistes, who argued they lost significant amounts (arguably 10% of their GDP) to the central Spanish treasury. In July 2012, the Catalan Parliament approved an economic agreement similar to the Basque one, but the Spanish government would not negotiate it. The rejection of the Basque model for Catalonia was a turning point for Catalan nationalism. Formerly unconvinced of the idea of independence, Catalan president Artur Mas now called for “profound reflection,” and a push for independence.

Another important Basque inspiration for Catalan secessionism was a more assertive tone of political culture: a shift from pactisme (strategy of consensus) to an action-oriented attitude. If negotiation is about “getting to yes” (Fisher and Ury), Catalans were historically considered masters of the art for their consensus-seeking political attitude, which was often contrasted with the Basque “no-saying culture” (Zulaika 300). Where Basque politicians veto, boycott, or walk out, according to this popular view, Catalans embrace consensus. A prime example is the 1978 Constitution itself, which Basques rejected, while Catalans found its values congenial to the consensual symbolism they imagined for themselves and for Spain: a new beginning, democracy, reconciliation (Edles). On the other hand, the Basque political ethos of action (ekintza) has been “to some extent antithetical to the ‘spirit of consensus’” (Edles 340).
“We’ve been patiently negotiating, with no results,” a Catalan interlocutor summed up a changing attitude. “Now is our time for action.” After the Spanish Constitutional Court’s repeated rejections, Catalans increasingly feel that the era of pactisme is over. A more defiant, risk-taking attitude characterizes the current movement: the organization of an illegal referendum in 2014 sent Catalan President Mas to court; another referendum is projected for October 2017 despite a constitutional ban; and last year the Catalan Government announced it was ready to unilaterally declare independence in eighteen months, effectively placing itself outside of Spain and the European Union. The shift in tone was noted by Spanish centralists, who argued that the new Catalan political culture was reminiscent of, and in ways even surpassed, Basque political assertiveness. The leading Spanish daily, El País, published an editorial titled “Tribute to the Basque Seny [‘common sense’],” contrasting the current “constructive and cordial nationalism” of the Basque government to the “terrible and hardly intelligent” conduct of the Catalan one (El País). Who would have thought, the article asked, that the much-praised seny, this Catalan word that evokes common sense and deliberation, would abandon the politics of its natural habitat and settle, of all places, in the Basque Country? The argument that even Basques, formerly so conflictive and defiant, had more common sense than Catalans aimed to undermine the nationalist side by telling them that their behavior was utterly un-Catalan, and ran counter to their tradition of sober consensus seeking.

My initial contention with the stake analogy was to show how physical culture progressively conspires to corrode Spanish sovereignty. In the following, I will identify the historical dialectic through which sport contributed to weakening sub-national ties to the Spanish state, identifying its most corrosive impact.

**Playing for Spain: Is Their Skin in the Game?**

In 2010, a highlight of Spanish nation building during the South African soccer World Cup was an Adidas commercial promoting the Spanish national team jersey. The commercial was titled Nace de dentro, “It is born within.” It featured two Basque players and an Asturian as they stand with naked upper bodies, handsome, muscular and sweaty. The players started stripping their own skin digitally, from under which emerged the national symbol of Spain, and the colours red and yellow: the Spanish national team jersey. “What unites us is born
within,” a voiceover said. The digital strip of the skin connotes a Spanish expression often used in sports: *dejarse la piel*, “leaving the skin,” or doing one’s best.

Rarely is the embodiment of a nation rendered so literally. The national team player’s body emerges as a primordial metaphor for a Spain where all are Spanish “under their skin,” in essence, while they may be Basque, Asturian, Catalan, Andalusian, etc. on the surface. The commercial illustrates the imposition of a symbolic persona that the national team was meant to achieve historically. However, the Spanish national team has featured several Basque and Catalan players who were openly anti-Spain nationalists, and the Spanish national team’s historical under-performance was sometimes attributed to their real or imagined lack of *sentimientos* for the Spanish colors: do Basque and Catalan nationalist players really have their skin in the game when playing for Spain?

For these players, in turn, an impasse of identification may emerge if they are uncomfortable with the symbolic persona the national team imposes. “Do I feel Spanish?” For some players, it results in an irreconcilable contradiction. The emblematic Athletic Bilbao goalkeeper Iribar was among the few known cases of a soccer player’s refusal to play in the Spanish national team in the 1970s and 80s. Iribar had been the undisputed goalkeeper of the Spanish national team for several years, and played for Spain on 49 occasions. As he gradually got involved with leftist Basque nationalism, ran for office and attended political rallies, there came a point when being involved in nationalist politics and playing for Spain became untenable. “For me, there was a moment of contradiction,” Iribar said in an interview in 1980. “I could no longer ask the release of Basque ETA prisoners, and then be ambassador of Spain with the Spanish national team” (Gómez 66).

A recent Catalan example is the former Barcelona defender Oleguer Presas, who explained to coach Luis Aragonés “how he saw the world,” and told him that “when there is no sufficient commitment or sentiment, it is better to convocate other persons” (*El Economista*). While as Presas confirms “there have been other cases too,” it remains everybody’s best interest to treat these withdrawals with discretion. They remain rare because, once in a dilemma, athletes tend to prioritize their personal careers over their national sentiments, or wait until they retire from active sport to voice their ideological convictions, as did former FC Barcelona player and coach Pep Guardiola, who now actively participates in the Catalan sovereignty process.
Catalan sport has emerged as the most forceful cultural factor to turn Catalonia into a categorical equal to Madrid, especially in two ways. On the one hand, Barcelona successfully organized the Olympic Games in 1992, which strengthened nationalist sentiments (Hargeraves), and turned the city into a fashionable cultural capital. Madrid, however, has lost three bids (1972, 2016, 2020), a failure in which Catalan nationalists revel. On the other hand, Catalan football has dominated the Spanish national team through play style and players in its greatest recent successes (2008, 2010, 2012). Independentistes are well aware of their increasing power, which has supplied them with a liberal dose of self-confidence. “If Catalan clubs are ousted from the Spanish league in case of independence, as they like to threaten us,” I was told by a representative of the Catalan Sport Federation, “it is all the worse for the Spanish league. Any European sport league would be happy to host our teams, and especially FC Barcelona.” This statement is undeniably true, and independentistes will not hesitate to rub centralist impasses under their nose: without its internal “Other,” Spanish soccer would lose its vitality and competitive edge. Furthermore, the country’s great brand, the national soccer team, is contingent on sub-national players that are often openly anti-Spanish. On the eve of the 2010 soccer World Cup final, 1.5 million Catalans protested against a constitutional court decision to curtail regional autonomy, and in favor of independence. That particular night before the historic game, the question of what would become of Spain without one of its greatest economic motors, Catalonia, gained another frightful dimension: what would become of the Spanish national team without its Catalan players?

**Banning the Spanish Bull**

Human cultures have demonstrated a great impulse to elaborate zoomorphic visions of politics. The proliferation of fantastic beasts in political imaginaries, the ideological figuration of the wolf, the fox, the lion, the lamb, the serpent, the eagle demonstrates, with Lévi-Strauss, our desire to single out animals not because they are “good to eat,” but because they are “good to think” (89). More particularly, some animals are singled out to think power, as Robbins argues about the greatest example of power display through animals: the French king’s menagerie, established in the palace of Versailles in 1661. It featured an impressive assortment of wild, exotic animals gathered through conquest, or received as gifts from all over the world. As symbols of
domination, they clearly had a “function as living fables, telling moral as well as political tales” (Robbins 41).

If animals, as Fernandez writes, “provide us with [...] reference points in our quest for identity” (46), bulls are “virtually synonymous with Spain” (Brandes “Torophiles”). Once again, skin is an important symbol in Spain: the country is also called piel de toro, “bull’s skin,” for the shape of the skin cut off from the animal after the bullfight is similar to the shape of Spain. The Spanish national soccer team is today popularly called La Roja, “the Red One:” the color red of blood and furious passion is loaded with significance for the bullfight. Skin is an imaginary link between the two ludic spectacles that constitute a temporal axis of Spanish identity: the bullfight of the past, and soccer of the future. Marvin called the bullfight as “something quintessentially Spanish,” and the bullfighter as a “heroic figure [occupying] a special place” in the Spanish national imaginary (xv). The bullfight never ceased to intrigue writers and commentators: it is art and culture for its aficionados; a “defense against femininity,” and “ritual revindication of masculinity” (Douglass 243); the symbolic “killing of the father” (ibid., 242); the “fiesta nacional” for the lower, and “big business” (Pink 198) for the higher strata of society.

Spanish regions too have their politicized bestiary representations, often featured in opposition to Castilian authority (Brandes “Torophiles”). The Galician cow, the Basque sheep, the Andalusian fox, or the Catalan donkey, however — and let’s admit rather unsurprisingly — fall short of the evocative power of the black Spanish bull. The emblematic Osborne bulls that populate Spanish highways metamorphosed from advertising brandy to Spain’s National Heritage. When new advertising laws required that the “bullboards” be pulled down, national protest led to a Spanish Supreme Court decision to protect them as a national icon that by now everyone associated with Spain rather than liquor, to the point that its original creator, the Osborne Group, practically lost legal control as owner over the image (ibid. 782-784).

It was therefore particularly significant that in 2010, the year its nationhood was declared “unconstitutional” by the Spanish Constitutional Court, the Catalan Parliament affected a blow below the belt: it banned the bullfight. If the region wanted to do away with the sovereignty of the State, it first had to do away with its sovereign beast.

It is hard to overestimate the import of the symbolic killing of the Spanish bull for the Catalan independence movement. Bullfighting had suffered progressive social alienation and opposition both in spite of
its close association with Spain, and because of it. For the past decade (2007-2017), the number of bullfights dropped by 70% Spain-wise to what is still about 1,800 shows a year. In Catalonia, the decision to ban bullfighting was clearly a political rather than an animal rights question. It became part of the Catalan nationalist agenda, and a desire to identify with a modern, progressive Europe as opposed to an "antiquated," "barbarous" Spain. A recent editorial titled “The Death of the Bull” is a good example of discursive boundary-making: it calls the bullfight a “delirium of death and machismo,” which summarizes everything anachronistic that a modern society should fight against. “The bullfight is the Spain of the lace head cover (mantilla), the decorative comb (peineta), of silent women praying the Lord’s Prayer, and of men exclaiming ‘Olé’ with excitement when they can write with the smoke of their cigars. They are the symbol of ideas about kings and ministers who serve a retrograde fatherland” (Farré). While the Spanish Constitutional Court overturned the Catalan ban in 2016, arguing that an autonomous region may regulate but not fully ban bullfights, it is currently unimaginable that the bulls will ever return to Catalonia.

What did Catalonia do with its bull rings? One of the most important arenas, in Tarragona south of Barcelona, hosts the bi-annual human tower competition, a two-day event that convokes the best teams, and is gaining increasing international attention. Catalonia has turned Spain’s main symbolic space into a Catalan one where, in the minds of most fans and participants, a new nation is built with each new tower.

Whistling Spain

“Why does the Spanish national anthem have no lyrics?” a joke went in Catalonia in 2015, as soccer fans prepared for the Spanish King’s Cup between the Basque Athletic Club, and the Catalan FC Barcelona. “Because it’s whistled!” Whistling the Spanish national anthem and the king catalystes nationwide debates over national and sub-national sovereignty, and the freedom of expression.

The first notable football game whistling goes back to 1925 in Barcelona, to the regime of Primo de Rivera, who had just overthrown the constitutional government in 1923 with a military coup d’état, and established a military dictatorship. The friendly match between FC Barcelona and C.E. Júpiter took place in June 1925 in Catalonia. At half time, when the Royal Marines played the Spanish Marcha Real, fans whistled the anthem so furiously that the Marines, confused as to why the “Spaniards” whistled “their own anthem,” switched to their God
Save the Queen. To their further bafflement, the British anthem met with enthusiastic applause. The event had major political repercussions for its transgressions. The stadium was shut down for three months, and the president of FC Barcelona was exiled from Spain. According to anecdote, the Les Corts stadium would be re-opened only after 12 religious practitioners blessed it in order to exorcise the “malevolent separatist spirits” that had contaminated it (Burns 124).

The recent instances of King jeering include the 2009, 2012, and 2015 King’s Cup finals, all three played between the Basque Athletic Club and the Catalan FC Barcelona. Under its various historical names, the King’s Cup has always represented Spain’s centralist powers, and now it would be played between two regions of secessionist aspirations. As King Juan Carlos emerged in the VIP booth of Valencia’s Mestalla stadium in 2009, the Spanish national anthem would be played, but it was not heard: 55,000 Basques and Catalans were standing, holding innumerable Basque and Catalan national flags high, whistling the anthem and the royal family. On the stands, a giant billboard said “We are nations of Europe, good bye Spain.” The state-owned Radio Televisión Española reduced the sound of the whistling, and amplified the anthem to audible levels, which stirred a political controversy over censoring an act of free expression. The Foundation for the Defence of the Spanish Nation (Denaes) sued the whistling. In spite of the National Court decision that declared that whistling fell within the category of free expression, pro-monarchy voices continued to call for the criminalization of whistling each time the Basque and Catalan teams qualified for the Cup Final.

“Eighty-seven years later,” discussions went in 2012 before the King’s Cup final, where once again the same teams qualified, “[Madrid province president] Esperanza Aguirre … evokes the ghost of the dictator Primo de Rivera” (El Periódico), who shut down Barcelona’s Les Corts stadium. Aguirre called for the cancellation of the final if fans whistled. This time, King Juan Carlos himself was not going to show up for the final that bore his name, as he was resting off the hip injury he had procured at a safari in Botswana. Instead, his son Prince Felipe represented the royal family. Fifty-five thousand Basque and Catalan football fans packed into Madrid’s Calderón stadium. The Spanish national anthem was reduced to a mere 27 seconds to mitigate the embarrassment of its furious whistling, but that wasn’t the only highlight of the anti-monarchy protest. Basque and Catalan fans were jumping and waiving pro-independence flags, savoring the moment as
they sang together the well-known children’s song to mock the king’s wild game hunt: “An elephant was balancing/On a spider’s web/And as he saw he didn’t fall/He called another elephant. /Two elephants were balancing...”

By 2015, no pro-Spain region wanted to hold the Cup between these two teams, much less Real Madrid, where it was originally scheduled. Instead, ninety-five thousand Basques and Catalans packed in Barcelona’s Camp Nou stadium, and produced a decibel that the press called “monumental,” “stratospheric,” and “thunderous.” Spain’s ruling conservative People’s Party (PP) qualified the incident as “horror” that “offends us,” declared that the whistling demonstrated “the disease part of the society suffers,” and reiterated the proposition that insulting Spain’s symbols should be punishable. The State’s Anti-Violence Commission issued a fine of 123,000 Euros for the clubs, and the General Attorney launched an investigation about whether the whistling constituted punishable offense to the monarch, and insult to national symbols.

The impulse to ban political jeering and mockery is highly problematic in a post-Charlie Hebdo Europe, I argue elsewhere (“Football”), and misses sport’s capacity to ease, rather than exacerbate, antagonistic political positions: the capacity of play to frame jeering and mockery as part of a joking relationship. Drawing on the carnivalesque premise of subverting power, joking relationships involve chiding and embarrassing, mocking and insulting, jokes and vulgar allegations, sexual overtures, crude scatology, horse-play, or a banter of obscenities (see Brant, Norman, Goldberg, Gundelach, Carty and Musharbash, Sørensen, Winkler Reid). As “ritual purifiers” (Douglas 372), the joking relationships of ludic arenas allow participants to see that an accepted pattern no longer has a necessity.

Because it produces “a shift of authorities and truths, a shift of world orders,” Bakhtin (127) lamented that the carnivalesque element of culture was disappearing from modern urban life. Sport stadiums, however, still exhibit important carnival features, as profanation, blasphemies, insults, debasing, bringing down to earth, vulgarities, verbal agons and cursing matches thrive. Excessive measures to “civilize,” sanitize, and gentrify (Cleland and Cashmore) sporting spaces, however, impede the organic development of joking relationships. If jeering remains a license proper to the marketplace publicity of games, as I think they should, sports will continue to be uniquely positioned to allow the “artful insulting” (Freedman 158) of not just the opponent or the referee, but state sovereigns as well. This has important democratizing
consequences. The play sphere opens the chance for the easing of traumatic political relationships, and the incorporation of disparate parties into a community of laughter through “permitted disrespect” (Radcliffe-Brown 196). The duality of the play frame’s interpretation allows for that incorporation. For the mocker, it is “more than a game,” and jeering constitutes a culture of resistance. The mocked, on the other hand, may save face by taking refuge in the interpretation of the situation as “only a game.”

**Catalans Want to Vote: Sport for Democracy**

“If Catalonia ever does become independent,” the Financial Times wrote in July 2017 in an extended analysis of the independence movement, “historians will probably look to September 13 2009, and the event that took place in Arenys de Munt that day, as one of the sparks that started the secessionist fire” (Financial Times). The Catalan small town of 8600 inhabitants organized an unprecedented local referendum, with 96% voting for secession. “Catalan Town Votes for Independence from Spain,” international news outlets wrote next day, mockingly. An avalanche of referendums followed all over Catalonia, to the point that most Catalans have voted about independence as many as three times — none of them binding, as the Spanish Constitution does not allow regional referendums on the question of independence.

Catalan desires to vote have surfaced in sport in various ways. The operative values of human tower building (“strength, balance, courage and common sense”), tower building metaphors like fer pinya “make a foundation,” and the sport’s ethos of collaboration for a common objective feature heavily at political events that campaign for the right to vote (Vaczi “Catalonia’s Human Towers”). Human towers are a staple of the annual September 11 pro-independence rallies: dozens of teams build castells at these events, attracting over a million people and the international media. Another example of how people constructed pro-independence ideology through body-practice-value linkages was the Catalans Want to Vote: Human Towers for Democracy event organized by the NGO Òmnium Cultural in June 2014. The event aimed to promote the following November’s nonbinding referendum, which called on the European Union to recognize the Catalan right to vote on the question of seceding from Spain. The campaign announced the simultaneous building of human towers in eight European capitals (Paris, Brussels, London, Lisbon, Geneva, Berlin, Rome, Barcelona),
and in its advertising made a clear parallel between the ethos of castells, and Catalan political objectives:

The Catalan people will decide our future in a referendum. Together we form a cluster [fem pinya] to build a better country. We believe in peace, effort, and cooperation. We are a sovereign nation that wants to live in a normal country. Our dream is shared; our path, democracy. We want to tell the world because the world has to know. That is why we are inviting you to the most important international event of the year. From the foundations of the human tower to the very top, together we will touch the sky. It is the chance to make our message reach Europe: Catalans want to vote. Help us build a foundation (omniumcultural).

Catalan soccer has contributed to the spirit of self-governance by providing an example of self-governance, even when it was transgressive and illegal to do so: under dictatorial settings. There are currently three clubs in the Spanish first division that operate through governance by their membership: the Basque Athletic Club, the Catalan FC Barcelona, and Real Madrid. In 1990, as a result of financial crisis and mismanagement, most clubs were obliged by law to turn into public limited sports companies (sociedad anónima deportiva). Only the above-mentioned clubs were allowed to keep their status as non-commercial entities, that is genuine clubs. Turning the rest of the clubs into companies had contradictory effects: infamously, they would land in the ownership of just one or a few proprietors, mismanagement would be rampant, and former members lamented their loss of membership rights such as running for office, initiating changes of the statute, direct voting on club president, and other matters.

In short, only three first division clubs continue to be owned and governed by their fans through democratic processes. The presidential elections I witnessed in Athletic Club (2011) and FC Barcelona (2015) were very much like political elections — except, locals would tell you, they were more important. These clubs hold presidential elections every five or six years; candidates carefully draft and vigorously campaign with their program; and members vote directly on them. It is hard to over-estimate the importance of this vote for club loyalty, and for its perpetuation of a democratic, participatory spirit in sport and society, when the everyday club member feels disenfranchised by globalization and obscure commercial-political maneuvers.

In 2015, less than two months before yet another pro-independence mega-rally, the FC Barcelona presidential elections emerged as a
reminder of what Catalans would vindicate on that rally: the right to vote. Football club elections became a grand display event of a political desire that went beyond sport. They catalyzed spectacular debates about sport performance, sponsorship, corruption, player signing — and, importantly, the club’s position in the question of Catalonia’s independence from Spain. Most importantly, to my mind, the town hall meetings with presidential candidates offered a scene rarely accommodated by a global, multi-billion business such as FC Barcelona. Fans of all ages and social strata addressed, challenged and criticized their leaders and candidates, some of the most powerful socio-economical agents of the country. If only for the duration of the campaign, and at the level of fantasy as sceptics would add, club members felt empowered as they held their leaders accountable.

Club operation on the basis of participation is, therefore, consequential for the message it sends about democratic rights and values in society at large. This became most noteworthy during the Franco dictatorship, where the regime appointed club presidents, elections were forbidden, and the sheer idea of voting was subversive. Namely, voting in football clubs, Shaw writes, “would have given the opportunity for an uncomfortable comparison with the lack of democracy in the national order” (122). And it did, as the club found furtive ways to exercise the act of voting. The 1953 elections were organized by exploiting a legal lacuna: the club called elections when Marti Carreto resigned after losing star forward Di Stéfano to Real Madrid, and the secretary realized that the 1948 reforms had not been formally incorporated in the regulations of FC Barcelona yet. This loophole opened the chance for a massive election held in the dead of the Franco regime, presenting a striking counter-example to political disenfranchisement in general. A great campaign ensued, and kept the city in suspense until more than 17,000 club members showed up to vote. Realizing the importance of a vote, any vote really, for maintaining a spirit of democracy under generalized disenfranchisement, FC Barcelona took every chance to hold them on minor issues the Franco regulations didn’t care to cover.

It is perhaps not accidental that the member-governed Athletic Club and FC Barcelona should come from regions that spent much of their history vindicating local voting rights. Given the political mandate to vote whenever given the chance, it is perhaps not accidental, either, that the Basque and Catalan clubs should have had conspicuously more elections and presidents than Real Madrid. Since their first votes in 1989 and 1900, Athletic Club has had 33 different presidents,
FC Barcelona has had 40, while Real Madrid has had half that number only, 20. While this data could imply greater presidential stability, it also confirms the general view of Real Madrid having a more señorial leadership culture based on hierarchy, and the subtle usurpation of power by presidents. Currently, Real Madrid fans are worried about accumulating presidential power that intimidates potential candidates from running. Though “the façade of democracy remains,” as a commentator recently remarked (Vice Sports), in June 2017 there was yet again no contender to the presidency at what was now referred to as “the elections that are never held” (El Confidencial 2017). In a wider football culture where 29-year-long tenures like that of the President of the Spanish Football Federation (RFEF) are possible, the 2015 FC Barcelona elections, and its five finalists campaigning for the presidency emerge as a statement of democracy.

Conclusion

Insistence, solidarity and continuity is a main motif in Llach’s “The stake.” I know very well that it is rotten, the singer sings about the stake that prevents them from acting freely. But Siset, it weighs so much / and when my strength slips from me / Sing me your song again. The song culminates when Siset dies, and the singer has to take over the responsibility of passing the spirit of resistance to the next generation: And as the new boys pass me by / I lift up my voice to sing / The last song of Siset / The last song that he taught me.

In this paper, I reviewed the contemporary Catalan nationalist movement through the logic of its canonical resistance song. Secessionist movements are a result of cumulative social and political interactions that aim to erode central power, and they often gain strength from the work of the other movements. Sport and physical culture are particularly apt for the kind of pulling efforts Llach calls for in his song. Sports iconically represent agonic confrontation, the exertion of effort, and collective work towards a common objective; they take place repeatedly, as every weekend thousands, and even millions, of people prepare for their games or performances; and they play a crucial role in the education of the new generations.

While not as coordinated as in Scotland, where “sport for yes!” was strategically deployed by the 2014 pro-independence campaign (Whigham and May), Catalan physical culture performed a range of political desires between 2009 and 2017. The strength and power of Catalan soccer helped Barcelona and Catalonia turn into a categorical
equal with regards to Madrid and Spain, and fostered a collective self-confidence that is indispensable for a risky move such as secession. Whistling and jeering the Spanish king and symbols subverted, if only for the duration of play, royalist power structures that are perceived as imposed, rather than chosen. Banning the bullfight was a blunt move away from what is seen as a regressive, patriarchal and violent Spain towards a progressive Europe. Club management and presidential elections in soccer have variously served as a routine confirmation of a governance model, and the sole reminder of a democratic spirit in a disenfranchised country. These events have relied on a great deal of sub-national solidarity, reflecting wider realities where the Basque, Catalan, Flemish, and Kurdish movements, for example, closely monitor and cite one another’s strategies, exchange information, and wait for a precedent. “Catalonia is not alone,” the Guardian concluded in September 2017 (Ascherson), arguing that global politics can no longer disregard secessionism, as globalization will continue to produce desire for smaller states. The strength of sport events rests in their cumulative impact on a new political ambiance where, according to demographic tendencies of voting practices, it may be only a matter of a new generation, the passage of “the new boys,” that European geopolitics will have to seriously address the fate of new states.

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A Basque-American Deep Game: 
The Political Economy of Ethnicity and Jai-Alai in the United States

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Abstract: In 1988, a conflict between jai-alai players and fronton owners turned into the longest strike in the history of any American professional sport. This paper addresses the ethnic tensions that characterized the political economy of the jai-alai in the US. On the one hand, it shows that the ethnic character of the sport was maintained due to the economic interests of the companies that managed it. On the other hand, it argues that the political changes in Spain and the Basque conflict influenced not only the mood and ideology of the players, but also their demands and forms of protest, which led to the strike of '88. These circumstances turned the conflict into a deep game, in which both parties risked what they most wanted, and both lost it.

Key words: Anthropology, Political economy, Ethnicity, Jai Alai, Basques.

Resumen: En 1988 un conflicto entre los jugadores de jai-alai y las compañías propietarias de los frontones en EEUU provocó la huelga más larga del deporte profesional americano. Este artículo analiza las tensiones étnicas que han caracterizado la economía política de los jai-alai en este país. Por un lado muestra cómo el carácter étnico del deporte se mantuvo gracias sobre todo a los intereses económicos de las compañías que administraban los jai-alai. Y por otro lado plantea que los cambios políticos en España tras el régimen de Franco y el denominado conflicto vasco influyeron no sólo el ánimo y la ideología de los pelotaris, sino también las exigencias y formas de protesta que dominaron la huelga del 88. Estas circunstancias transformaron el conflicto en un “juego profundo” en el cual ambas partes arriesgaron aquello que más querían y ambas partes perdieron.

Palabras clave: Antropología, Economía política, Etnicidad, Jai Alai, Basques.

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But whether Basque or American, These are truly great athletes and Jai Alai is truly a great sport. Artful, skillful, graceful, beautiful. That’s the game. Dramatic, exciting, emotional, fun.
That’s the experience. Jai-Alai. Those who play it, live it. Those who watch it, love it.
Jai-Alai. There is nothing like it in the world.

“This is Jai-Alai” (1988)

Introduction

1988 marked one of the worst crises in the history of jai-alai, a type of pelota game invented by Basques emigrants in Argentina at the beginning of the 20th century. The players, 85% of whom were Basques, requested recognition of the International Jai-Alai Players Association (IJAPA), an association formed to watch over their interests, check the legality of their contracts, and mediate between the company and the players. Fronton owners, the three of them North American businessmen who controlled all the jai-alais in US, recruited the players and wrote the contracts without any external control, refused to recognize the IJAPA, and began to threaten and use unfair labor practices against the players who joined it, which provoked a strike that lasted three years. This circumstance, together with the expansion and diversification of gambling in the US, marked the beginning of the decline of an industry with a turnover of more than 700 million dollars a year, and which, in 1988, had 14 active frontons in the states of Florida (8), Connecticut (3), Nevada (2), and Rhode Island (1).

This paper addresses the factors that turned a conflict that could have been resolved relatively easily into the longest strike in the history of American professional sport. From a utilitarian point of view, fronton owners and players shared the same interest in running the business, and yet they polarized their positions and strove to defend and maintain their respective claims without considering that it may be detrimental to their own interests. Following Geertz’s use of Bentham’s deep play, I argue that those who defend their status or their ideological values against their own practical interests are involved in a “deep game.” In the case at hand, American fronton owners preferred to make their omnipotence prevail over accepting the legitimacy of the players’ request, and Basque workers felt compelled to fight for their ideological morality and ethnic pride at the cost of jeopardizing their main reason for emigrating: money. Both parties risked what they most wanted, and both lost it.
The study of this American-Basque deep game, which had its climax in 1988, allows us to explore the political economy of jai-alai in the US, and to focus on the ethnic tensions that characterized labor relations within the frontons. On the one hand, it shows that the ethnic character of the sport was maintained due to the economic interests of the companies that managed it. They preferred to recruit players from a country like Spain, where labor rights were undeveloped during Franco’s regime and workers’ foreign status kept them under control. However, the ethnic homogeneity of the players became a real problem for jai-alai owners once these players went on strike. The political changes in Spain and the Basque conflict influenced not only the mood and ideology of the players, but also their demands and forms of protest, which led to the strike of ‘88.

The polarization between the parties, along with legislative changes related to betting, condemned the jai-alai to a more than likely disappearance in the US. Currently, in 2017, only two frontons remain open, and they do so because of Florida’s protectionist legislation, which links casino licensing to the maintenance of the game. The Miami and Dania frontons remain open because this allows their owners to have roulette tables and slot machines. The pelota players, who from the early 50s to the late 80s played in front of 5,000 spectators, nowadays play in front of no more than 50. This decadent panorama is portrayed in the documentary “Jai Alai Blues” (2015), which shows the apogee and the decline of this sport from the nostalgic perspective of those who have lost their mother lode. This is a very different perspective than that of those who saw and produced “This is Jai-Alai” (1988), a nationalistic portrayal of American goodness that promoted the game, while hiding the internal conflicts that existed at that time.

The point of view of the main actors was collected through newspaper articles and personal interviews conducted during 2017. Some of the players who took part in the strike gave me several documents to understand what happened in those years. Especially valuable is the ruling JD-280-89 for the accusation filed by IJAPA against Bridgeport Jai-Alai Inc. for unfair labor practices. The 66-page document, dated November 1989, summarizes the most remarkable testimonies to reconstruct what happened during the year of 1988. It serves as a guide to enter the details of this Basque American deep game.
This is Jai-alai

This is a sport about speed. A rock-hard ball moving faster than any other. Curving, twisting, with treacherous unpredictability. Men with lightning reflexes and ballet like movies. Using overpowering strength or subtle finesse. This is a sport about danger, courageous athletes relying on learned skills and competitive instincts. This is a sport about tradition. Its history dating back centuries. Its form unchanging. This is a sport about emotion, winning and losing, action and reaction. This is a sport about excitement. This is the world’s fastest and most exciting sport. This is Jai Alai.²

Basque pelota is a sport that includes several types of games. These vary in terms of the kind of court or fronton where it is played, and the tools used to hit the ball. The best known tools are bare hand, *pala* (paddle), and *cesta-punta* (a long basket), the device utilized in jai-alai, which means “lively fiesta” in the Basque language.

The *cesta-punta* is a wicker basket with a small glove at the end to pull on the hand, which allows the basket to be tied to the wrist. Traditional ball games used similar devices from at least the 16th century onwards. Initially, short leather gloves were used, which were then lengthened to allow the user to throw the ball farther. They started to make them from wicker at the beginning of the 19th century, when the game underwent a radical formal transformation, which provoked its industrialization and expansion around the world. The old long games (*bote luzea, laxoa*, and *rebote*), in which one team faces the other, as in tennis, and the wall is out of the bounds of the game, as in paddle, gave way to games played against the wall, in which the opposing players are placed together on the court. In these games, the wall takes a central role, since the ball must bounce on it with each throw, as in squash.

Much larger than the English games, Basque games, especially *pala*, *remonte*, and *xistera* — these last two involving baskets of shorter length and curvature than the *cesta-punta* used in jai-alai, which had still not been invented — acquired great popularity at the end of the 19th century. All the great Spanish cities opened several industrial frontons, with an average of 2,000 spectators per fronton, and the game extended to Latin America, where there were colonies of Basques that had settled there centuries ago. It is precisely in Argentina where a group of players of *xistera* invented the *cesta-punta*. One of them,

² From “This is jai-alai” (1988) documentary film: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FSn5cAXx1rY.
Melchor Guruceaga, injured his arm and adapted the device to be able to continue playing. At first, people criticized this new game for holding back the ball too much. In fact, the traditional game of xistera was beginning to be called joko-garbi (fair play), as opposed to the new game of cesta-punta, which became very popular despite the reluctance and allegations of foul play that fell on it.

The success of cesta-punta was such that, in the second decade of the 20th century, there were frontons with cross betting in Mexico, Cuba, Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, Brazil, Italy, Holland, France, Egypt, and China. Victorian morality, which prevailed in the US at that time, turned the attempts to introduce the game into a failure. Dominant values such as austerity and redemption through work did not fit well with gambling, understood as greedy and irrational. First San Francisco (1901) and then New York (1902), Saint Louis (1904), Miami (1924), Chicago, New Orleans, and other major cities failed to carry out projects to implement the game until betting was legalized in some states in 1934.

However, the success of the game in Cuba and Mexico, with several highly profitable frontons in each country, made several entrepreneurs insist on implementing it, mainly in Florida. The Second World War prompted a sharp increase in Florida’s population, which had very positive implications for jai-alai. By the early 1940s, Florida — hitherto the least-populated southern state — was host to important naval and air bases of the US Army, as well as to shipyards and arms factories. Hospitals and convalescent homes were built there for the war-wounded. The war industry, which generated the strongest economic growth in US history, also brought professional staff of all kinds, as well as manual laborers, to Florida. This, together with the burgeoning post-war tourist industry, led to the opening of several jai-alai frontons in the 1950s (Dania, Tampa, West Palm Beach, and Daytona).

Another political event that helped to foster the spread of jai-alai in Florida and ensure its success was the Cuban revolution of 1959. In the years following Castro’s rise to power, around 200,000 Cubans — many of them wealthy — emigrated to the US, with most choosing to settle in Miami. The Cubans were familiar with jai-alai, which had been widely played on the island for the previous fifty years, and they were quite prepared to visit American frontons in order to indulge their passion for gambling, which was banned by the Castro regime in Cuba. Thenceforth, and until the late ’80s, jai-alai flourished to an extent almost unimaginable for a foreign sport; though it never took
root as an American sport, the sixteen professional frontons operating in America by the late 70s were filled to capacity every day.

The Industry of Jai-alai

The 15-minute documentary “This is Jai-alai” shows the success of jai-alai and, at the beginning, does not differ from an advertising report that aims to attract audiences to a business that, until that moment, generated around 50 million dollars per fronton per year. From the ninth minute onwards, however, seen from the context of the conflict presented in this article, the data reveal a hidden intention. A voice over explains how the business is managed. It tells us how bonuses are paid to players who win championships at the end of the season, and future contracts depend on the year’s performance, stressing top-level competitiveness in jai-alai, where “maximum effort is not only required but demanded” (00:09:18-00:09:22). It also details the mechanism of an industry that provides “thousands of jobs and valuable tax money to the state coffers” (00:09:28-00:09:33). The voice over insists on control over earned money, and stresses the collaboration between the state and a private company, claiming that jai-alai “is one of the leading industries in Florida, and one of the most popular attractions for tourists and locals alike” (00:09:48-00:09:55).

In 1975, Miami Jai-Alai recorded a record entry of 15,000 spectators in a single day, and between 1976 and 1977 Connecticut opened three frontons: Hartford, Bridgeport, and Milford, raising $470,979 in bets at the latter on its inauguration (May 5, 1977). In the state of Connecticut, jai-alai became “the largest single component of the state gambling industry, and the most troubled” (Rosenberg), affected by several scandals, including the murder of its owner, Roger Wheeler, in 1981. This circumstance led to a 20% drop in revenues in the early 80s, which recovered and even increased in the middle of the decade. Therefore, with small ups and downs, since 1950 jai-alai had become one of the major betting businesses and an important source of state revenues. “Of each dollar bet, 82 cents returns to the bettor, one cent goes to the city, 5.75 cents to the state and 11.25 cents to the owner” (Rosenberg). Frontons also got benefits from parking and food and liquor concessions.

In the late 80s, the business of jai-alai was at historic highs. According to the data of the Association of Racing Commissioners International collected in the 1994 Statistical Abstract of the United States, the activity of the jai-alai activity between 1980 and 1987 increased
by more than 30% in games, the number of spectators, and money wagered. In 1980, 25,439 games were played, with almost 4 million spectators and 35 million dollars of benefit in government taxes. In 1987, 38,476 games were played, with more than 6.5 million spectators, and a volume of bets of 707.5 million dollars, of which $51 million went to government taxes. Each fronton earned about $80 million a year, and spent about 1.5 million to pay the salaries of the players.

The Bridgeport fronton, where the conflict between players and owners began, used a standard contract that was unchanged since the time the fronton opened in 1976. Salaries ranged between about $20,000 for the lowest paid player to about $37,000 for the highest paid player. These figures do not include potential prize money, which depends upon the player’s level of play, but does include an estimated bonus, which was based on the amount of money wagered during the season. The bonus was estimated to be worth about $11,000 for the six-month season.

The average monthly salary in Spain at that time was about $800, and the price of rental housing was about $200. The purchase of an average flat in the towns from which the majority of players came did not exceed $20,000. Taking into account that the players paid average rent in the US of $900 divided between three or four people, and that they had to pay and repair the baskets (about $400 a month), each jai-alai player saved $10,000 on average per season.

Despite being a short career, with an average of fifteen years as professional and ten years in the United States, becoming a jai-alai player offered an economic and social status unattainable for most young Basques. In 1988, only half of 28-year-old Spanish youths were independent in domestic terms (Requena). While the average time to pay for a flat was twelve years, most of the jai-alai players could do it in two or three years. Having a house in one’s hometown, another one in a summer vacation town, and a sports car was commonplace for a player under 30 who was working in the US in the late 80s.

Nevertheless, jai-alai players felt unhappy about the contracts, which consisted of a simple oath that appealed to the honor of the players and included promising and made them pledge, among other things, “to refrain from participating in strikes and disturbances of any kind of nature” (Nations 7). The same contract allowed the company to terminate the deal at any time and for any external reason that forced them to suspend the game. Players were in the dark about the renewal of their contract until the end of the season, when they were individually called to the general manager’s office.
The jai-alai players had requested to change the system of recruitment on numerous occasions during the history of jai-alai in the US. The fronton owners, however, refused to do so. The system of recruitment, individual and by season, gave them absolute control over the players, most of them foreigners, who felt they were in a “situation of permanent insecurity. Only by maintaining a good level of play did they have a chance to stay, when curiously it was the game system per quinielas which gave less chance to improve their game.3 Thus, new shipments of players arrived every year and, of course, the remittances of dismissed workers were also annual” (González Paniego 91).

The 1968 Strike

Jai-alai players’ insecurity, their “condition of foreign workers, and a type of industrial exploitation of the sport oriented to the economic benefit of the entrepreneur” (González Paniego 83), was aggravated by the strike of 1968, a milestone in the consciousness of future generations. At the end of the 1968 season, the jai-alai players returned to their homes in the Basque Country, and threatened their employers with not coming back the next season if they did not improve their working conditions. Empowered by the fact that the business was based on their performance, players requested salary increases, better insurance, and a percentage of the amount of money wagered (González Paniego 86). Jai-alai was also going through one of its golden ages. The frontons, all of them in Florida, were filled up on a daily basis. Stars of cinema, athletes, and politicians occupied the stands, and were photographed with the players. People asked for the players’ autographs at the exit of the fronton. After the closing of the Cuban jai-alai frontons, those in Florida also attracted the best players, many of them accustomed to more favorable working conditions than in the USA.

The players, recognized figures in both Florida and the Basque Country, considered that it was not possible to start a new season without them, and trusted that the fronton owners would yield to their demands. However, the owners sent the same old offer to the players, with the threat of not renewing the contract of employment, and with it the entry visa to the United States, to those who did not accept it. The players stood firm, and the businessmen took a plane to the Basque Country,

3 The game system per quinielas was imposed in US in order to offer quick resolutions and stimulate betting. It comprises a round robin in which the winner of the point stays on the pitch, and a third player enters. For players accustomed to play long matches this system gives no time to get inside the game.
where they began to hire inexperienced young players to replace the best figures in the world. Buddy Berenson, one of the most prominent owners of jai-alai, admitted in the documentary “Jai-Alai Blues” (2015) that the public did not notice the difference. The frontons continued operating all out, and the owners kept control of the situation without making any concession to the players.

All those who did not accept the conditions of the owners did not play in the American frontons until six years later, when one of their mates, Ricardo Sotil Lasa, already as foreman, recovered some of those who were still active for the new fronton in Bridgeport. The opening of three jai-alai frontons in Connecticut started a new golden age of jai-alai.

The Economy of Ethnicity

The documentary “This is jai-alai” echoes this splendor, showing fans of different sexes, ethnicities, and ages, expressing the fascination for the speed and drama of the game. It also exhibits the facilities of the frontons, which have thousands of seats, betting boxes, restaurants, and even shops. Legendary players of the sport like Txurruka, Tximela, Orbea, and Guillermo are listed in a sequence I want to highlight here. “World Jai-Alai has a legacy of greatness,” explains the voice over, “and to continue that into the future, World Jai-Alai maintains an extensive player training program in Spain, France, and even the United States.” At that moment, the documentary shows a map of the United States superimposing upon the two European countries. The image represents the message we consider central in the documentary, and anticipates the great concern of Jai-alai owners at that time: the fact that 90% of the jai-alai players were Basques.

During the production of this documentary, most of the players were on strike to obtain labor improvements, especially the right of association, denied by the companies. The frontons managed to remain open with difficulties. The sessions were filled with replacement players, who were considered scabs, and there were daily picket lines at the entrances of the frontons. The documentary omits this circumstance, and continues to state that, thanks to the schools of the World Jai-Alai in the US, several American players were, at that moment, performing at the maximum level. By interspersing images of training of children with sets of the local figures, it declared that the Americans were bringing a revolution to the old Basque sport, “challenging the Basques in their own game, and winning. It is now evident that the American Jai-Alai players are here to stay.”
This appeal to the nationalistic feelings of the spectator and possible consumer of jai-alai concealed the reality that truly worried owners: there were not enough local players to replace the Basques. During the half-century since jai-alai settled in the United States, fronton owners had not bothered to root the sport among the local population and, when problems arose, they realized that most of the players were still Basques. Jai-alai owners had given priority to their economic interests, hiring foreign players in conditions that would hardly be accepted by local workers.

From the 1968 strike on, the players felt trapped in a double bind (Bateson et al.). What they considered to be the only way to stay active, to play well, no longer ensured a place for the following year. The feeling that the fronton owners could arbitrarily replace even the most emblematic figures if they caused problems or were too expensive made the players feel trapped by a system that, on the one hand, paid them well and, on the other, kept them in permanent job instability. It was only necessary that this feeling of mistreatment would find ideological sediment that would provoke a joint and well-organized action by the players. The socialist and revolutionary ideas of the nationalist left wing, which became the majority creed of the Basque youth in the 70s, offered the discursive and practical framework for this to happen.

**Struggle as An Ethical Model**

In 1968, when the first of the two most severe jai-alai strikes in the US was called, in the Basque country, the political-military organization *Euskadi ta Askatasuna* (Basque Homeland and Freedom), known by the acronym ETA, committed its first deadly attack. Constituted in 1959, ETA’s primary goal was to create an independent Basque state apart from Spain and France.

ETA, whose armed activity ceased in 2011, marked not only Spanish politics but became an influential social phenomenon in the Basque Country. The repression directed by the Franco regime toward everything that could constitute a Basque differential identity, primarily the Basque language Euskera, generated a nationalistic conscience which “did not need to refer to some mythical age, given that repressed social life itself was experienced as foundational, as a founding myth. As social life was experienced as foundational, so the nation was framed as a symbolic project, both national and social, for future generations” (Perez-Agote xxi). “Moderate” Basque nationalism capitalized on the emotional and symbolic fusion between the lived project and the
national construction at the democratic elections. The nationalistic left wing related to ETA, however, mobilized the youth and controlled not only the street and the social movements, but also the discourses around revolutionary being and struggle as a way of life. This dominant ideology attracted thousands of young people, some of whom dedicated their lives to armed struggle. The rest, although not directly related to the violence of ETA, considered that option legitimate. Until the late 1980s, when social support for ETA’s actions began to decline, a vast majority of young people subscribed to the political and moral ideals of the nationalistic left wing: Spain was the black beast to fight, and egalitarianism and communalism were the axes of action to face capitalist infamy.

In this context, several strikes occurred in the jai-alai in the US during the 1970s, most of them placated with wage increases. However, the generations of players were changing, and what was paradise for those from the 50s and 60s became a jail for those from the 70s and 80s. For the former, jai-alai meant leaving a country that was economically depressed and repressed by the dictatorship and its conservative Catholic morality. They made a lot of money and lived far from the family and the social control of the small towns from which most of them came. In the US, they enjoyed greater sexual freedom, and every summer returned to the Basque Country, exoticized and flush with money. They could also speak their language freely and without fear of reprisals and, although they had to march to the rhythm of a bullfighting pasodoble — a typical Spanish song — every time they went out on the court, the freedom they enjoyed compensated them.

The feeling of privilege began to decline with the generations that came from the mid-70s and especially during the 80s. For them, the pasodoble became a real martyrdom. Although it is not possible to speak about a clear and dominant ideology among the jai-alai players, the political conflict in the Basque country affected the fight for their rights. They were not only influenced by the moralizing discourses and the forms of struggle, but the players also felt that they were losing out on something while staying in the USA, and they did not feel the same motivation to emigrate as the previous generations. The dictator Franco was dead, and the revolutionary feeling mobilized most of the youth. The archetype of the young Basque, previously incarnated by the pelota player, was now incarnated by the borrokalari, the fighter. The hero was no longer the man who excelled in the fronton, in the town’s plaza, but the man who took to arms, the one who figuratively fought
in the mountains or the streets for the freedom of Euskal Herria, the Basque people. Euskal Herria called its young people in line, and many of them felt uncomfortable for not coming to their homeland’s call. As the “Kalera, Kalera” (“To the streets”), a song which was clandestinely composed in the late 70s and was part of a repertoire of vindication and appeal to the revolutionary struggle that people sang in unison at traditional fiestas and gatherings of all kinds, states:

Altxa begiak, zabaldu orok
deidadarra lagunari
berroko izanen gaituk libre
indar emanaz iraultzari.

Kalera, kalera, borrokalari kalera,
kalera, kalera, borrokalari kalera,
hire indarraren beharra dia gu
gure indarrarekin batera
hire indarraren beharra dia gu
gure indarrarekin batera.

Zai dago ama, zai aita
zai andre ta lagunak
hator, hator Euskadira,
hator, hator etxera.

Look up, transmit
the call to your comrade,
We will be free again
Giving strength to the revolution.

To the street, to the street, to the street, fighter,
To the street, to the street, to the street, fighter,
We need your strength
Next to ours,
We need your strength
Next to ours.

Your mother awaits you, your father awaits you,
Your wife and your friends are waiting for you
Come, come to Euskadi,
Come, come home.

Joseba Zulaika points out that “anyone actively engaged in Basque culture and politics could not receive more honorable entitlement than being a burrukalari” (183). The *borroka* or *burruka* (fight), along with the *joko* (game) form of polarized competitive frames in which most Basque men are socialized, is “crucially relevant for understanding people’s political outlook and for describing the generation of the ongoing violence” (Zulaika 169). If *burruka* refers to a spontaneous struggle between young men, *joko* “is a competitive game, one in which two or more opponents confront one another with a single objective: to win” (González Abrisketa 169). Almost always linked to a bet, in Basque games there is no place for a tie: the outcome always has to offer a definitive and conclusive result. The disjunctive or mutual exclusion approach, involving both *burruka* and *joko*, leaves no room for plural arrangements or mediating elements. One has to win. The other loses.

The jai-alai players knew that a struggle in antagonistic and disjunctive terms could only have disastrous consequences for them. The “we or they” logic of the *burrukas* between foreigners and locals in
the town’s fiestas and the “neither...nor...” logic of the independence discourse was not translatable to a context in which all the parties were indispensable and were obliged to reach an agreement. The functioning of the jai-alai industry needed them all. However, the events quickly led to polarized reasoning in which each side became the other’s enemy.

**The Jai-alai Trial**

The “Jai-alai Trial” was the title of a three-page document that, on February 7, 1988, Pedro Olarreta read to his fellows of the Bridgeport’s roster, and sent to the rest of the jai-alai frontons to start the struggle for their rights as workers. The document begins by recalling the spectacular and beautiful nature of a game which spread throughout the world, and then immediately appeals to the “severe crisis that this sport undergoes today, and its difficulties facing the future,” which he relates to the immorality of betting. Olarreta considers that the player is unhappy, and that the “conformist nonconformity of the pelota player shows his lack of improvement in this severely damaged sport.” Remembering the 1968 strike, he criticizes the commercialization of the game, with nine weekly functions and eleven months of play a year, which translates into the lack of respect towards the player, and his reduction to a mere number for the viewer.

In the letter posted to the players, he encourages them to recognize the decadence of the game, to look to the future, to meet, to establish statutes, and to carry out a collective action — thereby breaking the contract — to force the owners to improve their situation. Finally, Pedro Olarreta sets a deadline for his demands:

> From February 15, I start to reduce my food, and on the 20th, I declare myself on indefinite hunger strike. By the last day of the month, all contracts have to be broken, and on day 1, we must be paid double. Otherwise, we will not go out to play.

Despite the fact that no direct affiliations can be established between the jai-alai players and the left-wing movement in the Basque Country, this call for mobilization includes elements that remind us of appeals and modes of vindication linked to the armed struggle (*Borroka armatua*). On the one hand, the document differentiates the honesty of the players from the immorality of the betting, and by metonymical extension of the fronton owners who stimulate it and the public that only comes to jai-alai seeking to win money. This Manichean analysis of jai-alai recalls
the purely antagonistic ethos that is typical of the Basque political framework. In Joseba Zulaika’s words, “Once a worldview split into positive and negative, sticking stubbornly to the positive side becomes imperative” (183). The conviction of being in possession of a clear moral superiority promotes these scenarios of polarization, in which agreement is hardly attainable.

On the other hand, the reference to the hunger strike in the document seems to be out of context, but it becomes very understandable if we relate it to the political process in Euskadi. At the end of the 1980s, hunger strikes were frequent methods of protest by ETA prisoners against penitentiary policies both in Spain and France, but they were minorities in the context of labor struggles such as jai-alai’s. Pedro Olarreta’s threat of starting a hunger strike, a form of struggle that responds traditionally to a situation of political repression, demonstrates the influence that the Basque conflict had on the imagination of the jai-alai players.

However, the most significant expression of cultural idiosyncrasy is the ultimatum Pedro Olarreta puts forward at the end of the document: a claim that any Basque would qualify as an hordago. An hordago is the voice used in the card game called mus to make a definite bet of all or nothing. Unlike the progressive accumulation of points, the hordago allows winning the game in a single play. If the opponent accepts the hordago, this involves putting the cards in the open to see who has the winning play and therefore wins the game. In his analysis of the cultural models that made armed struggle possible, Joseba Zulaika considers the hordago as a key model for understanding the mentality that sustained Basque political violence.

What mus teaches Basque men for hours on end is the premise that marking the result of a gradual process can always be offset by the economy of an hordago. By allowing hordago solutions, mus assumes that sudden, partial, arbitrary acts are more decisive than the progressive summation of a process (178).

The mus, universally played in the Basque country, was a leisure activity that jai-alai players enjoyed in the long free hours during their stays in the US. Pedro Olarreta knew that an hordago is only thrown to gain time before a game that is almost lost, or when you have a winning play that the opponent does not expect. Otherwise, an hordago at the wrong time can ruin the game. The demand for a doubling of the salary, something that the fronton owners would have never accepted,
indicates that Pedro Olarreta had the first option in mind. He throws an unacceptable hordago to gain time and measure the opponent’s forces.

**The Events of 1988**

What Pedro Olarreta did not expect was the almost unanimous agreement of the players. 97% of them adhered to the document, modifying some of its parts. However, Pedro Olarreta did not begin a hunger strike, and on the recommendation of Olarreta himself, he was the only one that broke the contract. Moreover, the doubling of the salaries was no longer mentioned beyond the first document. Once a certain unity of action was evident, the only explicit request of the jai-alai players was the recognition of the IJAPA. On March 7, 1988, the IJAPA wrote to the companies claiming recognition on the basis that a majority of players had signed authorization cards.

The company replied in a letter, dated March 10, 1988, stating:

Bridgeport Jai-Alai, Inc absolutely refuses to recognize any so-called ‘association’ that claims to represent our players. You call this group an ‘association’. What you really mean is that you are trying to form a union. You also know as well as I do that any players who signed ‘authorization’ cards did so without a full, complete knowledge of the facts. I question whether anyone explained to them the full legal significance of their signatures, or of the serious disadvantages of union membership. We put no credence in those cards. Aside from assuring you that we will use any and all legal means to resist this union, we have nothing further to discuss. Any other communications should be directed to our attorneys.

This was the position held by the companies from the beginning to the end of the conflict. They refused to accept that the players had already formed into an association. American businessmen, probably accustomed to the arbitrariness of labor rights in Franco’s Spain, and with the experience of absolute control and impunity that this gave them in the strike of 1968, failed to understand that things had changed. They felt that the savages who they had helped “to descend from the mountains” had now merely another outburst of rebellion, which could be solved by asserting authority.

On February 29, when the jai-alai players were still playing, Bridgeport General Manager, Paul Weintraub, according to his testimony, had “a meeting with the players to clear the air” (Nations 11). He questioned
the association, calling it “a fancy way of saying ‘union’,” and told the players that “forming a union — or ‘association’ — would be among the worst things that ever happened to this fronton.” The rejection of the IJAPA by the fronton owners was surprising, taking into account that the rest of the jai-alai workers — pari-mutuel clerks, restaurant and lounge employees, ushers, cleaners, and others — had been affiliated with unions since 1977.

Weintraub considered the association useless because each player had already signed written contracts negotiated with them. These contracts had not changed for decades. The players’ attorney, Robert Cheverie, called them “yellow dog” contracts, outlawed since the 1930’s, and it is evident in the JD-280-89 ruling that they contained abusive clauses, including an oath pledging the players to refrain from going on strike. These provisions were contrary to the legal frameworks of the time, and infringed on one of the fundamental rights of workers: their right to form a union, and to go on strike which, according to previous case law, was the only means workers had to fight against bosses’ threats and abuses of power.

In the case of jai-alai, the impunity with which fronton owners threatened the players with layoffs, deportation, replacement, and other punitive measures became obscene. On March 24, after 92% of jai-alai players in the US responded to the threats with a strike authorization vote, Weintraub posted a note on the players’ bulletin board leaving a written record of the threats, and including a new one: “a possible lawsuit for damages against any player refusing to play.”

This new threat was formulated, in the Judges’ opinion, “to restrain employees in their exercise of Section 7 rights to form a union and to go on strike.” However, the players did not know the laws, and feared reports to all that refused to play, since, in their contracts, it was expressly indicated that they could not initiate a strike. Pedro Olarreta had been sued for breach of contract. In fact, he had been the first jai-alai player in history to be reported, and decided to leave the US at the end of March. Fear of denunciation was compounded by the fear of expulsion from the country, a ghost that had been hovering since the 1968 strike, when all the players had to remain in the Basque country because the company did not process their visas. Without an employment that called for the H-1 visa, the person was subject to deportation. However, in the 1970’s the immigration law was changed, and the change allowed striking aliens to remain in the country throughout the duration of a strike if a strike certification was obtained.
Tension grew as jai-alai companies issued threats, and players demanded fidelity to their comrades. In April, the baskets of one of the Bridgeport jai-alai players who was outside of the association were found broken, and the company blamed the rest of the players. In the Newport jai-alai, the company had told its players to bring back their airline tickets, and access to the fronton had been restricted when they wore their union hats and T-shirts. In Tampa, World Jai Alai suspended a player wearing a union hat. In Hartford, a newcomer did not get a contract because he joined the Union. Something similar happened in Orlando, where a contract was not given to a player because he was an officer of the Union. In Florida, players were being transferred from one location to another, and they were interrogated. Faced with this climate of tension in the frontons, the IJAPA representatives decided to go on strike.

Bringing the Deep Game to a Close

The strike was called on April 14. Only three players remained, one of them a figure from the 1968 strike. On April 15, Weintraub, the Bridgeport general manager, sent a letter to all the players stating that they were to be replaced as quickly as possible, and asked the responsible players not to listen to the union leaders, and to go to the fronton to play. Companies searched everywhere to find replacements. Everyone who owned a cesta (basket) was allowed on the fronton’s court for a tryout. By April 20, Bridgeport reopened the fronton with 35 players characterized as permanent replacements. The fronton was again closed on April 25 by the Connecticut Division of Special Revenue for public safety reasons. Strikers remained at the entrance of the fronton with banners preventing the public from entering the interior.

A couple of years earlier, in a strike of pari-mutuel employees, the state refused to issue licenses to replacement workers. In the case of the jai-alai players, however, the state reconsidered its prior ruling, and decided to allow the company to reopen on June 16 with replacement players. The fronton ran until its assigned closing date of June 25. Bridgeport Jai-Alai Inc. extended a contract to the players for the 1989 season. Thirty-seven of these contracts were signed by replacement players, and only three by previously striking players.

On June 30, the IJAPA made an unconditional offer to return to work, which the company responded to on September 6, stating that they did not recognize the association as the bargaining agent of anyone at Bridgeport Jai Alai. The company sent individual letters to
seventeen players, the more active ones, telling them that permanent replacements had been hired in their positions, and no openings were available to them at this time. However, they would place their name on a preferential rehiring list if they were interested. The remaining players on strike (22) were sent a letter informing them that a job was presently available for them at the fronton.

All of the players on strike responded that they would accept employment. However, they did not come in, and were replaced about two weeks before the season started. The players were contacted again, and were explained that the company would delete any mention of strikes, concerted activity, and conspiracy from the contracts, so that nothing “should be construed to limit or infringe in any way on any rights you may have under law to engage in lawful, protected, concerted activity.”

Three players of forty crossed the picket line in that moment, none of them Basque. The strikers sent out another unconditional offer to return to work. The company again denied that the IJAPA had the authority to speak for any Bridgeport player. Players insisted on talking to the contractors as an association, but the companies rejected the idea and insisted on talking to them as individuals.

On November 28, 1989, Bridgeport Jai-Alai Inc., was sentenced for engaging in unfair labor practices that provoked the strike. The judges ordered its officers, agents, successors, and assigns to desist from threatening that they would never recognize the union, from requiring its players to sign illegal clauses, from refusing to offer reinstatement and to continue the salaries, as well as four more commands. Moreover, as a remedy, the company had to reinstate all players to their former positions, and pay all their salaries and bonuses with interest.

The company appealed the ruling, and the strike lasted until April 14, 1991, when the parties reached an agreement. The companies recognized the IJAPA, and Bridgeport Jai-Alai Inc. reinstated the players and paid them $120,000 each. They distributed the money based on the months each of them was in the picket line. Some of them had maintained the protests on a daily basis throughout three years, even in the winter of Connecticut. Others had left the struggle, and returned to the Basque Country. Everyone was tired, including the spectators. They had to confront the picket line at the entrance of the frontons every time they went to jai-alai. Furthermore, in the court, the players were much worse than the ones whom they had previously become accustomed to. In addition to that, there were new opportunities for betting, with faster resolution and greater prizes.
In October 1988, Native Indians were granted the right to open betting shops and casinos on their reservations, while, at the same time, the state lottery started up. The world of gambling expanded and diversified, while American businessmen and Basque pelota players were engaged in their own particular deep game.

Currently, two frontons offer games throughout the year: the legendary Miami Jai Alai, and the Dania Beach Jai Alai, which recently turned part of the large stadium into rooms with slot machines. They are unlikely ever to be reused for jai-alai. In the event of a change of the legislation that now protects jai alai in Florida, the Basque players who are still in America would have to return home, bringing the history of jai alai in the United States to a close.

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Baseball Nationalism from “the South:”
Dominican Baseball
and the Use of Nationalist Rhetoric

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Abstract: Sport and expressions of nationalism go hand-in-hand. In looking at political and cultural relations between the global North and South, we have to see them as iterations of centuries of ruthless extraction of human toil and resources by wealthy European and American overlords. But, in the sanitized language of contemporary international sporting bodies and their corporate presentation of self it is difficult to see the neo-colonial relations at work. They continue, however, just below the surface. This study of the relationship between Major League Baseball and the Dominican baseball scene looks at the continued efforts of the former to “mine” talent as cheaply as in that past. In the face of growing power and resistance from below, however, American hegemony that operates so successfully in other areas of Dominican economy and culture, are, in this sport being challenged. I show how an unregulated sector of the Dominican baseball world has wrested control of young talent and is attempting to change the power dynamics in the sport. There are other political and economic changes—some planned, and others unintended going on as well, and they all indicate growing Dominican presence couched in the nationalism of resistance.

Key words: Theory-from-the-South, political-economy, commodity chains, buscónes, unintended consequences.

Resumen: Los deportes y las expresiones de nacionalismo van juntos. Al fijarnos en las relaciones políticas y culturales globales entre el Norte y el Sur estamos obligados a ver las repeticiones históricas de siglos de extracción del trabajo y recursos humanos por los ricos caciques americanos y europeos. Pero es difícil ver el funcionamiento de las relaciones neo-coloniales en el lenguaje aséptico de la relaciones internacionales de las organizaciones deportivas y sus presentaciones corporativas; continúan, sin embargo, justo bajo la superficie. El estudio de las relaciones entre la Liga Mayor de Béisbol y la situación del béisbol en la República Dominicana se fija en los esfuerzos continuados de la primera para “minar” el talento de una forma tan barata, como ya sucedió en el pasado, pero enfrentándose a un poder de resistencia de abajo cada vez mayor. Sin embargo, ante este poder y la creciente resistencia que viene de abajo, la hegemonía americana, que funciona con tanto éxito en otras áreas de la economía y
la cultura dominicanas, se ve cuestionada a través de este deporte. En este artículo se hace evidente cómo un sector no regulado del mundo del béisbol dominicano se ha hecho con el control del talento joven y está intentando cambiar la dinámica de poder de este deporte. También están ocurriendo otros cambios políticos y económicos —algunos planificados, otros no buscados— que indican una acentuada presencia dominicana que se expresa en el nacionalismo de la resistencia.

**Palabras clave:** Teoría desde el Sur, economía política, cadenas de las mercancías, buscones, consecuencias no buscadas.

Nationalism in Dominican baseball is commonplace yet unique. As we see every four years in the World Cup and the Olympic Games, sport and nationalism fit easily together. Dominican baseball offers us a closer look at nationalism to show that it is linked to agency and opportunity. In my analysis, I show that nationalist discourse is a primary weapon used by a group of Dominicans who develop players (buscónes), and who have gained control of the nation’s supply of young, unsigned talent. This has come about in the face of every effort by Major League Baseball (MLB) to undermine these people and return Dominican baseball to a neo-colonial relationship. A political-economic analysis allows me to detail the transnational system that has emerged in finding and developing players for MLB. While there is a system at work, unintended consequences occur when individuals and groups try to gain access to a system that either excludes or seeks to control them.

In my examination of Dominican baseball, Jean and John Comaroff’s (“Theory”) treatment of “Theory from the South” provides a valuable framework. For the Comaroff’s, “… ‘the Global South’ assumes meaning by virtue not of its content, but of its context, of the way in which it points to something else in a field of signs — in this instance, to its antinomy to ‘the Global North,’ an opposition that carries a great deal of imaginative baggage congealed around the contrast between centrality and marginality, kleptocracy and free-market democracy, modernity and its absence” (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2012). In this iteration, the “Global South” lends itself to a form of nationalism that is relational. It is also the descendent of earlier theories. Call it: Dependency Theory 3.0; Imperialism revisited; neo-colonialism surgically augmented. What I mean is, that for almost 500 years scholars have been studying North-South relations as they have morphed into ever more nuanced systems, but the essence is unchanged. It is a relationship founded upon and fueled by the unquenchable thirst for resources, labor, and riches by those more rapacious from those less able to stop them.
Until fairly recently the Global South has borne this burden inaudibly. I say “inaudibly” rather than mutely because we in the North rarely hear of their resentment or about their responses unless it requires military intervention. But on the streets, and in homes and shops of the developing world it is expressed daily, audible to all. In using the notion of ‘theory from the South’ we are centering our examination at the local level-adopting the vantage point of the subaltern, and extending the notion of “grounded theory.” In this way, “Big Theory” is appropriate because it gets retrofitted so that every norm, rule, pronouncement etc. is translated from the language of the dominant into back alley speak (Scott 2012).

For Dominicans, just about everything is filtered through their relationship with the US, prompting the oft stated quip, “Americans cough, and we get pneumonia.” Despite the US coming into the country after the Spanish, Haitians, and Cubans, American domination has been the most thorough going. The Dominican Republic (referred here also as DR) would have been an American protectorate had the American Congress swung a few more votes in that direction when Dominican President Buenaventura Baez in 1869, lobbied the US Congress to officially annex his country. President Grant supported him, and the measure was only narrowly defeated. That willingness to become an extension of the US gained traction by the chronic indebtedness of the Dominican government, a situation that in 1903 allowed the American owned San Domingo Improvement Company to take over the administration of the Dominican Republic’s national customs revenues as security on the loans taken. The Roosevelt Corollary in 1904 (furthering the Monroe Doctrine), many argue was directly targeted at the DR. Two US military occupations (1916-24; 1965-66) followed. The result of all this is that American control and Dominican acceptance of it has gone unchallenged. One of the only exceptions to this has been developing in the relationship between Major League Baseball (MLB) and the Dominican baseball world.

The following is a sport study of baseball in the Dominican Republic, but it is built upon a contest for political and economic control over Dominican baseball resources of their sport. American enterprises operating in places such as this are accustomed to foisting their laws and conventions onto others. The relative civility in political and legal transactions often mask unbending economic goals that Americans bring to the table. For the most part, Americans go unchallenged, but when confronted it is often in nationalist terms. What I am arguing for in this
examination is that discourse, while dramatic, without the requisite economic power is empty.

What’s been called “Third World nationalism” in post-colonial studies is very different from the kind of nationalism witnessed in the developed global north. The latter, assumes its preeminence, seeking to promote, defend, regain, and extend it. Third World nationalism, on the other hand, seeks the birth of its power, not usually an extension of it. Third World nationalism seeks sovereignty: to ensure that identities of Third World peoples are authored for the most part by themselves, not colonial powers. But, because post-colonial nations continue to “dance with the devil,” with their partners in the north, nationalism is forever being honed and made ready for use to resist foreign influences. Nationalism from the South is a language of outrage and is always expressed in relation to the alien host. Evo Morales’, for instance, nationalized Bolivian lithium production, an act that was framed in zero sum language. Bolivia rises to the degree that multinational corporations fall (Revette 2016). There’s a language for that that is informed by both indigeneity, and indignation. Dominican baseball is no different, and has long been a conduit for nationalist sentiment; and as the economics of the game became more contested, feelings of nationalism grew more overt and bold. Dominican baseball is built around its tendentious relationship with Major League Baseball (MLB), a relationship that officially goes back over 65 years. In its essence, American baseball interests have operated with the same arrogance, lack of local awareness, and expectation of compliance as other US interests. As a result, Dominicans use of nationalist rhetoric and discourse is not born out of convenience, rather it is essential—crafted out of common experience, and shared understanding of the foreign presence in their country.

Political-Economy and Nationalism of Dominican Baseball

Early Dominican Baseball

Baseball was brought to the DR during the last decades of the 19th century by Cubans looking to escape the wars for liberation in their country. Cuban brothers Ignacio and Ubalde Alomá immigrated to Santo Domingo in 1880 to ply their trade as ironworkers. By 1891 they began playing their game with teams made up of compatriots and a handful of Dominicans (Ruck, 1999: 5). In the interior, another Cuban, Doctor Samuel Mendoza y Ponce de León established the game
at La Vega at about the same time as the Alomás. Dominicans took
to the game quickly, playing it in both the Capital (Santo Domingo),
and rural sugar refinery towns, played among the educated elite as
well as working poor. Baseball rooted quickly, perhaps in part because
there wasn’t much of a sports pantheon in place. For the children of
the elite in the Capitol it was a sporting tradition based on modernity
and leisure that may have driven them. In the countryside, it was a
diversion from hard labor of cane cutting that fueled their desire to
play: that, and being rewarded by refinery managers (with time off)
for beating a neighboring refinery. Large fan bases, local heroes, loud
rivalries and lore soon followed (Ruck *ibid.;* Klein 1991).

The first decades of the 20th century saw Dominicans take on foreign
teams, but while well attended, these games generated only minimal
nationalist expression. The occupation of the Dominican Republic by
the US Marines from 1916-24, on the other hand, was a lightning rod
for Dominican nationalism. Fellito Guerra was highly acclaimed for
what he did on the mound, and as a patriot for what he didn’t do there.
After he dominated teams from Cuba and Puerto Rico his reputation
led to him being sought after by American teams to play for them. He
loudly refused them however, citing as the reason his opposition to
the occupation of his country by the US Marines. For that very public
decision, Dominican crowds hailed him wherever he went as their hero
and patriot. (Klein, *ibid.:* 20) Enrique (El Indio Bravo) Hernández was
another stalwart who pitched for Nuevo Club in the teens and 1920s.
His luster grew exponentially when he repeatedly beat American teams
from the U.S. Navy, in particular a no-hit, no-run game against a team
of Americans from the Navy cruiser, Washington. These victories took
place two years before the Marine occupation, but grew to legendary
portions once the Marines landed. During the U.S. Marine occu-
pation contests between Dominicans and U.S occupying forces con-
tinued but took on hostile tones. A 19-year-old Francisco Rodriguez,
playing for the legendary Licey team, prompted all of the DR to rejoice
when his home run in the ninth inning tied the score (Licey would
go on to win in the 10th) against a team of U.S. Marines. The Marines
had dismissed the Dominicans as, “Champions of nothing,” which
when leaked into the Dominican press, further enflamed hatred of the
U.S. forces. Nationalism and resistance were twin strands not easily
separable. The Occupation gave rise to a guerilla war in the eastern
provinces, but sporting contact led to as great or greater local interest
because the meta-warfare that comprises baseball was translated easily
into publicly performed spectacles of resentment: baseball nationalism as “engaged acrimony” (Klein 2017).

The Modern Era

Though both are built on resentment, the early expressions of nationalism in the game are quite different from what we have occurring in contemporary Dominican baseball. The game’s structure has changed completely from the early 20th century, and significantly from 1954, when the first Dominican, Ozzie Virgil got to the Major Leagues. In both of those eras there was no meaningful North American presence on the island. Back then, racial desegregation in baseball had only begun, and Cuba had for some time been an established center for Latin talent for major league teams. After the Cuban Revolution, and certainly once the Cuban Blockade was in place interest shifted slowly to the DR and Venezuela. Until the 1970s, however, Dominican prospects and player development was haphazard. (Klein 1991). “Bird dogs,” part time Dominican scouts, would alert any American scouts they knew if they saw someone of interest. Only a few teams heeded these calls enough to send someone to Santo Domingo to casually watch a player. MLB created a “working agreement” with Dominican baseball throwing a few coaches their way in exchange for using professional teams down there as repositories for anyone they wanted to develop in the off season. They forced Dominicans to play their game in the winter to accommodate MLB’s summer season— a clear indication of how little was thought about Dominican: “But, through the 1970s, increasing numbers of Dominicans were beginning to shine the major leagues,” and the first modern attempts to systematically “mine” players were established. They are called “baseball academies,” and initially they were crude, foreign outposts, relatively unconnected to U.S. operations. Their function was to sign Dominican players to professional contracts, and to develop and store them until they could be sent to play in the U.S.

The Los Angeles Dodgers and Toronto Blue Jays developed the first iterations of the baseball academy in the mid-to-late 1970s. Dodger head scout in the DR, Ralph Avila, worked tirelessly to build an infrastructure and relations between his upstart academy comprised of rented fields, a pensión, and part-time coaches, and established Dominican organizations (Dominican professional teams). He also worked to insulate his players as much as possible, removing them from other influences so that he might be able to give them the skills needed. In time, he convinced ownership to invest in the future, and Campo Las
Palmas was built in 1986, for the then extravagant sum of $400,000. It would be the state of the art facility for the next 15 years, and seal Avila’s legacy as a pioneering force in Dominican baseball. Avila’s aim was to protect Latin players who would have to journey abroad and face the daunting tasks of functioning in a foreign setting without the use of language, while continuing to develop and excel at baseball. Many baseball prospects failed miserably when sent to play in the U.S., not because of lack of skill, but because of culture shock. The academy he conceived of could deliver the language acquisition, cultural remediation, and baseball instruction. For the next few decades Campo Las Palmas did this better than any team in baseball. They had dorms, a cafeteria, medical care, full-time coaches, and two fields. Those who signed with the Dodgers were treated in ways that Dominicans rarely were—as professionals, traveling in style, meticulously uniformed, and seen by the rest of the country as baseball royalty.

Major League Baseball and its teams were by the late 1990s more firmly in control of Dominican baseball than ever before. All facets of the game (amateur and professional) were more strictly under control of MLB, a sober fact relayed by former Dominican Baseball Commissioner Luís Rosario, whose office is little more than a rubber stamp for MLB’s requirements, “This office should be able to defend cases, but...[MLB] is a monopoly, and it’s their monopoly. They’re the ones who govern the business and make the rules of the game. Those people take advantage of [our] poverty” (Klein 2014).

Unintended Consequences

But Avila’s academy would become part of something much more ambivalent. Unintended consequences, of the sort that Robert Merton wrote about would come to both heighten MLB’s influence and then to erode it. I will show, below, that the unintended consequence of the success of the baseball academy would allow a sector of Dominicans to emerge who would confront MLB, but first the academy system would blossom. The success of the academy system led to more teams replicating what the Dodgers had done, and that in turn, led to increased competition, more money being poured into baseball development. The economic attention being lavished on Dominican baseball by the 1990s meant that young players were increasingly scrutinized, and interfered with. Practices that Dominicans had forged during the decades that they were being ignored would now be subject to major league interference. I’ve examined this in terms of a “global commodity chain,” model, as
part of a neoliberal political-economic system that seeks to extend its
domination (Klein 2012).

Something went awry. As the numbers of Dominicans in the MLB
pipeline mushroomed, younger players who worked their way up the
amateur ranks of Dominican baseball began to bypass these local
leagues and head straight for the academies asking for tryouts. In the
late 1980s, I watched larger, and larger groups of youngsters (14-17
year olds) gather in front of the gates of Campo Las Palmas waiting to
be let in for a tryout. If this trend continued it would, I predicted, impact
the structural integrity of Dominican baseball, “...the organizational
presence of baseball academies run by major league franchises in the
Dominican Republic has fundamentally undermined the long-stan-
ding sovereignty of Dominican baseball” (Klein, 1991: 158). Without a
steady flow of youngsters, the amateur leagues would wither, but the
Dominican professional teams would be hurt as well. They had been
a feeder system for professional players in the DR and even American
minor leaguers to hone their skills in the winter. The academy system
hurt professional Dominican ball when it established its own league:
the Dominican Summer League (DSL). The DSL used its own players
(all signed rookies), and in short time grew to include all 30 major
league teams, and upwards of 1000 young signed professionals. The
academy system would in time short-circuit the flow of talent that had
fed major league teams, but by 2000 MLB was large and in charge. A
chain had developed better linking all parts of the Dominican Republic
with major league teams in North America.

(1) Major League Baseball.
(2) Minor League Baseball.
   AAA baseball;
   AA baseball;
   A baseball;
   Rookie Leagues.

North America
----------------- ----------------- ------------
Dominican Republic

(3) Dominican Baseball Academies.
   Dominican Summer Leagues.
(4) Developing Unsigned Young Players and Signing them with Teams.
Everything was predicated on keeping the flow of talent (#4 in the chain, above) coming and this piece of the chain was the only part not directly controlled by MLB. As noted, the weakening of Dominican amateur baseball threatened the flow. A stratum of unaffiliated part-time scouts emerged to fill this void. The buscón (Spanish buscar for one who searches) was the name they got. It was now these people upon whom major league baseball depended for young prospects.

The numbers of Dominicans had grown with each decade: 22 in the 1960s; 38 in the 1970s; 65 in the 1980s; 133 in the 1990s; 280 in the 2000s. At present, there are more Dominicans on Opening Day rosters in any year than there were during the entire decade of the 1980s. Hundreds of Dominicans play in the US Minor Leagues, and over a thousand in the Dominican Summer League that MLB also tags as a Minor League. Because of their position at the base of the chain, buscónes were taking a commanding position, and they were affecting the way North Americans were doing business in the DR. As Dominican players became the game’s most elite players signing bonuses began to skyrocket. Until roughly 2000, teams almost never paid more than $10,000 for a player (Hall of Fame pitcher Pedro Martínez signed for $7500 in 1988), but with increased numbers and rising excellence players were, by the late 1990s, beginning to command six and even seven figures. The profitability of MLB was being impacted. “Signing on the cheap,” (the euphemism for signing Latin American players) was being threatened, and the owners demanded that cost of talent be returned to what it had been. Buscónes were responsible for this. They were growing into full service operations. They found players, housed and fed them, cared for their families, and developed them for years before parading them before major league scouts. For this, they get a 30% commission of signing bonuses. Their indispensability, as the only men capable of securing the mushrooming numbers of young players now needed, was the source of their increased numbers and power. There emerging power was an unintended consequence of the academy system that saw them as anathema.

The buscónes were targeted by North American baseball as harmful to the game, and with the assistance of the North American media, MLB began depicting buscónes as Dickensian criminals, as in an ESPN Magazine piece, “A decade of scandals has spawned a sequel, a horror movie beset with villains called buscones: middlemen in a festering, corrupt hellhole who lie about players’ ages, keep them out of school, inject them with animal steroids, then take most of their signing
bonuses...” (Arangueré and Cyphers, 2003: 23). The term “Buscón” always had a connotation of being a swindler, and MLB pushed it. This characterization had the effect of painting all Dominicans in negative fashion however, “It always seems like it’s something in the Dominican [Republic]. Every year there is a new story, new problem or new controversy,” declared writers for Baseball America (Manuel and Kline, 2005: 3).

In demonizing Dominicans, we see how “theory from the South” works. Americans inability to grasp just how difficult it is for people in the Global South to “play by the rules,” furthers a view of the inferiority of the developing world. In the developing world, however, the infraction committed is not seen as a moral failing, but rather as an ethically rationalized choice fueled by caring for one’s family. Consider the following, “During the World Series my friend who scouts for the [major league team] got free tickets from the club because he works for them. He sold them for $2000, and when the team found out they fired him. [They said] he did something illegal. He said to me, ‘What am I gonna do? I could feed my family for three months with that money’” (Klein, 2014: 130). Northern rules are outweighed by the Southern morality of family.

Age and identity fraud is far and away the most frequently committed offence. An especially evocative case of this is that of a former Little League pitcher named Danny Almonte. (Klein, 2008; 2014). In 2001, Dominican Danny Almonte, had recently arrived in the Bronx and played on the local Little League team made up primarily of other Dominicans. That year, as a 12-year-old he threw the first no-hitter in 40 years of Little League World Series history, and Danny became a media darling. He followed that performance with two more overwhelming pitching performances, allowing only three hits in three games. In the media clamor, however, it was discovered that Danny Almonte was actually 14, a full year older than the rules allowed. His team was stripped of its victories, and the public soured on him. The case quickly became a flashpoint for nationalism.

The American media and public looked to fix blame, and it quickly fell on his parents. From the vantage point of the Global North, manipulating children in this way was a travesty, “.... adults have used Danny Almonte in a most contemptible and despicable way,” declared New York Times reporters (Mcfadden 2001). Even President George W. Bush weighed in, “I’m disappointed that adults would fudge the boy’s age” (ibid.). Americans saw the case as a scandal, but Dominicans
in the US and back home saw it differently. Dominicans grew angry at what they saw as anti-Dominican press. Hall of Fame pitcher Pedro Martínez, always a nationalist argued, “If he was from America, that kid would probably be ... getting a little medal from George Bush. Now all of a sudden because the kid’s from the Dominican, he’s not legal” (Hohler, 2001: 20). When Almonte’s team returned to the Bronx in disgrace, the players were greeted by thousands of Dominicans chanting, “Danny! Danny!” One boy carried a sign defiantly claiming, “12 or 14. So what?” Back in his hometown of Moca, people chanted in front of his mother’s house, “Doce, Doce [12, 12].” Even though the records showed conclusively that he was 14, his mother insisted he was 12, in a thumbing of the nose to what they felt was disrespect to their own. One teenage boy there, got to the core of the matter-circumventing regulations in order to move ahead in life, “I don’t care whether Danny changed his age. He’s still my hero. I would do it too if it [got] me to the major leagues” (McFadden 2001). The press turned its attention to Danny’s father claiming he was unfit to parent. How it was, they asked, that Danny had been in the US for so long without being enrolled in a Bronx school. Without hesitating, his father responded that Danny was “eating,” and “training,” to excel in baseball. Americans were speechless. Parental negligence, they concluded. But in the DR, the elder Almonte was doing what any good parent would do: give their child a chance to succeed by caring for him and giving him a leg up in the baseball world. The correlation between education and economic opportunity is poorly established in the Dominican Republic, making baseball a rational choice for parents looking to gain a better future for their children, a point not at all understood in the Global North with its strong correlation between education and opportunity (Klein 1991; 2014).

**Rules are made to be broken**

MLB, foreign interests, and even national governments use their operating standards, norms etc. in dealing with locals. For the working classes legitimacy and citizenship is what is at stake. Coerced to comply, locals have to find quasi-legal or illegal methods, yet when detected they get penalized and demonized. Buscónes and players devised ways to maximize their opportunities within the MLB’s restrictive regulations having to do with identity and age. If it was outside the legal bounds, the dire conditions that most faced daily still made it worth the risk.

As unrestricted foreign players, MLB regulations allow major league teams to sign players as young as 16 ½ years of age (if they will be 17
by the start of the next baseball season). July 2\textsuperscript{nd} is the date for these determinations and the offers teams make. By that date Buscónes have toured with their players, showcasing their talents to all interested teams. But MLB has also created a unique wrinkle, and only for Dominican Republic, in which players, independent of specific skills are at their most desirable at 16½. After that they begin to lose value with every month. A 17-year-old throwing at 92 mph is worth more than an 18-year-old doing the same; and the 18-year-old is worth more than 19-year-old doing the same. The system not only demands 16½ year olds, it penalizes those who are even the slightest bit older. No other sport views youthful players in this fashion, and it is a view that doesn’t exist back in North America where players aren’t even looked at seriously until about the age of 18. Dominicans have responded the way they always have, by circumventing the laws, in this instance by falsifying their birth records so that they are younger. “In a sociopolitical milieu where full citizenship rights were difficult to achieve, subject to recurrent verification and at risk of being diminished and even negated, much was at stake in whom people were believed to be,” argues Steven Gregory (2006: 121) in his study of Dominican tourism. As a result, “It was not uncommon for persons’ identities to be publicly in dispute, ambiguous and shot through with contradictions,” he concludes. Dominican pitcher, Joel Peralta, who pitched in the major leagues for 11 years, admitted he was 16½ when he signed, though he was actually 20. “I wish I never had to do that, but if I didn’t do it I wouldn’t be here! We don’t have the chance after [we] turn 18, 19 years old to become a professional ballplayer….in the United States, [players] can be drafted when they’re 22, they get a chance to play pro ball. We don’t have that. The only chance when you’re 20, like I was, to sign was to lie about my age” (Klein, 2014: 122). Buscónes are seen as responsible for this even though it is MLB that created the system that demands 16½ year olds.

The most famous of the Dominican player developers, or buscónes is Astín Jacobo. Dominican born, but raised in New York City, he returned to San Pedro de Macoris as a young man to develop players. As a transnational citizen, he is not only bilingual, but bicultural as well. He knows how and when to think like an American, and he is also not frightened by American attempts to intimidate. On the matter of blaming Dominicans for being corrupt and falsifying documents he points up how this system is rigged to penalize Dominicans and not others, “The Cuban can come into my country, and be 30 years old,
and they'll [MLB teams] give him all the money in the world. And our kids? Once he’s past 18, they don’t wanna give him a penny...When a Dominican’s 19, he’s old!” (Interview 8/5/2005) Jacobo has repeatedly refused to back down, and has drawn a select group of influential buscónes. Together they have met every challenge MLB has thrown at them, and the use of nationalism is their primary standard.

In Dominican-U.S. relations what Jacobo and company have been doing is rare. MLB has treated the Dominican Republic as its own neo-colonial private plantation, one that will not be encroached upon by other countries. There are at most only eight or nine nations that play the game at an accomplished enough level to supply MLB players (Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Canada, Japan, Korea, Taiwan). Small by comparison to FIFA. (Klein 2006). All are economically and politically subservient to MLB.

The Marine’s Again?

The string of scandals that involved Dominicans (age, identity, steroids) prompted MLB’s Commissioner to step in. In 2010, Commissioner Selig sent his second in command, Sandy Alderson to the “troubled” country to straighten matters out. Alderson was a former Marine infantry officer who had served in Vietnam, a Harvard law school graduate, with a wealth of baseball experience. He was a blend of no nonsense, intelligence, and experience; and he came into the DR with the hubris that often accompanies those traits. Within days of his arrival Alderson held a summit of sorts and the entire baseball establishment in that country attended (minus buscónes, who were not invited). He laid out the issue, “What we want to do is strengthen baseball in the Dominican Republic, maintaining the country as an attractive venue to sign players and try to eradicate the problems that have affected signings on the island” (DR Sol “MLB”). What he meant was: MLB has decided that the DR was filled with “problems;” that it used to be an “attractive venue” when major league teams could sign players cheaply, but has ceased to be; and we need to return to ‘cost effective’ spending. If these issues weren’t addressed, “…there are many people in the United States who understand that the Draft would be the best option,” Alderson threatened (ibid.) The Draft is the way players are selected in the US. It is tightly regulated by MLB, and it means both that Americans would “occupy” the baseball world (by running affairs) in the Dominican Republic, and buscónes would be eliminated. This was MLB’s way of
addressing the matter: defining the issue as problematic; locating it in the DR; and threatening the country with foreign occupation.

Those in attendance were silent. The Dominican media were split, some favoring MLB, others tepid in their opposition. Only the buscónes had the temerity to protest en mass. While the summit was going on in the Hotel Embajador, the most influential of the buscónes organized a hastily put together protest against MLB just outside. Jacobo and his colleagues brought their prospects with them and it was a large, noisy event, “we could have had a half a million people there because baseball is a Dominican passion, claimed one protestor (Nina).

Before we got to the Embajador, an anti-riot squad was set up to stop us from getting any closer. Very scary guys! A line of them were blocking our way and we stood confronting each other. A lieutenant came up to me and said, “Moreno (brown guy), I can’t let you go by.” And I said to him, “Listen, think like this is 1965, and what we’re doing here is defending our nation, our people...Do you have a son or nephew who plays baseball? You know that if MLB gets its away with what they’re trying to do in that hotel, your son will have lots of trouble becoming a ballplayer.” He waved us through (Jacobo interview, 8/18/2010).

To the officer in the anti-riot squad, the nationalist resentment Jacobo expressed made sense. Most Dominicans understood it as such. Ronaldo Peralta, former director of the MLB Commissioner’s Dominican office certainly did, “Remember, baseball here goes with nationalism, and it’s very important for Dominicans. If you try to regulate and affect [the buscónes] economic interests, they will go to the press and point out that you are against those who want to develop the Sammy Sosa’s and Albert Pujols’s, that you are forbidding a kid from becoming the next Dominican star...Baseball is the one thing that makes this country great. We have failed in everything we have tried. But we have 91 Dominicans in the major leagues. Who wants to go against that?” (Peralta interview, 5/27/2005). Alderson did, dismissing the mass demonstration outside, joking about buying the protestors lunch.

The march, however, forced Alderson to meet with the buscónes and that proved only that they were intractable enemies. After it, Alderson once again declared that he wanted to “help” the game become stronger but issues needed addressing. They ramped up their efforts at oversight: mandatory drug testing; “extreme vetting” (to borrow a term currently in use) of anyone who signs a contract; mandatory fingerprinting; and backed everything up with punishments that would
invalidate any previous contracts signed between players and teams. He was very aware that anything holding up the signing process affects the size of the bonus. Clearly, MLB could adversely affect anything baseball related.

Another major summit was organized, and this time buscônes were invited. Everyone in baseball attended, and the essence of this was not that new information was being passed on but rather that MLB’s hegemonic vision of baseball was being performed. At one point Alderson announced that MLB was bringing in $40 to $50 million dollars into the country. Jacobo, couldn’t resist by reminding the gathering, “I said [to Alderson], “Thank you for that, but you’re making $7 billion [gross revenues for MLB], and we’re the principle guys helping to make that for you” (Jacobo interview, 10/02/2010).

Jacobo and affiliates had long been anticipating this play by MLB, and a year earlier had laid plans for their own league, one that centralized all of the nation’s best players into a tightly controlled association. It was called the, “Dominican Prospect League.” It was a streamlined version of finding and concentrating the best talent into 4 teams playing a schedule devised to draw scouts from teams to evaluate them. Jacobo was trying to drive a wedge between MLB and major league teams, most of whom had developed their own relations with buscônes. Again, MLB tried to prevent the league from forming. For instance, MLB put pressure on the San Francisco Giants who had agreed to let the DPL hold their All-Star game there to call off their agreement. The All-Star game was held.

In time, MLB started imitating the buscônes by starting their own prospect league and holding their own version of the All-Star Game, called El Torneo Supremo. When the DPL refused to buckle under to El Torneo Supremo, MLB used its administrative muscle to coerce the buscônes into bringing their players into the fold. MLB’s investigative agency began paying visits to those unwilling to send players to them. It worked with some smaller player developers, but not Jacobo and Company. In fact, they began looking to anticipate and counter their enemy’s next move. To that end, they began to develop other markets for their players, in Japan and Mexico— both of which have professional leagues and are independent of MLB. In anticipation of others trying to undercut him from having such exclusive access to young unsigned player, Jacobo devised his own little league system all contained at his complex.
In 2012, MLB once again floated the idea of an international draft to see if they could sneak it into the next bargaining agreement with their players union. Again, Jacobo and others took the fight to them. They fanned out to visit every one of the 30 major league Spring Training facilities, and contacted every single Latin American player on the major league team’s 40 man roster. They presented them with a spirited argument against MLB’s efforts to extend the draft to their countries. The players responded viscerally and instantly, swearing they would strike before letting MLB have its way. In the end, 164 of 165 Latin players signed their petition that was presented to MLB Players Association. The following year, the player’s union voiced strong opposition to this part of the Collective Bargaining Agreement that was being renewed. Rather than risk the ire of the union, MLB once again pulled this threat to the national sovereignty of Latin American countries off of the table. “We beat them,” was Jacobo’s voice mail to me, “They just declared that the Draft is going to fail!” (Klein, 2014: vii).

Conclusion

For Dominicans, this is a battle for political and economic sovereignty. MLB wants a return to a neocolonial past when it governed all of its affairs in the Dominican Republic. The buscónes stand in their way. Because it is the language of resentment and resistance, in this struggle nationalism plays a much larger role on the Dominican side. Nationalist discourse resonates loudly in the Global South as illustrated in the following address made to the Dominican baseball hierarchy in 2013. Astín Jacobo asks, “Which is worse: the major league team that knows a kid is worth $1 million but pays $25,000 for him, or me, who knows he’s worth $1 million, gets it and the kid goes home with $650,000? Which is better for the kid, his family, me, and for the game here in the Dominican Republic? For the last 40 years [MLB] has been taking advantage of us. In the last 10 years, we’ve evened things out a bit, and they don’t like it” (Jacobo ibid.).

Astin Jacobo, Enrique Soto, and all of the other buscónes preference for nationalist rhetoric is ideal for rallying support because it references difference and power. Enrique Soto, colleague of Jacobo, characterized the matter thusly:

The United States and baseball gives our youth a lot of opportunities. But Americans...They take and take and still want more... We are a country also. We’re underdeveloped, we have a lot of problems,
but there are good people here. They don’t deserve to be treated like common trash (Bretón and Villegas, 1999: 56).

It is very much a language that understands power and resentment through comparison, again illustrated by Soto, “If the [MLB] teams invest, they’re organized...If the buscónes invest, we’re thieves” (Fainaru, 2001). Such a comparative rhetoric clarifies what the Comaroff’s mean when I quoted them early on, that the Global South stands in contrast to the Global North as, “...an opposition that carries a great deal of imaginative baggage congealed around the contrast between centrality and marginality...”

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Baseball and Cuban National Identity in Leonardo Padura’s Havana Quartet

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Abstract: The focus of this essay is on four novels written by Leonardo Padura Fuentes and published between 1991 and 1998 in Spanish and between 2005 and 2008 in English. Through an analysis of these works which are collectively known as the Havana Quartet, the essay expands upon three basic premises — the third of which is considerably less controversial that the other two. They are, first, that the concept of national sports offers a useful lens through which to examine national identity; second, that works of fiction can be useful data sources for sociological research on the relationship between sport and national identity; and, third, that baseball is the national sport of Cuba. Having outlined the theoretical bases upon which these premises are made, the essay proceeds to examine the ways in which Padura uses his central character, Havana policeman Mario Conde, and his friends to explore the place of baseball in Cuban society. Important in this regard are the use of simile, the significance of nostalgia and memories of playing and watching baseball. The essay ultimately addresses Padura’s regular, yet apparently ephemeral, treatment of baseball in the Havana Quartet that serves to flag the game as exemplifying what is meant by the concepts of banal nationalism and the nationalism of everyday life.

Key words: Cuba, baseball, fiction, Padura, banal nationalism.

Resumen: Este artículo se ocupa de cuatro novelas escritas por Leonardo Padura Fuentes publicadas entre 1991 y 1998 en español y entre 2005 y 2008 en inglés. El análisis de estas obras, conocidas en su conjunto como el Cuarteto de la Habana, parte de tres premisas fundamentales —de las que la tercera es la menos controvertida—, a saber: En primer lugar, que el concepto de deporte nacional ofrece una perspectiva útil para examinar la identidad nacional; en segundo lugar, que las obras de ficción pueden ser fuentes de datos útiles para la investigación sociológica sobre la relación entre el deporte y la identidad nacional; y, en tercer lugar, que el béisbol es el deporte nacional de Cuba. Después de esbozar las bases teóricas sobre las que se sustentan tales premisas, se pasa a examinar el modo como Padura se sirve de su personaje principal, el policía de la Habana Mario Conde, y sus amigos, para indagar el lugar que ocupa el béisbol en la sociedad cubana. Importante es a este respecto el empleo de
símiles, el significado de la nostalgia y los recuerdos referidos al hecho de jugar y ver béisbol. Por último, el trabajo se ocupa del tratamiento que hace Padura del béisbol en el Cuarteto de la Habana —tratamiento regular, pero efímero—, que sirve para emplear el juego como ejemplo de lo que significan los conceptos de nacionalismo banal y de nacionalismo cotidiano.

**Palabras clave:** Cuba, béisbol, ficción, Padura, nacionalismo banal.

**Introduction**

There were boys of various ages, between twelve and sixteen of every colour and shape, and Conde thought how, if someone had stopped on that same corner, in that same district, twenty years ago, on hearing similar outcry, he’d have seen exactly what he could see now, boys of very colour and shape, except the guy celebrating or arguing most would have been him, the young Conde, grandson of Rufino Conde, or the Count as he was known to everyone (Padura, *Havana Red* 2).

Leonardo Padura Fuentes has been described as “one of Latin America’s foremost contemporary detective writers” (Zamora and Gélinas 1). As this essay shall argue, Padura is rather more than just a detective writer. However, it is certainly the case that his reputation “revolves around his series of novels dealing with the exploits of Mario Conde” (Kirk 1). Conde is a policeman who neither looks nor feels like a policeman and who constantly reveals to the reader his own concerns and frailties. Nostalgia is an ever present feature of the four novels which are collectively known as the Havana Quartet which provide the primary data upon which this essay draws.

The paper expands upon three basic premises — the third of which is considerably less controversial that the other two. They are: first, that the concept of national sports offers a useful lens through which to examine national identity; second, that works of fiction can be useful data sources for sociological research on the relationship between sport and national identity; and, third, that baseball is the national sport of Cuba. Each of these premises will be discussed prior to an examination of the place of baseball in the crime novels of Leonardo Padura Fuentes which, it will be argued, highlights the value of the concept of banal nationalism for an understanding of the significance of Cuba’s national sport and of the role of national sports more generally.
National Sports

A discussion of the concept of national sports has particular value for the study of nationalism more generally inasmuch as it necessitates some reference to the main debates in this area (Morgan; Goksøyr; Bairner, “Conservative”). For example, a primordialist interpretation of the origins of nations would allow for the possibility that national sports are bound up with the various criteria which are perceived to grant legitimacy to historic nationhood — blood ties, language, topography, the soil and so on, with some so-called national sports being linked to natural landscapes (Bairner, “National Sports”). According to theories linking the rise of nationalism to the exigencies of modernization, on the other hand, national sports are simply part of a panoply of elements that serve to legitimize the nation state. In addition, concepts such as “imagined community” and “invented tradition” can then be invoked in an attempt to explain how efforts are made to bestow some historic legitimacy on what are essentially modern responses to particular political and socio-economic exigencies. Furthermore, the distinction between ethnic and civic nationalism may also be invoked in order to advance the case that the national sport implies true belonging whereas other sports that are played within the nation can be linked to what constitutes the civic nation, or more properly, the nation state, but lack the stamp of authenticity. In reality, however, no single approach can fully explain how specific sports acquire national significance.

Adopting a quantitative approach, the first criterion commonly invoked when seeking to establish that a sport is national is popularity. Although not without some merit, this approach is rendered problematic by the fact that activities which attract large numbers of participants, such as angling, walking and jogging, even if defined as sports, are largely unconnected to the nation. High participation rates combined with mass spectatorship figures in sports which have national representative teams is another matter altogether which accounts for the fact that, according to this criterion at least, association football is the national sport of the overwhelming majority of countries in the world. This in itself however makes it difficult to make any meaningful pronouncements on the relationship between the national sport and any given nation.

A second criterion is that of priority or invention. A sport may be described as national for the simple reason that it was first played in a particular nation. Historians of sport will attest to the fact that it is notoriously difficult to identify the precise place of origin of many
modern sports. For that reason alone, one might wish to add the category of uniqueness with a sport being regarded as national precisely because it is played exclusively within a specific nation, the boundaries of the latter being extended in this instance to incorporate diaspora communities. Gaelic games are good examples of this. One problem with the criterion of invention is that fact that few nations would claim to be the place of origin of any modern sports whereas Britain, and more specifically, England can be legitimately represented as the birthplace of so many sports, in their regulated and bureaucratised form, that describing each of them as an English national sport would once more render the concept meaningless. There are of course honourable exceptions — Gaelic games as recently mentioned, baseball in the United States and Australian Rules Football amongst others.

Other criteria also exist. For example, countries which were not initially responsible for the invention of a particular sport may well have enjoyed great success in that sport and/or may have exerted considerable influence on the sport’s subsequent development. Both of these, often mutually dependent, factors can serve to ensure a sport’s national status in a particular country. Here one thinks of rugby union in New Zealand (Patterson) and soccer in Brazil (Bellos).

Some sports represent the nation symbolically despite the fact that they may well have demonstrably failed to capture the interest of most of the people who constitute the civic nation and/or the nation state. They are played and watched by people who, in the eyes of nationalists, truly belong rather than by those whose authenticity as national beings is open to question. One thinks, for example, of cricket in England and bullfighting in Spain. In addition, and of particular significance, activities of this type may well be used by those whose role it is to promote the nation, its products and its tourism industry precisely because these national sports testify to what are projected as unique characteristics of the nation.

Arguably what are needed are alternative theories of nationalism that can provide a more nuanced approach to the concept of national sports. For example, Michael Billig’s influential conception of “banal nationalism,” which was described by Skey (331) as “perhaps the most influential study of everyday forms of nationhood,” has helped to stimulate a trend in nationalism studies towards examining the implicit, everyday, and sometimes micro-level creation and recreation of national identity (Hearn). Billig’s ground-breaking study challenged those conceptualizations of nationalism that had focused on its emergence in
extraordinary conditions. Instead, explanations of nationalism should not be limited to extreme and violent domains, but should also be understood as incorporated into mundane, everyday life practices. Billig asked how the nation continues to flag its existence even when extraordinary conditions have reached their conclusion. As Hearn (660) articulates, “ultimately Billig’s argument is not that banality reveals the true nature of nationalism, but rather the explicit ideological form, the stirring call to die for one’s country is rendered more plausible by nationalism’s banal presence.”

Billig concluded that within the nation, there exists unnoticed, routine flagging which serves to (re)produce the nation daily. “The ideological habits which enable the established nations of the West to be reproduced” (6) represent the mechanisms whereby there are continual reminders of nationhood in established Western nations. In many discreet ways, the citizens of a nation are continually reminded of their national belonging, whether this is through the singing of a national anthem, or simply by seeing a national flag hanging outside a public building. The habitual assumptions about belonging that permeate the media also assume that we (the viewers or readers) are part of the nation (Edensor).

In support of his argument, Billig offers a discussion of the differences between waved and unwaved flags. He claims that the “unwaved flag, which is so forgettable, is at least as important as the memorable moments of flag-waving” (10). In addition, like Edensor, he highlights the role of the press in maintaining a sense of nationhood, arguing that British national newspapers, for example, address their readers as members of the nation, and continually point to the national homeland as the home of the readers. He interprets these reminders as operating beyond the level of conscious awareness. Billig, and later Edensor, argue that most work on nations, nationalism and national identity only focuses on “the spectacular, the ‘traditional’ and the official” (Edensor 17). However, according to Edensor (17), we must not forget that, like nationalism itself, “national identity is grounded in the everyday, in the mundane details of social interaction, habits, routines and practical knowledge.” Ordinary hints of nationality act to further imprint the nation onto the people, so that it is remiss to discount the subtle displays of nationhood that citizens encounter daily (Bowes and Bairner, forthcoming). This is highly relevant to the role of baseball as Cuba’s national sport despite its invention in the United States.
Cuba’s “National Pastime”

Baseball came to Cuba in the 1830s, before US intervention in the island’s political affairs and was “just as much Cuban as it was American” (Huish 423). By the 1920s, it was already the national sport, situated at the heart of Cuba’s 19th century nationalist movement against Spanish imperialism and later its American variant. According to Burgos (12), “the process whereby baseball became the Cuban national pastime cannot be extricated from its colonial contexts.” Although the sport came to Cuba as a consequence of the close proximity to the United States, “it was soon practiced in contradistinction to the Spanish culture that peninsulares (those born in Spain) engaged in on the island” (Burgos 14), notable amongst which was bullfighting. Nevertheless, the adoption by the Cuman born elite, the so-called criollos, of baseball inevitably allowed for closer contact with a much closer colonial power and, from 1947 onwards, numerous Cuban players joined teams in the US (Pettavino and Brenner).

The first official match in Cuba was played in 1874 and the Cuban League was formed four years later. The initial teams consisted of white players only. Black players began to be admitted to the league at the start of the twentieth century, including players from the North American Negro League who joined integrated teams in Cuba. Amateur leagues flourished from the early 1930s to 1960, albeit with black players excluded until 1959.

By the time of the revolution in 1959, sport was a highly visible component in the construction of Cuban identity. It was against this backdrop that “the revolutionary government lost no time in putting sports to use as a political tool, both internally and externally” (Pettavino and Brenner 524). Fidel Castro’s ability as a baseball player has been much discussed and has no doubt become the stuff of myth (Echevarría). However, in light of Cuba’s pre-revolutionary history, it is little surprise that, in the years immediately following the Cuban revolution, he and his comrades were keen to build sports and recreational facilities with what at that time was the relatively novel and undeniably progressive aim of providing access to all. According to Pettavino and Brenner (523), “Cuba’s national sports program, initiated in 1961, was aimed at two mutually reinforcing goals.” Sporting triumphs on the international stage would attest to the success of the revolution. But, in addition, the sports programme would contribute to internal development. As Carter (“Game Changer” 7) notes, “the 1976 Cuban constitution, modelled on the earlier short-lived 1933 revolutionary constitution, clearly enshrined
sport into this reshaped Cuban society.” According to Carter (“Game Changer” 8), Castro and his colleagues “saw sport as a vital vehicle for the inculcation of revolutionary and socialist values.” In addition, the symbolism and practice of sport allowed them “to demonstrate their ‘natural’ Cubanness as means of legitimating their usurpation of the existing order while also indicating the new order of things” (Carter, “Game Changer” 5).

However, in an otherwise comprehensive and contemporary account of Cuban socialism, Gordy makes only one reference to baseball and none at all to sport in general, perhaps because of an acceptance of the widely-held and largely compelling belief that sport, by its very nature, is inimical to radical politics. Yet, other researchers have demonstrated the almost symbiotic relationship between sport and socialism in Cuba. According to Huish (421), “One of the most distinctive features of the Cuban sports model is that it is entirely state-driven,” the state’s controlling arm being the Instituto Nacional de Deportes, Educación Física y Recreación (the Institute of Sports, Physical Education and Recreation or INDER). In this respect at least, it differs little from the model adopted in the former Soviet Union, the GDR and elsewhere. Nevertheless, as Pye (119) has argued, “The Cuban regime rejects the neo-marxist argument that sport promotes elitism and anti-collectivist ideas.” This is not to deny that Cuban sportsmen and sportswomen have had remarkable success in the post-revolution era, particularly in baseball, boxing and track and field. However, it is baseball that has been accorded the status of national sport-popular but also a constant presence.

Cuba is undeniably a sporting nation. First and foremost, however, it is a baseball nation, arguably to the same extent as Taiwan and considerably more so than the United States where it was once the unquestioned National Pastime but “it is exhausted but not dead, sacked by the NFL and many other sports and pastimes in this increasingly fragmented, heterogeneous culture” (Nathan 103). In Cuba, on the other hand, baseball remains the national sport, not least, as Carter (“The Manifesto” 247) claims, because, from the outset, the nineteenth-century criollos made deliberate efforts to equate the game with a nascent Cuban nationalism. It can also be characterised as the national sport, however, because it has continued to be a significant part of everyday life — a major contributor therefore to a sense of banal nationalism which is vividly captured in the fiction of Leonardo Padura.
Fiction as a Sociological Resource

As Bateman (383) notes, “Following the lead of American academics such as Michael Oriard and Christian Messenger, a number of sports historians have in recent years begun to look at imaginative literature as an important mediator of sport.” It is in this spirit, as Johnes suggests, that novels should be approached as potential sources in sport history. Novels can certainly be interpreted sociologically with a focus on the insights that they can offer and the sociological concepts that help to strengthen those insights (Bairner).

Although literature has been described as a fabrication (Bennett), the former Anglican Bishop of Edinburgh, Richard Holloway argues that fact great fiction explores the truth better than anything. The point, therefore, is not to pursue a sociology of literature but “to see what happens when sociology and literature are reciprocally illuminated by their dissimilar, yet comparable, approaches to the same site” (Alworth 302). Therefore, much depends upon how we actually use literature and, more specifically, how we read works of fiction sociologically.

In discussing the use of fictional methods in ethnographic research, Rinehart (204) identified three kinds of writing — academic writing that seeks to replicate some sort of truth, fiction which can be based on actual events but is often the product of the writer’s interpretation of actual or imagined events, and fictional ethnography which “combines the realist goals of academic ethnography and fiction but with an eye to both instruction and feeling.” The latter, in the form of creative non-fiction, has become an increasingly accepted means of exploring the what, the why, and the how and is used to complement and, in some cases, supplement traditional academic writing (Sparkes and Smith). The emphasis of this approach is, according to Cheney, on establishing facts. But, in light of the criteria regularly invoked to support the use of creative nonfiction and storytelling, is there a place in the social scientific study of sport for authors of fiction whose primary objective in writing is not normally informed by social science and, indeed, may not even have sport as a major concern?

Whilst most academic writers may be cautious about the excessive use of invention even in personal narratives, others are less diffident. According to novelist Jean-Claude Izzo (38), the chronicler of Marseille’s criminal underbelly, “imagination is a reality, sometimes more real than reality itself.” In similar vein, journalist Joe Queenan (151) writes, “Just because something isn’t true doesn’t mean you shouldn’t believe in it.” We are not talking here about the difference between
truth and lies but about “different sorts of truth” (Maitland 14) or of verisimilitude as a way of presenting truth(s). As for comparisons between fiction and creative nonfiction, and setting to one side any suggestion that either approach can uncover absolute truths, it would be wrong to deny that novelists are also researchers or that their approach is less likely to offer insights into society than more conventional data collection presented as creative nonfiction.

As C. Wright Mills (21) observed, although “their serious work embodies the most widespread definitions of human reality,” novelists often possess the sociological imagination. Therefore, because this article is primarily concerned with the type of data that is of value to social scientists — in this instance, specifically to social scientists of sport — it is argued here that we can and should add certain works of fiction to more commonly accepted data sources. Good sport-related fiction invariably reveals more about the social world in which people, play and watch sport than about the narrow world of sport alone. It is no coincidence that Philip Roth (1973) gave the title *The Great American Novel* to a work of fiction that has baseball at its core. Furthermore, baseball has been well served by other notable writers of fiction including Bernard Malamud, W. P. Kinsella, Chad Harbach, Robert Coover and Michael Chabon. Leonardo Padura’s work cannot be described as sport-related fiction; he is a crime writer whose Havana Quartet has as its central character a police detective. Nevertheless, just as serious sport fiction does not address sport alone, so crime writing often has wider concerns, with sport being one such concern in Padura’s work as will be demonstrated in the following discussion.

The paper will first consider Padura’s use of sporting similes, most notably those relating to baseball. The discussion will proceed to an examination of the relationship between baseball and nostalgia in the Havana Quartet. The next section will focus on Conde’s own playing career as documented in the novels. The concluding section comprises an analysis of experiences of Conde and his friends as baseball fans.

**The Use of Simile**

Padura’s use of simile offers an easy introduction to the significance of baseball in the Havana Quartet. As he thinks about a woman whom he had admired years earlier and with whom he has now been reunited, Conde observes that “Tamara’s something else, more than beautiful, nice and tasty, as delicious as the crack of a baseball cleanly hit...” (Blue 91). He thinks of an old school notebook on which he had
written some lines as being “like a forgotten pitcher sent to warm his arm up before making the decisive throw” (Gold 29). A murder that he is investigating had been committed by “something like a baseball bat, one of the old wooden sort” (Black 23). Indeed, “a single well-aimed brutal blow had been enough to put an end to the life of Miguel Forcade Mier: like a ball angrily repelled by a powerful hitter, his brain burst inside his skull, putting an end to his ideas, memories and emotions of the man who in a moment made the transition from life to death” (Black 31).

At times, Padura also reaches for other sports to enliven a description — hence, a toothless, alcoholic black man is described as having “the face of a boxer defeated in a thousand fights” (Black 115). Indeed, it is worth noting before returning to baseball that the idea of Cuba as a sporting nation more broadly is itself a feature of the Quartet. Conde’s grandfather had been a breeder of fighting cocks and he would “sometimes dream about Grandfather Rufino and his roosters and it’s a dream of death…” (Gold 92).

He’d sit on a stool in the entrance to the cockpit, and, holding the rooster in one hand, lean his legs of stone slightly backwards so the back of the stool rested against the doorpost made of caguairán, the hardest of Cuban woods (Gold 91).

Elsewhere, Conde describes “the street corner which harboured the cockpit where Grandfather Rufino had, eight times, put his fortune on spurs that enriched and impoverished him in equal measure” (Gold 172). It was also a time when there was “a game of dominoes in every arcade” (Black 66).

In addition to baseball, Conde and his friends played dominoes too and even ping-pong and, when relating the story of when the Count had last played baseball, Padura adds that “he also kept goal for the football eleven, defended for the basketball team, ran on the 4 x 400 relay team, as well as playing first base and third bat in the baseball team” (Black 214). Here one is reminded of Fidel Castro’s reminiscences of the place of sport in his schooldays. His school, he remembers, was wonderful, with “several basketball courts, baseball fields, track and field facilities, volleyball courts, and even a swimming pool” (Castro and Betto 109). Castro had just turned sixteen at the time and quickly began to take an active part in school sport, claiming later that he was quite good at basketball, soccer, baseball and track and field — indeed “nearly everything” (Castro and Betto 109).
In another reference to sport, we learn in *Havana Gold* that a murdered school teacher would “do PE with her group, because she played volleyball very well” (Gold 48). Later in the same novel the PE yard is described — “from the street they could see the basketball court, its bare hoops and boards worn out by all those hard throws” (Gold 179). Conde also remarks on the sporting prowess and in relation to the body shapes of people with whom he has police business — “as a lad he’d been a rower and he’d lived for a while in Guanabo, he knew something about sailing and had friends on the beach who would get him a good yacht” (Black 203). Even Conde’s boss is described with reference to sport.

He still seemed young for his age, in that tight pullover emphasising pectorals of a practiced swimmer and squash player’ (Black 30).

But it is baseball that looms largest in Conde’s life and in many of the numerous nostalgic passages in which the Quartet abound.

**Baseball and Nostalgia**

Song (234) describes Conde as “a police detective whose gloomy outlook on life is only forgotten through alcohol binges.” Zamora and Gélinas (6) go further, arguing that a central element in Padura’s Quartet is “the articulation of a spleen feeling” which, they claim is one of the many possible collateral damages of an unfulfilled country’s destiny’ (Zamora and Gélinas 9). They add that “this spleen feeling can be observed in most of the series’ main characters, and Mario Conde is possibly the most archetypal and well-rounded illusion in this regard’.

It is undeniable that Conde is often nostalgic and that baseball regularly finds a place in his ruminations on the past.

Once upon a time, a long time ago, there was a boy who wanted to be a writer. He lived peaceful and happy in a not very tranquil, or even beautiful dwelling, not far from here, and spent his time, like all happy boys, playing baseball in the street, hunting lizards and watching how his grandfather, whom he loved a lot, groomed his fighting cocks (Gold 111).

Similar reflections appear in *Havana Red*.

Despite the heat, August afternoons had always been the best for playing baseball on the street corner. Holiday time meant everybody
was in the neighbourhood all the time, and had nothing better to do,
and the hyper-active summer sun allowed you to play on beyond eight
o’clock when a game really deserved to be extended’ (Havana Red 2–3).

Conde’s memories are corroborated by an academic historian of
Cuban baseball who writes, “as young boys we played everywhere: in
open fields, in roads and city streets, in schoolyards” (Echevarría 4).
What makes Conde sad, however, are less the failings of the Cuban
revolution than the fact that young boys are no longer playing baseball
in the same spaces that he had his friends had once occupied.

Recently, however, the Count had seen few baseball games on the
street corner. The boys seemed to prefer other less energetic, more sweet-
smelling diversions than running, hitting and shouting for several hours
under a scorching summer sun, and he wondered what boys nowadays
could possibly do on long summer afternoons (Havana Red 3).

These are the wistful, rather the splenetic or embittered, sentiments
of older sports fans all over the world who mourn the passing of what
they regard as “the good old days.”

Furthermore, Conde himself finds his own nostalgia irksome al-
though not perhaps the role that baseball plays in it.

With a nostalgia he found increasingly irritating, the Count sur-
veyed the main street in his barrio, overflowing rubbish containers,
wrappings from late-night last-minute pizzas blowing in the wind,
the wasteland where he’d learned to play baseball transformed into a
repository for junk generated by the repair shop on the corner. Where
do you learn to play baseball now? (Blue 6).

We read that “Conde’s strolls down memory lane always ended in
melancholy” and inevitably include “nights at baseball games” (Blue
197). Playgrounds, now empty, are sad places “without the hue-and-cry
from matches, the rivalries and girls reduced to hysteria by a brilliant
shot” (Gold 179–80). But, it is not all about sadness. Returning to the
stadium after a lengthy absence,

[...] brought with it a flood of memories. The green grass shining under
bluish light and the reddish turf, freshly raked for the start of the game,
created a contrast of colours that is the exclusive heritage of baseball
grounds (Gold 281).
Here Conde sits with his boyhood friend, Skinny Carlos, and gazes “at the green and brown terrain, the packed terraces, the colours of the uniforms, blue and white on the one hand, red and black on the other, and remembered that once, like Andrés, he’d decided he’d commit his life to those symbolic realms where the movement of a tiny ball was like the flux of life, unpredictable but necessary for the game to go on” (Gold 282). Conde then realises that “He’d always liked the loneliness of the centre of the park... the smells, colours, sensations, skills that came from a possible attachment to a place and time he could revisit simply by seeing and breathing with relish a unique experience” (Gold 282).

Happy memories are evoked even as Conde searches for evidence linked to a murder,

In one corner he found two gloves and a baseball helmet. So he was a baseball player as well, he thought and couldn’t stop himself picking up one of the gloves, putting it on his hand and hitting it against the other, as if he were anticipating some really big hits. Feeling nostalgia aroused by memories of his happy days as a street baseball player, the lieutenant put the glove back in its place and crouched down to see what was in some jute bags... (Black 212).

We are left in no doubt, therefore, that many of the Count’s memories relate to a time when he had been a ball player.

**Conde’s Playing Career**

Conde remembers the best game he ever played when “they let me take first base, despite being only the eighth batter in the line-up” (Blue 136). He was playing for his school team, the Víbora Violets, against Habana High School. He recalls,

We were zero-zero in the eighth inning when it was Skinny’s turn to bat, for he was fifth up, and he hit a drive past the shortstop and he got to second. All hell was let loose ... And it was all down to that bitch destiny, because Isidrito, who was sixth up and never blew it, made a pig’s ear out of it, was the first out, and Paulino the Bull’s Testicle, who was seventh, rolled it into Yaya’s hands who leisurely stroked it over his balls before throwing it to first base, and Paulino was the second out. Then it was my turn to hit (Blue 138).
Conde hits the ball “right down the middle of the field, real hard, like I’d never hit before, and it was like seeing the ball flying in slow motion, flying till it hit the fence right under the scoreboard, and I started to run hell for leather and it went so far I could go to third, almost enough for a homerun, they screamed, Skinny scored, then ran to third base and scooped me up in his arms” (Blue 139). However, “in the ninth innings the La Habana lot scored twice and beat us two-one. But it was the best game of my life” (Blue 139).

Some years later, Conde played his last serious game of baseball when he was at university — “he was in the third year of his degree and, as usual, volunteered to be part of the worst baseball team in the whole history of Cuban university sport” (Black 214). His team represented the School of Psychology and that day, “the Count felt he could hardly lift his arms up and failed three times with the bat when it was his turn at the end of the eighth innings and they were trailing two zero to the Philology Tigers” (Black 215). In a conscious nod in the direction of his past, Conde replaced his aluminium bat with a wooden one, much to the consternation of Skinny Carlos. This decision, in the last game he ever played, was immediately rewarded.

[…] he steadied himself, carried through his swing and the blade of the bat hit the ball and sent it hurtling into the far depths of the park on the right, so he could run like crazy round the bases … to the jubilant cries of a skinny Carlos, who had thrown himself on the pitch shouting: “Fuck, what you need is real balls!” and hugged the Count’s three companions who had scored thanks to his great batting, which put the game at three-two in favour of the Psychologists, who finally won their only game the day Mario Conde played baseball for the last time, in the 1977 University Games (Black 216).

Whether as a player, or increasingly only as a fan, baseball matters to Mario Conde and is an important part of the glue which binds him and his friends, especially Skinny Carlos, together.

Friends and Fandom

“Baseball infected them,” Padura writes, “like a chronic passion, and the Count and his friends suffered virulent attacks” (Red 2). Conde admits his embarrassment that “as a kid, that I preferred playing baseball on the street corner to going to Mass...” (Blue 55). As an adult, Conde supports the Industriales team and “he suffered before and after
each game, even when the Industriales won, for he thought that if they won that one, they were more likely to lose the next, and he suffered eternally, in spite of all his promises to be less fanatical and to ditch baseball: it wasn’t what it used to be, he would say, when Capiró, Chávez, Changa Mederos and Co played” (Blue 98). The Industriales “kept him awake worrying at night” (Blue 68). Indeed, “recently the Count was scepticism incarnate: he even tried not to go to baseball games because the Industriales played worse and worse, and luck seemed to have forsaken them, and apart from Vargas and Javier Méndez, the rest seemed second-raters, too weak in the leg to really get them into the final” (Blue 68). He and his friends are aware that they are incurable baseball fans “and the one most infected was Skinny Carlos” (Blue 98).

At this point in time, of course, Skinny is no longer skinny. He is confined to a wheelchair after getting a bullet in the back which severed his spinal cord while serving with the Cuban army in Angola in 1981. If anything, however, his situation has strengthened Skinny’s love-hate relationship with baseball.

He followed the progress of the championship with a loyalty that could only be displayed by an unredeemed optimist like himself, despite the fact they’d not won a thing since the distant year of 1976 when even baseball players seemed more romantic, genuine and happy (Gold 12).

When Skinny was still skinny, another friend, Andrés, was set on being a baseball player but was now a doctor. It is thanks to him that Conde and Skinny have good seats at a match in the stadium, procured through a patient of Andrés who worked in the INDER... in a most sought-after location: right on the edge of the field, between home-plate and third base which they attend at Skinny’s insistence. The match is important.

Orientales and Havanans were going to engage, once again, as if it were only a game, in a historic contest that perhaps began the day when the colony’s capital was transferred from Santiago to Havana almost four hundred years ago (Gold 281).

Skinny is happy “‘I've not been back here for ages,’” he says, “stroking the arms of his wheelchair” (Gold 283). Yet, constantly, his love of baseball is conflicted. Of his beloved Industriales, he declares,
Hell, how can you spend your whole life waiting for these wankers to win a championship when they always open their legs like hookers when they really need to concentrate on winning? But I get like this because I’m an idiot, I should just give up watching bloody baseball... (Blue 162).

It is a cry from the heart that is heard regularly wherever sports fans gather, not least in Havana’s Parque Central where Conde is tempted to engage in the endless debates about baseball.

He reached the Parque Central and almost decided to get entangled in the eternal arguments over baseball that raged there daily, whatever the temperature, to find a reason for yet another defeat for those bastard Industriales; balls, balls is what they’re lacking, he’d have shouted in honour of Skinny, who was neither skinny nor nimble enough to be shouting on his own behalf (Blue 214).

With reference to the arguments in Parque Central, Carter (“Baseball” 117) argues that it is “this particular practice of arguing baseball and its implicit value of confrontation that marks baseball fans in Havana specifically Cuban and masculine.” According to Jamail (2000 49), “Cubans call anywhere that people gather to talk baseball the esquina caliente (hot corner), but the park is the hottest of them all.”

Although Conde’s friend Skinny emerges as one of the most engaging characters in the Havana Quartet, he is no saint, especially when it comes to the issue of ‘race’ in Cuban baseball, as illustrated by reflections on the game between the Víbora Violets, and Habana High School.

[…] the Habana High School team ran onto the field, enormous blacks about to slay us alive as they already had other teams, but we were cocksure and shouted at the pre-game huddle, we’re going to beat the skinny liquorice sticks, fuck ‘em, said Skinny, and even the Moor and I thought we would (Blue 136).

With reference to the Violets’ defeat, Skinny adds, “That’s why you and I almost beat the lanky coal-merchants from the high school in Havana, you remember that?” (Blue 198). The expressions Skinny uses reminds the reader of the early days of baseball in Cuba and the exclusion of black players from many leagues partly due to the criollos’ refusal to acknowledge other classes’ engagement with the game which “would have diluted their own construction of baseball as
representative of a modern Cuban nation in which they would be its leaders” (Carter, 2005: 261-262).

Together with the racism, the treatment of women in the books is generally. This is not to suggest that Padura is a sexist writer but rather that he presents his key protagonists as having reactionary views about the roles that women play in society; they cook, they are beautiful and sexy or, as exemplified by one case, they are murder victims. Only the latter is represented as having had an interest in sport. Just as Padura presents the reader with an insightful depiction of the place of baseball in his characters’ lives, so here, as in relation to race, he is making sure that we appreciate that these men are flawed. Indeed, like many sports fans, they are not averse to using match attendance for the purposes of letting off steam offensive ways.

He (Conde) would have liked the chance to go to the stadium ... where you could say anything, calling the referee’s mother a whore or even your team’s manager a fucking idiot and then depart sad in defeat or euphoric in victory but relaxed, hoarse and raring to go (Blue 68).

Conclusion

As reflected in Padura’s fiction, baseball is not the only sport that is played in Cuba but for Cuban men at least it is granted enhanced status when compared with what Conde thinks of as “passing fads.”

Suddenly he enjoyed the illusion that time didn’t really exist there, because it was that side-street which had served ever since as an area for playing baseball, though some seasons would see a sly, treacherous football appear, or a basketball hoop, nailed to an electricity post. But soon baseball — with bat, hand, four bases, three rolling-a-fly or at the wall — would impose its rule not too acrimoniously, over those passing fads...’ (Red 2).

The idea of playing on a five-star ground was a dream that Conde and his friends all shared “to the day when Andrés realized his potential didn’t in fact extend to achieving such glory” (Gold 282-3).

As Javier Méndez, a former outfielder for the Industriales, so aptly put it, “You grow up with baseball all around you. It is part of being Cuban” (cited in Jamail, 1). Little can disrupt the relationship between Cuban men and baseball, the strength of which can best be illustrated by those moments when baseball has to take second place. Thus, on the
occasion of Fidel Castro’s death, one mourner in the Parque Central
told a foreign journalist, “today, we don’t talk about baseball” (Watts).
Padura’s references to baseball in many ways reflect the role that
the sport plays in everyday life on the island. Even though a baseball bat
is used as a murder weapon in one of the novels, baseball is otherwise
seldom central to the crime stories that are told. Yet it is always there,
a constant presence in the memories and in the lived reality of Mario
Conde and his friends and in the places they know so well. As one author
observes, “it has been said that the real Cuba lies in the shadows and
alleyways of Old Havana — anywhere baseball is played” (Wendel 14).
According to Carter (“The Quality” 188), “the regular yet ephemeral
nature of Cuban baseball is what drives its ability to engender cultural
intimacy and fuels the politics of passion.” It is Padura’s regular, yet
ephemeral, treatment of baseball in the Havana Quartet that
flags the
game as exemplifying what is meant by banal nationalism and the
nationalism of everyday life. Thus, reading these novels that are not os-
tensibly about sport informs us in a particularly appropriate way about
why and how baseball can be described as Cuba’s national pastime.

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Hunting Chimera:  
The Politics of Rugby Participation among the Qom of Argentina  

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Abstract: This paper examines indigenous rugby participation as a reflection of the ambivalent relationship between Qom indigenous athletes and the Argentine state. The analysis begins with geographic analysis of the ethnographic location, a peri-urban homogenous Qom ghetto. From this starting point, the founder’s effect of neo-Nazi Loco Rossi, an ex-professional criollo Argentine rugby player, is examined. In 1993, Rossi started the first indigenous rugby team near Formosa, Argentina. Over the ensuing decade, Aborígen rugby club gained traction and international visibility, culminating in a successful independent film entitled “A Chimera of Heroes” by Daniel Rosenfeld. Their success, occasioned retreatment within the indigenous community, which formed an all-indigenous team-Qompí to compete with Aborígen. The conflicting aspirations of indigenous athletes are then examined through the lens of Batesonian schismogenesis. In conclusion, for the Qom the kind of schismogenesis exhibited by the competing formations of Aborígen and Qompí is an instance of complimentary schismogenesis, for rather than existing in equivalent contexts, Aborígen and Qompí reinforce competing indigenous ideals. In this way, they reflect Qom anxieties about their place vis-à-vis the Argentine state.

Key words: Argentina, Qom, Indigenous community, Rugby, Schismogenesis.

Resumen: En este ensayo se examina la participación del rugby indígena como representación de la relación ambivalente entre los atletas indígenas de los Qom y el estado argentino. El ensayo comienza con el análisis geográfico de la ubicación etnográfica, un barrio Qom homogéneo y periurbano. A partir de este punto de partida, se examina el efecto del Loco Rossi, un ex-jugador argentino de rugby criollo profesional. En 1993, Rossi fundó el primer equipo de rugby indígena. Durante la década siguiente, el club de rugby Aborígen ganó tracción y visibilidad internacional, lo que acabó culminando en una exitosa película independiente titulada La quimera de los héroes de Daniel Rosenfeld. Este éxito ocasionó una reacción en la comunidad indígena, que formó un equipo totalmente indígena, Qompí, para competir contra el equipo Aborígen. Las conflictivas aspiraciones de los atletas indígenas se examinan a través de la lente de la esquistomogénesis Batesoniana. En conclusión, para los Qom la especie de cismogénesis exhibida por las formaciones competidoras de Aborígen y...
Qompí es una instancia de cismogénesis complementaria, ya que en lugar de existir en contextos equivalentes, Aborígen y Qompí refuerzan ideales indígenas antitéticos. De esta forma, reflejan la inquietud de los Qom sobre su lugar frente al estado argentino.

**Palabras clave:** Argentina, Qom, comunidad indígena, rugby, cismogénesis.

**Introduction**

Dust is kicked up as the trucks make their swift passage down provincial highway 80. A group of us are walking along the road’s shoulder, with lawn chairs in tote toward one of the local rugby fields. The match pits Qompí, an all-indigenous rugby team, against one of the other many non-indigenous, criollo, teams from the local adult league. Halftime has ended, and Qompí stands ready to receive the ball while the opposition stands in a line, prepared to kick. Sitting on the midline of the field, the spatial contrast occasioned by the game’s rules brings into relief other differences between the battling squads. The stark ethnic contrast on either side of the ball reminds me of the reluctance of the Qom ethnic group to mix with non-indigenous Argentines and the in-road that rugby was originally intended to be. As the ball is kicked, and teams begin to communicate, another reminder is audible — Qompí switches from casual Spanish, in which they had their halftime meeting, to the Qom language as a means of talking around their opponent. Despite this misdirection the final contrast is a familiar one — a score heavily lopsided in favor of the stronger, bigger, and better-trained opponent.

The ongoing rivalry between Qompí and Aborígen highlights tensions of identity, geography and nationalism in the northern Argentine province of Formosa. While they both are known locally as the only teams that are composed of indigenous Qom athletes, their differences cast light on the sociopolitics of indigeneity in northern Argentina. The members of Qompí, donning less professional garb, communicate noticeably in the Qom language. More professionally dressed Aborígen, on the other hand, fields some non-indigenous players who are unable to speak Qom. Thus, the team members communicate in the Argentine lingua franca, Spanish. As others have noted (McDevett 262, Reid 112) the local language use highlights differences in player and community aspirations. Indeed, the players of Aborígen have aspired to professional rugby careers, playing in larger Argentine cities and even representing Argentina internationally. These players are particularly useful to producing positive international perceptions of the Argentine
State relationship with its indigenous people. The members of Qompí, by contrast, enact defiant indigeneity and active non-participation in Aborígen, and by extension, Argentine nationalism.

This analysis addresses how geography, local history and team composition reflect ambivalent Argentine aspirations for the Qom integration/homogenization and how those contrast with parochial indigenous sensibilities that protect indigenous community integrity. The narratives of indigenous rugby center upon the influence of ex-European rugby player and Argentine nationalist Eduardo “Loco” Rossi and his forays into team formation and coaching. Following his “conversion” from apparent Nazism (Young, Review: The Chimera of Heroes), Rossi founded Aborígen Rugby Club in 1993, gradually guiding the team to international success. While the success of the team was not debatable in terms of wins and losses, his coaching approach to Aborígen polarized discourses concerned with rugby, indigeneity and nationalism. On one hand, European and Argentine journalists praised the attention Rossi gave to the Qom players and the successes his team achieved. Positive sentiment waxed with the release of the documentary film, A Chimera of Heroes, by Daniel Rosenfeld, which went on to win an independent film award. However, within the Qom community, Rossi gained a reputation for authoritarian coaching techniques, promulgation of performance enhancing drugs and exploiting his players’ talents for money (though the veracity of these claims are highly dubious). Moreover, the location of his training facility — in the no-man’s land of bush that rings Formosa — initiated a panic among the Qom that their children were being stolen to be stripped of their indigenous identities and reworked into criollo (Argentines of European descent) rugby players. In response, an all-indigenous rugby team, Qompí, coalesced on the fields in the center of the Qom settlement, Lot 68, as players fled Rossi’s regimen and recruited other would-be players to their team. To this day, Qompí maintains its most bitter rivalry with Aborígen, reflecting the two teams’ importance as a microcosm of the on-going colonial encounter.

It’s Not About Winning

In the vignette that begins this analysis, Qompí players would be perceived by context-unwary observers as languishing in a doomed project. They seem slight and and poorly trained compared to their robust opposition. Their uniform is makeshift by each player, usually ill-fitting and well-worn. However, the Qompí team would disagree with this
assessment, as if their counterpoints were self-evident. They have always appreciated the more gracile frames of foragers for whom speed and endurance were more important than rote strength and weight. They look upon the bodily poetics of their oppositions’ as derivative of rugby’s European context, but not appropriate to indigenous praxis of rugby.

For the criollo, the national purpose of the sport is not so different than the social agenda of the present government or the political goals of the colonialists before them: Qom ethnocide through compelled integration. The Qom have learned by generations of losses how to express their transcendence of the opposition by other means than fixating on the kinds of victory fetishizes by their various state oppressors. The internalizing of a separate and alternative mentality regarding sports indicates that the people who can socialize such independence may also be able to consolidate a separate and viable identity, indefinitely.

Not only does the rivalry of Qompí and Aborígen reflect local anxieties about the integrity of group identities, it is paralleled on national and international scales. Domestic Argentine rugby players have traditionally been groomed towards civilized temperaments in an atmosphere of amateurism (Dunning 9); they face a catch-22 when weighing local allegiances versus international aspirations. For example, a promising young Argentine rugby player must gauge the monetary gains and worldly experience of playing in Europe against the loss of social capital back home. A positive reputation at home could translate to more stability long term through business partnerships and deep familial ties. This social safety net, in many cases, could lead to greater economic vitality than the promised riches of an athlete’s life, as the fortunes of professional athlete are contingent on performance and remaining injury-free. This tension is now global in scale (Esson 84, Darby et. al. 142, Besnier 491). Neoliberal internationalization in the sports economy has created a socioeconomic pull on playing talent toward global competition centers, which promise monetary gain and international notoriety for players that expatriate to practice sports professionally. However, local movements against this flow are also quite common (Vaczi 21). These movements luxuriate in the subversive power held in athletes’ refusal to participate in globalized flows of athletic talent away from motherlands toward the corrupting influences of money and fame. When players practice the arts of refusal, their actions bolster nationalist or localist movements by upending the economic logic of the international sporting industry. Not only this, but they achieve the communal respect of those who demonstrate the individual character to
abdicate individualistic prestige in favor of commitments to communal integrity.

In order to understand the use of public recreational space by the Qom people, we must first examine their sedentarization and resultant delineation of spaces, the arrival of rugby to the indigenous sphere, and the ways in which history and space have interacted in the interim. The current outlook of the Qom community is reflected not only in the spatial organization and utilization of fields in and out of Lot 68, but also in opinions and actions related to rugby and its practice.

By 1970, many of the Qom (then using the ethnonym Toba, which is now shunned as a pejorative) ethnicity, displaced from their lands, disrupted of their semi-nomadic foraging cycle, had loosely gathered on the outskirts of the provincial capital, Formosa, in search of assistance, work, and influence. This apparent loitering caused them to be corralled by the Argentine Army and placed on a remote lot, roughly equivalent to four city blocks located alongside a provincial route and comfortably separated 5 miles beyond the city limit. Aside from its location relative to the city, the internal geography of the barrio (literally neighborhood, but in this context, exurb) continues to be largely dictated by government management and intervention. Despite numerous tokens of governmental involvement, this exurb, Lot 68, is nevertheless a distinctly indigenous space. The overwhelming majority of the population, estimated at about 5,000, identifies as part of the Qom ethnic group, one of several indigenous ethnic groups in north central Argentina. The remainder of the population consists of members of the other indigenous groups, the Pilagá and the Wichí, with an occasional spouse of non-indigenous heritage. The private lands immediately surrounding the barrio are occupied by monte (bushcountry), livestock grazing land, a police checkpoint, and a gas station. One must travel several miles to the southwest to again encounter occupied land, and another several miles to reach the city center.

The geography of Lot 68, decided upon in the 1970s, continues to produce vigorous “integration debates” on both sides of the monte buffer. Many Qom inhabitants maintain that even the relative distance they have to the city is a cause of many communal ills, including violence, alcohol and drug use, and loss of traditional knowledge. Therefore, they contend greater integration, spatial or cultural, will serve to further existing problems and generate new ones. In Formosa, the contested flow of talent is from the bush country, an indigenous space, to the decidedly non-indigenous provincial capital of Formosa. It is
not solely associated to the politics of community, however, but also with Qom narratives that indicate a continuum of health from the bush (healthy, healing) to the city (contagious, sick). The Qom maintain a reflexive belief in contagion that is chthonic to specific locales and can affect or be spread by individual that leaves such a place and moves elsewhere. One man described the interstate road system thus,

The road system is like the circulatory system of a human being. It can bring good things. Nutrients, oxygen. The road brings motorcycles, and better health supplies. But the veins can let cancer spread too. Since the route has been completed, drugs and disease have come into the community. The road brought the gas station, and now the gas station brings trucks from Bolivia. They bring drugs, on their way through to Buenos Aires. Women and girls prostitute themselves at the gas station. Before there was no syphilis. Now, yes. It’s only a matter of time before AIDS comes into the community.

This highway analogy epitomizes traditional Qom beliefs regarding the city: that it is a source of communal and social diseases that are particularly dangerous to indigenous interlopers. Such a conception of city-related contagion, then explains the community’s ambivalence to rugby. Some inhabitants claim that it is good exercise, while providing an outward sign of indigenous strength. Others lament its European origins, and recall that most of the things given to the Qom by Europeans have been instruments of violence and communal turmoil.

On the criollo side of the buffer, the isolation of Lot 68 fosters negative criollo opinions of the lack of motivation, professionalism, intelligence, and capacity of the indigenous people. The Qom are perceived to persist with coddling and without social improvement, ideas which foment continued racial enmity. For city-dwellers, the solution is for greater integration of Qom society with criollo society. It is the “solution” that the Qom contingency takes as a euphemism for ethnocide. This debate, ultimately concerning the nationalist politics of ethnic integration, has played out in the public space of rugby matches from remote Lot 68, Formosa all the way to the pitches in New Zealand.

A Chimera of Heroes: Rossi Introduces Rugby to the Qom

In the early 1993, an ex-professional rugby player Eduardo “Loco” Rossi, introduced rugby to Lot 68. Born in a nearby Chacoan city, Rosario, he played professional rugby in Buenos Aires, France, Spain
and Wales. Upon retiring, he became a coach. Soon after experiencing a conversion away from right wing Nazism after a visit to a French holocaust museum he decided to offer his sport and assistance with it to the Qom by forming a team he named Aborigen Rugby Club, the first registered indigenous rugby club in Latin America. In the beginning the team lacked funds and training entirely. For instance, Rossi notes that a dearth of funds required that the team practice in unconventional ways like pushing a pick-up truck instead of practicing the scrum using more common, modern equipment. Rugby found fertile ground in the Qom population. During the 1990’s, unemployment skyrocketed among the Qom of Lot 68 during the mechanization of Formosa’s agricultural sector. This led to widespread unemployment and, accordingly, free time. Rossi’s discourse around prospects of a better life through discipline, teamwork and selflessness resonated with the Qom youth of the time. Therefore, despite early monetary limitations, Aborigen quickly advanced beyond provincial borders with matches against other teams outside of Liga Formoseña de Rugby, such as Tucumán, Tierra del Fuego and Rosario. In a step which all members remember vividly, Aborigen made its international debut in New Zealand in 1998, were it went 1-1 in two local games.

Eventually Aborigen won sufficient success that it was made subject of a 2003 documentary by Daniel Rosenfield “The Chimera of Heroes.” The film won international success for its dramatic portrayal of Loco Rossi’s foundation of Aborigen Rugby Club. It has been summarized by one film critic as “a white rugby coach, a one-time avowed racist collector of Nazi memorabilia, who saw the light and took it upon himself to venture into the jungle, teach the game to Toba [Qom] tribesmen, and train and manage Argentina’s first indigenous team.” Despite this success (it secured award at the Venice Film Festival Official Competition), scholars (Salamone 12) have criticized the film for marginalizing the voice of the indigenous people it portrays in favor of a focus on Rossi’s interesting journey from right wing extremist to indigenous rugby coach. Despite seemingly noble intentions, even the director’s description “A white man is the leader of a group of the socially excluded Toba [Qom] tribesmen. He has taught them to play rugby, creating the Aboriginal Rugby Club, and to defend their dignity and their rights.” indicates anti-indigenous sensibilities describing Rossi’s ability to assist them in defending their dignity (implying that the Qom might not have dignity without rugby) or their rights (by additional participation in white Argentine pastimes).
By the time I interviewed Loco Rossi and toured his home and training facilities in 2011, his recruiting and training practices had shifted to suit the goals he had for the team. As he and I strolled through his extensive collection of World War II memorabilia, I asked him what his role is vis-à-vis the Qom community. In return, he stated solidly:

You will hear a lot about me. Let me tell you first though, that I am hard — quite demanding. The second thing is that I am a teacher, and not a politician. I am a former of lives, a life guide. I put myself as an example. Rugby, like other sports, is a direct form of discipline for people, and a way to integrate society. Like it was in World War II and all warfare, the result is what matters — the methods can be justified.

Rossi went on to explain Aborígen’s current recruiting practice that pulls players from both Qom and criollo centers. Towards the explicit end of “integrating society”, Rossi and his coaching staff soon began to populate Aborígen with both indigenous and criollo players, housing them away from their respective home-barrios in a dormitory setting. At these dormitories, the players would live, socialize, practice, eat, and study. When I asked what the purpose of the team is, Rossi responds, “It is a goal of a better life of self-improvement. There are some [indigenous people] that integrate not having to do with rugby, but not many. In New Zealand, the aboriginal people are much more advanced and integrated into society. That is the goal here.”

As we proceeded with the facilities tour we saw one-story dormitory housing available for players. The players live at the facility. To the left of the fields is the main building complex, also one-story. This includes of visitor locker room home locker room, a mess hall, kitchen, his office, and a pantry. The grounds are very well tended, with grass mowed, pantry organized, no graffiti on any walls — everything in its place. The first thing we do is go to the pantry, where Loco distributes flour, cornmeal, milk, honey and other high calorie food that the rugby players need. Rossi turns quickly to the importance of organization in running such an enterprise.

Yes, some of it my own money, but I get some money from the government to. The government matches my contribution. I think it’s a good investment, because my organizational skills prevent much from being lost. Clubs like Qompi get money from the government and they just eat it. This club, my club, got money directly from the president. The teams that are only made up of Toba [Qom] now, Qompi, they aren’t going anywhere, and they’re reinforcing discrimination.
In his statement, Rossi furthers his nationalist agenda by insinuating that Qom players who do not participate in his recruiting practices, rather preferring to enact what they consider to be an unproblematic indigenous identity, are reinforcing discrimination. In this manner, proponents of traditional indigenous practices — including the integrity of Qom communal life, are accused of isolationism.

Ex-players who have stayed with Rossi through their development echo his call to have Qom individual live among the criollo city dwellers and take on a Westernized life. One of Rossi’s original Qom players named Carlos, still contributing as a dedicated coach while living in the city of Formosa, describes his path to integration provided by Rossi and his Club:

Lot 68 should be mixed in. I live in a regular neighborhood in Formosa and my kids are integrated. I have my own life with a woman, and we build something together. This is an example of integration that works. If I have a wife, I must be independent, so I have a trade. The people in Lot 68 can’t live in fear of the city. They are integrated already, even if they don’t know it, with motorcycles and cell phones. It’s been 15 years since I broke out from the inside. I think it’s the fault of the people who live there for isolating themselves.

Carlos’ narrative reflects the ideals instilled by Rossi’s program: discipline, intentional integration, independence and work. He has come to feel as though the people who remain in the indigenous enclave of Lot 68 are responsible for their poverty by willingly, fearfully isolating themselves from the broader Argentina population.

Overall, Rossi’s boarding-style training facility and pro-integration stance support a nationalist agenda — one that incorporates Qom community members to create a superficially diverse Argentina at the expense of the indigenous sovereignty. However, local responses to Abo- rigen’s heterogeneity have been mixed. Within the city, I attended dinner parties where guests descried or questioned Rossi’s recruiting practices saying, “It’s remarkable, but I doubt it can be kept up. Can the Toba boys keep up with the Spanish of the others? I think they should have their own team. Why go through the trouble?” There is apprehension among the people of Formosa that the team can be made disciplined and functional enough for rugby — the first aversion to Rossi’s chimera. Where Rossi’s methods truly come under fire, however, are within Lot 68 where Rossi is considered a despicable child stealer and drug peddler (see next section). To them, the chimera that
Rossi has created to further integrate the Qom unremittingly under the Western umbrella is reprehensible. Indeed, it is a monster worth fighting against.

**Qompí Competes**

While the 1998 New Zealand trip inspired some indigenous players, such as Carlos, to pursue a life in the city because he saw that “the Maori of New Zealand were far more part of society,” circumstances surrounding the trip, including allegations of embezzlement, verbal abuse of players, and alleged Nazism, caused some Aborígen players to move back to Lot 68 and form their own, ethnically uniform team (even including an indigenous coach who was previously a player for Rossi), grounded literally and metaphorically in the fields that lie in the center of Lot 68.

By the time I arrived in Lot 68 in 2009, Qompí was a fixture of communal life in Lot 68. Every evening as the sun set, rugby players would leave their homes and begin tossing around on the fields under the lights. They would divide up into teams and scrimmage for several hours, before breaking for some cold *mate* and *torta frita* (fried bread). As rugby is played, singing emanates from the evangelical churches of Lot 68 while motorcycles buzz up and down the streets of the *barrio*. In the vision, we see how centrally rugby fits into the communal life of Lot 68. The players of Qompí reinvented rugby as an activity through which they enact their indigeneity in the context of their *barrio*. Even aside from the location of the fields and the composition of the teams, Qompí reflects other aspects of Qom culture. As one important example, the egalitarianism of the Qom comes through, as there is a women’s rugby group that scrimmages on the field parallel to the men (this is not the case in non-indigenous Argentina, where female teams associated with rugby clubs play field hockey instead).

The team name, Qompi, is a Qom word meaning “many of us” and is simultaneously a trope on the Spanish word *competición*, or competition. Qompi, cited as a racist money pit by Aborígen players and coaches, is viewed instead as a source of communal wealth, health and indigeneity within the *barrio*. One player who played for both Aborígen and Qompí commented to me, “Maybe it was good that there was Aborígen back then, but since we did so well at rugby, I think it is only fitting that we have our own now. Rossi was abusing players — yelling at them. He showed me his Nazi flag.” He shivered visibly. “Now the kids can play and live in the same place — our community.”
Residents of Lot 68 were quick to point out to me that “away from home” is not the same for someone born there as it is for someone born in the city. “For one of them, to be born in the city and then to live and train there is easy. It is like being at home. For one of our kids, it is different.” While Aborígen is putatively non-racial in its recruiting practice, its name, now taken by the Qom as a pejorative, and its location, in the city, suggests the team’s purpose — to perpetuate the extermination of their culture and remedy the “social problem” they present, all through the seemingly benign path of integration. To hunt Rossi’s chimera, deserting players started teaching the boys of Lot 68 how to play rugby on the soccer fields in the center square. They innovated a kind of touch-rugby pickup game for practicing without the violent hitting and heavy use of scrums that Rossi reported utilized in his practices. Eventually, this group of players also joined the Liga de Rugby Formoseña to play against criollo teams and Aborígen.

Considerable pride in the performance of Qom athletes is the rule. “Our players are different. You can see one of them [criollo] taking a rest on the sideline, and it takes him minutes and minutes to catch his breath. In contrast, we take a couple seconds and we are ready to play again. I believe it is something different in our bodies.” The essentialization of indigenous rugby skills extends to the results obtained by distinctive indigenous training techniques and places. These are wholly grounded in the use of otherwise unused public land surrounding the barrio. As other authors such as Gaston Gordillo (88), have noted, the monte, for former foragers, is a strong symbol of indigeneity. A strong sense of ethnic space permeates the training regime of Qompí players. Daniel says, “We run and we train in the bush. We can’t afford to lift weights at a gym. It’s also hard to get into the city for people here. We get strong by building houses, and running these old trails. They are stronger and larger, but we are fast. They can have their steroid injections and weight rooms.” I asked if all the other teams, including Aborígen, use performance enhancing drugs. “Oh yes, of course! But, we don’t,” he said shaking his finger emphatically. “Where do they get the injections?” “Rossi,” he replied. In his statement, Daniel makes apparent that for indigenous players, the monte is a source of strength that supersedes what can be had from what he considers to be a synthetic, toxic and individualistic path to competitive success.

As Daniel implied, Qompí loses with much greater frequency than Aborígen. In fact, they often appear near the bottom of the general standings in both the youth league and the adult league. Yet recruits
to Aborígen are seen as traitors to the ethnicity, rather than simply as motivated athletes. “Yes, they win, but I would never want to be part of that team. I can’t stand the arrogance. I would never walk away from my people here.” I asked how prodigal players would be treated if they switched back to Qompí. However, in a fluid pragmatism typical of Qom narrative, I received answers such as, “Everyone makes mistakes. If anyone wants to come back, live here, and play for us, he will be welcome. People switch back and forth all the time. Some guys get lured by promises of money, fame, or trips. He (Rossi) never shows his face in Lot 68. He recruits players by bribing them. When they realize Rossi’s lies, like I did, they come back.” The essential ethnic identity outweighs the performed identity gained, but only transiently, by defection.

There is a rebellious enjoyment that accompanies playing or routing for Qompí. As one of the only non-indigenous players on the team, I felt while playing that I was somehow furthering the cause of Qom self-determination in the Argentine context. What I felt surely pales in comparison to how the players feel. In fact, there is a strong rebellious streak that runs through the players that have played exclusively for Qompí. Members of Qompí tend, more often than does even the typical population of Lot 68, to publicly display tokens of rebellion. T-shirt, decals, stickers bear the revolutionary image of Che Guevara. Boom boxes thump with the music of Rage Against the Machine, 50 Cent and other musicians whose lyrics rail against the establishment. Such anti-establishment, anti-nationalist tendencies are not only absent at Aborígen camp, but instead the rigorous discipline of the dutiful team member is enshrined and valorized.

Qompí players, while competing and afterward, tend to take on leadership roles in the community, such as being one of the bilingual teachers at the primary or secondary school in Lot 68. This pattern indicates that playing for Qompí — performing identity in the public space of the field— strengthens ethnic solidarity to an even greater extent than simply living in Lot 68. Rather than integration, as was the explicit aim of Aborígen, this parallel development, with its maintenance of an indigenous recreational space within a veritable reservation, is the ongoing counterpoint offered by Qompí’s players and alumni.

Agnosticism towards losing games, while maintaining a mindset of anti-compliance, is at the heart of Qompí players’ and alumni’s social life. This happens to align in high concordance with much else in the Qom identity cluster. Since 1507, from the introduction of the horse, to guns, to alcohol and how rugby, the Qom predictably repurpose
cultural artifacts loaned from criollo neighbors into powerful modes of indigenous resistance. Thus, the weekend tournament pitting Qompi against Aborígen and criollo teams becomes a microcosm of the colonial encounter, with indigenized modes of colonizer practices being appropriated and utilized to generate alternative forms of meaning, resistance, and hybridity with and against colonial oppressors.

Local Pleasures Confront National Aspirations

In biological science, a chimera is “an individual, organ, or part consisting of tissues of diverse genetic constitution; a hybrid created through fusion of a sperm and an egg from different species.” Daniel Rosenfeld’s title for his film on Loco Rossi’s involvement with the founding Qom players anticipates a useful lens for understanding the complex hybrid flows and counter-flows that Aborígen’s formation and evolution have occasioned within Lot 68, Formosa and Argentina more broadly. Aborígen’s formation comports well with the notion that it is a hybrid formation derived from two distinct parental pools; a long history of colonial contact indicates that the foundation of Aborígen is the latest in a series of hybridities between cultural markers of Qom derivation with those of European origin.

What then causes Aborígen to be important enough to trigger filmmaking, international competition, and the formation of a second indigenous team to compete against it? I argue that its formation violated extant local imaginations of ethnic geographies. In essence, its formation opens up a “third space” between Lot 68 and Formosa that did not exist before.

The intervention of the Third Space, which makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process, destroys this mirror of representation in which cultural knowledge is continuously revealed as an integrated, open, expanding code. Such an intervention quite properly challenges our sense of the historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force, authenticated by the originary Past, kept alive in the national tradition of the People (Bhabha 54).

Clearly, in Formosa ethnic narratives reinforce Qom and criollo identities as separate and distinct, a sense that is further buttressed by the geographic reality of ethnic separation. By training in the interstitial space between to 68 and Formosa, Aborígen embodies and enacts a sporting Third Space (Ruddock 369) where alternative identities come
into being. In turn, the formation of Aborígen in the monte outside of Lot 68 led to the creation of a competing Third Space in the center of Lot 68. These liminal spaces open up possibilities for reintegration or disintegration.

What is at stake, then, is whether or not members of the Qom ethnicity are willing to participate in reflecting a heterogenous vision of Formosa within Argentina, or if they prefer the local pleasures of resistance and indigeneity. In navigating the dichotomy between the ethos of self-determination and that of ascendant indigenous participation within Argentine society, Qom players circulate between the teams that serve as the embodied markers of the two alternatives.

In that Qompí and Aborígen remain as fixed entities with players circulating between them based on their particular moments in personal aspiration and affiliation, it is fruitful to consider how the teams function as competitive hubs in a bureaucracy of identity politics in Formosa. On the one hand, Qompí represents localist, domestic aspirations that place communal integrity and grass roots development above all. This is even better illustrated when realizing that many of the bilingual teachers of the Qom school tasked with ensuring the survival of the Qom language and teaching myths, are involved in Qompí, while no members of Aborígen are present in the community whatsoever. By contrast, Aborígen represents a global pull on talent that invites Qom players to enjoy the world’s stage as few indigenous people do. It provides exemplars, in the form of the Maori of New Zealand, to show Qom youth a pattern demonstrating strong, successful indigenous men living and competing in a context that is largely European-derived.

Stemming from his study of a New Guinean group, Gregory Bateson elaborated (175) the term schismogenesis to describe a “process of differentiation in the norms of individual behavior resulting from cumulative interaction between individuals.” Schismogenesis has been used to describe the various kinds of social rifts that occur in the various societal strata, and remains useful in describing the ways in which Qompí and Aborígen bureaucracies are formed by the cumulative actions of the players that pass through them. Bateson described two types of schismogenesis, complementary and symmetrical.

**Complementary** schismogenesis is enacted by hierarchical, unequal, segments of a society; as exhibited between the competition of economic classes. While there is contest between individuals and segments, the tensions still exhibit an overall institutional continuity, and ultimately reinforce the hierarchical social whole. **Symmetrical** schismogenesis,
however, is a more common pattern seen in sporting environments, where a kind of arms race for superiority ensues. With symmetrical schismogenesis in Western (and by extension, criollo) sports, each team has the same rules, belongs to the same overarching federation, and represents analogous territorial segments. All teams seek the same goal: to win. The enthusiasm of winning, or the disappointment of loss, both serve to reinforce the ethos of the game. In that sense, the ethos itself seems to be more important than other potentially divisive practical forces; and for this reason, sports are often thought to integrate peoples together who are otherwise unduly given to other more practically injurious contest.

While Western athleticism ostensibly promotes character building, personal perseverance, camaraderie, integrity and a host of other values, frequently enough such an idealization is not the case in practice. The Aborígen Club is clearly seeking to integrate, if not, subordinate, Qom athletes, and the community to which they are attached, to the subculture of sport, which conjoins territories of Argentina together. Rossi hopes to engender the discipline of the game, such as it has evolved in Argentine society, into popular Qom behavior. Outside Western observers are hardly able to be critical of Rossi’s efforts, as athleticism and sports competition holds an uncritical pride of place in globalized popular culture.

That a documentary about the Aborígen Club was awarded by the Western cinema is unsurprising given the shared value system at play. For many of the Qom people, the Aborígen Club is not serving to integrate them into Argentine society on the idealized level playing field of rugby. The mentality of sport associated with Argentine rugby in general, and the Aborígen Club in particular, is not play on neutral ground. For the Qom culture resistance, the Aborígen Club exhibits yet another prong of the national program of ethnic suppression. Yet it is precisely here in this program that the Qom exhibit particular ethnic traits of a yet more dramatic effort for community survival.

Exhibiting a different somatic type than the Aborígen Club; practicing in an alternative location; cultivating a different set of skills; displaying a different kind of uniform, and speaking a chthonic tongue, team Qompí is content to play on their own, unapologetic terms. As others have noted (Vaczi 37), for the Qom, even the ultimate goal of the national game, and the international sport cult, is subordinated to the indigenous ethos. In this heresy of organized sport, a more essential layer of play is foregrounded; one by which the dominant standards of
the ascendant classes are subverted even by the very act of their ritual presentation in the common ball field. A kind of subversive prestige is thus earned when traditional prestige cannot be practically won.

**Conclusion**

Qompí has exercised indigenous self-expression sufficiently to shift the goals of sporting practice, at least among the residents of Lot 68. While Aborígen Club et alia are aiming for the fetishized goal of standard victory by the acquisition of scores, Qompí has adapted its modern game to its anti-nationalist aesthetics. Qompí “wins” by its enjoyment of a confidence that it genuinely represents its people’s heritage. Lot 68 affirms them in this regard, while they are labeled racists by Aborígen players. Qompí players reinforce the value of fraternal bonds over individual stardom. Qompí is able to find satisfaction in connecting the game they play more to the heritage they esteem than to the fetishized victory others crave. Such a cultural disassociation of the collective desire for victory is quite rare, and only subject to cultivation from a culture with a tenacious grasp of its smaller scale heritage. René Girard writes of the kinds of endogamous rivalries in globalized sports:

Rivalistic desires are all the more overwhelming since they reinforce one another. The principle of reciprocal escalation and one upmanship governs this type of conflict. This phenomenon is so common, so well-known to us, and so contrary to our concept of ourselves, thus so humiliating, that we prefer to remove it from consciousness and act as if it did not exist. But all the while we know it does exist. This indifference to the thrust of runaway conflict is a luxury that small ancient societies could not afford (9).

For the Qom, therefore, especially for the Qompí team, the kind of schismogenesis exhibited by the competing formations of Aborígen and Qompí is an instance of complimentary and NOT symmetrical schismogenesis, as is more commonly seen in sporting rivalries. Rather than playing on a truly level field with the same rules, the context of Aborígen’s emergence, and the social mobility its players might utilize, is quite different than the context and possibilities of players who are currently on Qompí’s roster. The rivalry of Qompí and Aborígen is a reflection of the class struggle typical of indigenous-state relationship. The movement of players between the teams reflects the ambivalence of the indigenous community to the state — they are Argentines by
birth, but are generally not beneficiaries of a nationalist agenda. They play their games by an alternative set of rules. Indeed, the Qom have perceived that sport was not just a game by which they could learn valuable social skills to survive in a larger society. For them it was a initially a criollo trick, but one which they unmasked by an indigenous sensibility, and turned around to their own best advantage.

A secondary definition of chimera is also appropriate to reference: “a thing that is hoped or wished for but in fact is illusory or impossible to achieve.” (oxforddictionaries.com) A team that has a goal well beyond winning is “playing” its league, in the performative sense of that word. It succeeds by its compelling show of its people’s ethos. The players of Qompí are rewarded not by the league podium, but by Lot 68’s pride and gratitude. The very capacity of the indigenous people to reward athletic youth with affirmation that competes with national allurements it itself powerfully reinforces the local community’s indigenous identity.

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Nationhood, Violence and The Beautiful Game: Peronism, Football and Cultural Identity in Argentina

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Abstract: The political contexts and history of Football in Argentina is critical to an understanding of the game’s growth and development in the country since its evolution in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The political and class centred cleavages at the core of football’s identity have framed an interlocking synthesis of nationhood, ethnicity and society which continue to impact upon the game’s contemporary landscape, at both club and national levels. The Post-War phenomenon of Peronism, based on the controversial leadership of Juan Peron (1946-1955 and 1973-1974) defined a quasi-ideological nexus reflecting the volatile political tensions in Argentine society, spawning a rich cultural and political legacy. This article evaluates the relationship between the Mass Populism of Football and the Mass Movement of Peronism. It has four key themes. Firstly, it contextualises the historical and cultural development of Football within the rise of Peronism during the 1940s around the critical concepts of Mass Populism, Cultural Representation and Political Factionalism. Secondly, it considers the capacity of the game to shape and legitimise Nationalism, Identity and Political Culture in the period. The core of this analysis is an examination of the parallels and paradoxes between Peronism and the sub-cultural mores of football. The study then considers the impact of Peron’s return to Argentina in the 1970s within the shifting dynamics of the cultural representation and political symbolism of the game. Finally, the article reflects upon the lasting legacies of Peronism within the contemporary vortex of Argentinian Football.

Key words: Argentina, Culture, Football, Politics, Peronism.

Resumen: Los contextos políticos y la historia del fútbol en Argentina son críticos para entender el crecimiento de ese deporte y su desarrollo en esta nación desde su evolución a finales del siglo XIX y principios del XX. Las divisiones entre los componentes políticos y de clase que se hallan en el centro de la identidad del fútbol han configurado una síntesis interrelacionada de nacionalidad, etnicidad y sociedad que continúa impactando sobre el paisaje contemporáneo de este deporte, tanto a nivel de club como nacional. El fenómeno de postguerra del peronismo, basado en
The Roots of Football Culture in Argentina: Key Themes and Contexts

The global and historic culture of Argentinian football is embellished by the contrasting images of Messi and Maradona, of Simeone, Di Stefano and Rattin. Its folklore is rich in the heroes, anti-heroes and villains which have fashioned the game’s iconographic landscape. Football grew out of Europe, with the English roots shaping the game’s genesis being particularly prominent in the late nineteenth century (Campomar 32). By the 1920s and 1930s, the contested and divisive growth of professionalism, passionate club rivalry with a vociferous, volatile fan base, and the evolution of a particular style of play (Nadel 44) had merged with the interlocking synthesis between football, politics and the representation of identities (Wilson 115). Within the Argentinian state and nation these forces gave rise to the seminal notions of Argentinidad and La Nuestra. The genesis of the former can be traced back to Argentinian independence in 1810 acting as a catalyst for the historic break with Spanish Colonial Rule. Real impetus was given to the concept and values of ‘Argentinidad’ after the influx of European Immigration in the late nineteenth century, which created an ethnically diverse society. Fashioning a sense of national identity in an attempt to create cultural and political cohesion in a fragmented population became a key governmental objective. The start of football’s boom period in the 1920s dovetailed perfectly so that pride in La Nuestra, the national team, became a major factor
in the shaping of Argentinidad (Guilianotti 30; Wilson 5). These pivotal cultural constructions around the game are at the core of the paradoxes of idealism and violence, creativity and negativity, football and anti-football, which have characterised the complex dynamics underpinning the frequent dislocation, at both club and national level, of football in Argentina (Wagg C3). The nexus between Football and Politics is crucial to a critical understanding of the historical and cultural development of the Argentinian game (Goldblatt 274).

The central tenet of this article is to consider the relationship between Football and Peronism in Argentina, both in respect of Peron’s first period in power, from 1946-1955, and with regard to his return from exile in 1973-1974. The study has four main themes. Firstly, it examines the game’s symbolic representation of the Peronist impulse, with all its ambiguities and contradictions, contextualised within the seminal cultural values of La Nuestra. Secondly, it considers the demise of the idealised concept of the Argentinian game in the post Peronist phase of the late 1950s and 1960s. It then evaluates the relationship between Football and Peronism during his brief return from exile during the 1970s, before reflecting upon the legacy of Peron in the construction of nation and identity within the contemporary Argentinian game. As the cohesive links between the regime and football became embedded in Argentinian Society, the shadow of Peronism was only partially eclipsed by the nation’s World Cup victories in 1978 and 1986 (Wilson C29).

**Football and the Struggle for Nationhood in Argentina**

Football has played a key role in defining the shifting mores of national identity, or ‘Argentinidad’. The cohesion and symmetry of the development of the game’s mass popular appeal has made it a potent vehicle for political exploitation and manipulation through its capacity to reflect and articulate collective populist sentiments (Goldblatt C8). The game’s genesis and subsequent growth in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were inextricably interlinked with the demographic changes, urbanisation and industrialisation which defined the social and economic developments underpinning the rise of nationalist sentiments (Hedges C2; Wagg C3). The game was a focal point in the emergence of class centred politics in the 1910s and 1920s (Munck C5), serving both as a means to incorporate migrant workers, particularly from Southern Europe, within the sprawling urban communities of the game’s heartland, and to fracture the middle and upper — class elitism which had been central to football’s quintessentially
British roots in Argentina (Goldblatt C5). These roots had stressed football’s amateur traditions and harked back to an earlier innocence (Giulianotti and Williams). With the rise of organised nation centred politics after the First World War, the game became an increasingly significant cultural and social force in defining ‘Argentinidad’, not only representing the break with Europe but also in respect of articulating and framing distinguishing features of the sport as part of the struggle to define the Argentine nation, first expressed in the rivalry with Uruguay (Campomar 105). When the first World Cup Final was played in Montevideo in July 1930, it reflected divergent constructions of contrasting Latin American ethnicities on either side of the River Plate (Glanville C1).

By this time, the archetypal folkloric mores of Argentinian football were located as a cohesive set of myths and values to bind the male urban working class together within the burgeoning ‘barrios’ of Buenos Aires and Rosario, tapping into a complex mosaic of local, class orientated and regional rivalries resonating in the boom of club football in Argentina from the 1920s to the early 1950s, with surging attendances and extensive media coverage (Wilson C17). Within this lexicon, El Pibe, El Potrero, El Criollo and El Crack (Galeano 33; Sibaja and Parrish 655) became identified with the nascent emergence of a distinctive way of playing the game and in establishing the indigenous characteristics of La Nuestra, which celebrated individualism, culturally rooted in the romantic escape of the poor boy, crafting the art of the Argentinian style of play in the urban wastelands of his local neighbourhood before escaping to enthral the crowds by becoming a star (Nadel C2). This image of the game rejected comparatively dour European tactics and the organisational strengths of the European game (Campomar 72), underpinning the ideals governing the formation of the Argentinian Football Association in 1931, which was a highly politicised structure of governance from its inception, overseeing important cultural shifts such as the eventual adoption of Spanish replacing English as the game’s linguistic modus operandi in 1934. This was part of a raft of developments during the 1930s, leading to the subsequent professionalization of the Argentine Game (Giulianotti and Williams), fashioning a hybrid mix of bohemian idealism and practical realism as the backdrop to Peron’s emergence from the ranks of the military. The national team was the embodiment of the cherished values of La Nuestra, a potent symbol of national pride, a cultural representation of the Nation, cast in the same vein as the Tango in its manifestation of bravado, masculinity.
and panache. (Archetti, Guilianotti 155). The actual history of the game’s cultural roots was more fluid than these sacred myths and precepts suggest, with several ethnicities and identities shaping both football’s cultural hue and its tactical diversity (Wagg C3). The concept and associations of La Nuestra were most significant in legitimising football as a central tenet of Argentinian statehood.

In the early 1940s, and the start of Peron’s gradual rise to power, football had already carved a niche within the political and cultural fabric of Argentinian society. The hierarchical nature of the Argentinian Football Association, allied to the cohesive structure of club football, based on member associations, became fused with its capacity to harness mass populism. These factors made the game ripe for exploitation and manipulation by the key concepts underpinning the political predilections of El Caudillo (Wilson C13).

**Football, Peronism and the Politics of National Identity 1946-1955**

Juan Peron’s rise to power in the early 1940s is well documented (Bolton C3). The evolution of the paradoxes of Peronism as a force for both inspirational unity and violent division in Argentinian society is profoundly etched within the political culture of the country (Hedges C7). Moreover, the cult of personality around both Peron himself and the international profile and publicity surrounding his relationship with Eva Peron Duarte engendered a plethora of aspirations, policy achievements and myths during his first presidency which have endured to fashion the most potent cluster of idealised images and symbols within the vortex of the nation’s political history and cultural identity (Rock). For all its contradictions and ambivalences, Peronism shaped the development of contemporary Argentina, encapsulating the Revolution of October 1945, El Caudillo’s two term Presidency and his fall from grace in 1955, followed by the mystique and drama of his exile and his brief return to power in the 1970s (Bolton C13). The factionalism and violence which permeated the Peronist/anti Peronist dichotomy defined both the internal dynamics of Argentine society and its international image and reputation for over thirty years, and left a lasting imprint on the juxtaposition of militarism and democracy which defined politics in the post Peron era (Hedges C12).

In common with other dictators such as Mussolini and Franco, Peron had little personal interest in Football (Wilson 118). However, he was quick to perceive the potential of Sport in general, and football
in particular as a potent political weapon within the axis of Class Identity, Mass Populism and Popular Culture (Campomar 264). Within the emergent quasi ideology and doctrine of Peronism in the late 1940s, the game’s secure place within the cultural and sporting mores of a maturing sense of national identity suggested that it could serve the aims of the regime well as a focal point of cohesion between the diverse elements of Argentinian society whilst fostering a nexus of patriotism, pride and loyalty in the ‘New’ Argentina (Wilson C13). The complexities of Peronism as a force of social and cultural change made use of football in four seminal ways. Firstly, it utilised the game’s latent power to promote the objectives of Justicialismo or Social Justice as a mode of social inclusion and citizenship in the sprawling communities of what had become a predominantly urban society (Bolton C2). Secondly, Peron’s power base within the burgeoning power of the Trade Unions exploited the potential of football to permeate working class populism in Buenos Aires and other cities where support for the game was passionate and loyal (Wilson 122). Furthermore, Peron’s rise to power and his first period in office coincided with a ‘Golden Age’ of Argentinian football, at both club and international levels (Campomar C7). This enabled the regime to maximise the game’s popularity and success as vehicles for political legitimacy, containment and distraction in domestic economics and politics, as achievements, both real and imagined, were used in a censored sporting and non-sporting media to project positive iconography around both Peron himself, and significantly on Evita (Bolton C4; Wilson C13). Finally, the national team was used to project and legitimise Peron and Peronism internationally, being represented as a reflection not only of the special characteristics of La Nuestra, but also as indicative of the Peronist doctrine of the ‘Third Way’ as a key dynamic in the new post—war order in International Politics (Bolton C3; Hedges C7).

The relationship between Football and Politics under Peronism in the period 1946-1955 illustrates a scenario in which the fortunes of the game and of the regime itself reveal close parallels. Football mirrors many of the ambivalences, contradictions, successes and failures of Peronism per se whereas Peronism inculcates many of the illusions, folkloric myths and ultimate disappointments of the Argentinian game into its manufacture of cohesion and consent within a complex and politically volatile society. The fusion of Football and Peronism was emotionally charged; Passion, Rivalry, Patriotism and Idealism provide the coherent thread linking the game with the contemporary politics
of the period. The development of *La Nuestra* and other potent representations of football in the first Peronist period serves as a testimony to the contemporary interdependence between the game, the nation and political culture.

The volatile politics and mass organised protest which culminated in Peron’s ascent to power coincided with a ‘Golden Age’ for Argentinian football at both club and national level in the 1940s and 1950s, in which the principles and values underpinning *La Nuestra* were critical in defining the concept of *Argentinidad* (Campomar 244; Wilson C16). The great River Plate team of the 1940s, spawning the mystical famous five; ‘La Maquina’ of Muñoz, Moreno, Pedernera, Labruna and Loustau, immortalised the beauty and flair of the Argentinian game. Whilst the team did not always sweep everything before it on the field, given the intense competition within the domestic game at the time, the side’s attacking football and charismatic players cemented its niche in the folklore of the nation’s sporting heritage (Galeano 87, 89). The emergence of Racing Club, and the achievements of the national side gave full rein to the sacred precepts of *El Pibe* and *El Potrero*, releasing *Los Cracks* to exhibit the distinctive skills of *El Criollo*, the Argentine way of playing the beautiful game (Sibaja and Parrish 656). These values incorporated the aspirational nature of sport, idealistically allowing the underdog to escape from poverty within the collective power of football’s mass populism. As such, during the 1940s there existed a close symmetry between the game’s continued boom and the organised street politics of ‘Los Descamisados’, the ‘shirtless ones’; the forgotten underclass and unrepresented groups in Argentinian society as a working-class mass movement which enshrined the dual objectives of social justice and reform so central to Peronist doctrine and its popular appeal (Wilson C13). This found subsequent expression in the activities of the Eva Peron Foundation (Bolton C4; Hedges C8).

By the late 1940s, aided by the increased mediatisation of the game through the radio coverage which reinforced the mass audience for the Sporting Press, particularly in respect of *El Grafico* (Wilson 40).

Football became increasingly perceived as a means of projecting national cohesion and identity within the traditional framework of local club rivalries. The regime was adept at implementing the twin strategies of direct involvement in the administration and structure of the domestic game, whilst carefully exploiting the values of nationalism and patriotism around the national team. The Political Patronage underscoring Peronism’s links with the game found expression in the
development of infrastructure during the period, with funding and subsidy provided for stadium construction in return for compliance and support for the wider political aims of the Peronist doctrine. This close association between football and the state fuelled allegations of corruption and financial irregularities which subsequently became such a defining feature of the nation’s football (Nadel C2). Moreover, the high public and media profile during the game’s boom period secured both legitimacy and publicity for Peron and Evita, and allowed the regime to at least partially paper over the deep divisions and splits in Argentinian society.

The most direct link between Football and Peronism was reflected by the setting up of *Los Juegos Nacionales Evita* (Evita Championships) in 1949 (Campomar 264; Wilson 119). Peron himself had allegedly remarked that he had risen to power on the back of male support, that his second term would be based on the female vote and that a third term would be founded on children. In this way, primarily with football but also embracing other sports, the Eva Peron Foundation made use of the competition to promote the political goals of citizenship, social inclusion for girls, patriotism and a keen sense of morality (Goldblatt 274). Above all the prominent media coverage of the annual event provided the regime with a cluster of images of Evita as mother and saviour of the nation, and attempted to inculcate and legitimise Peronism as the nation’s future.

Whilst the cultural heritage of football was exploited by Peronism to manufacture an idealised sense of nationalism, the reality of the game’s development in the Peron era revealed ambivalences and contradictions. The battle for professionalism had largely been fought during the 1930s, but the consequences spilled over into the Peronist years. The fluid nature of ‘Argentinidad’ rooted in immigrant stock had already witnessed the Italian ancestry of three cracks of the game in the 1930s, Monti, Guaita and Orsi, all of whom had played for Argentina in the 1930 World Cup Final representing the Mussolini regime’s World Cup winning side of 1934, with Monti playing in the final itself (Glanville C2; Wilson C7). Even in the pioneering days of the international game, nationality and cultural identity was fluid, with football being exploited to legitimise Fascism in the fashioning of Italy’s successful, winning national team. This established a pattern which was repeated by the loss of star players, labelled *il Oriundo*, to Italy and Spain in the post war years, and by the further exile of the so called ‘deadly trio’ of Maschio, Angelillo and Sivori to play for Italy
in the 1950s. This player exodus reduced the potency of *La Nuestra* as a sporting and cultural force, and was exacerbated by the frequent disputes around unionisation and player power in the late 1940s, underscoring a wider political turbulence, and clearly expressed with the poaching of star players by the incipient commercialism of *Los Millonarios*, Bogota, which paid huge salaries to a cluster of star players including Di Stefano, Rossi and Perdernera from the Argentinian game (Goldblatt 278).

The multiple associations of football under Peron manufactured images and illusions of cohesion and certainty whilst the reality was more indicative of factionalism and protectionism within a culture of insularity and defensive paternalism. The aura of invincibility, the mystique of *La Nuestra* is especially apparent in the fortunes of the national team at the zenith of the golden age for the nation’s football. By the late 1940s Brazil had replaced Uruguay as the arch enemy, the eulogised victory over three turbulent matches in 1946 coinciding not only with Peron’s first election success, but seeping into the myths of folkloric representations of identity (Hedges C5; Wilson C13). This pinpointed a less parochial and provincial attitude in the new international order of the post-war world, in which Argentina and Brazil would be in the vanguard of development and economic growth. The intensity of the football rivalry between the two nations gave contested cultural and sporting power a new edge and kudos. Yet for all the rhetoric surrounding the national team, its prowess was rarely tested outside South America. This demonstrated the innate pragmatism of the paradox between Internationalism and Insularity at the heart of the Peronist doctrine, in which the protective shield of isolation masked fragility and weakness within the nation’s football. On the one hand, the heroic and noble defeat of the national team by England at Wembley in 1951 and the subsequent defeat of the supposed masters of the game in Buenos Aires in 1953 (Clack; Wilson C16) were portrayed in the Argentinian media as evidence of the new, confident, successful Argentina, displaying the skills of *La Nuestra* on the international stage, a fitting testimony to the third way of stable governance and a coherent political ideology (Bolton C7). Yet underlying this bravado, the insecurity of potential failure lay deep within the Argentine psyche. As a result, the national team did not participate in either the 1950 Brazil World Cup or in Switzerland 1954. A mixture of disputes with the AFA and FIFA, coupled with Peron’s pragmatism, survival instincts and paranoia suggested that the political risks were too great,
that the enormous political and cultural capital of victory were offset by the passions unleashed by potential failure (Campomar C5; Nadel C2). Beneath the swagger and confidence of *La Nuestra*, the brittle nature of *Argentinidad* around the mass populism of football, the fear that the tactical and organisational shortcomings of the game would be exposed, most of all in Brazil’s hosting of the World Cup, effectively jettisoned its involvement.

These paradoxes meant that football was largely cocooned within the self — promoting bubble of hyperbole encompassing Peronism (Taylor C2). It served the key purposes of juxtaposing authoritarianism, autocracy and populism to present a positive sense of cultural coherence in the Peron years. It left the potent legacy of romanticism, idealism and hope. The fragility of these notions was cruelly exposed in the period following *El Caudillo’s* fall from power in 1955, when they were eventually reduced to nostalgic memories of a glorious heritage.

**Peronism in the Shadows: Anti-Futbol and Violence in Argentina 1956-1976**

The life and death of Eva Peron was soon immortalised in a pastiche of myths, symbols and representations within the nation’s cultural folklore, whilst Juan Peron’s many years of exile, mostly in Franco’s Spain, kept the idealised flame of Peronism alive, serving as a reference point for both his supporters and detractors to embellish the deep political divisions within the frequently violent and repressive fabric of the Argentinian nation and state (Bolton C6; Hedges C10). Consequently, although Peronism became a proscribed organisation shortly after *El Caudillo’s* overthrow in 1955, political battle lines were largely drawn along the lines of a Peronist and Anti-Peronist dichotomy for the following twenty years. A powerful mixture of an idealised revisionism of the Peron regime, focussing on its achievements but oblivious to its many darker elements, together with its overt or thinly disguised survival remained as important elements within the Argentinian State. Furthermore, the reassertion of those powerful factions in Argentinian society which had been eclipsed by years of Peronism, ushered in a lengthy period characterised by class centred political factionalism, unstable governments, and the increased involvement of the police and the military in Civil Society (Hedges C9, Munck C3). The cultural cleavages unleashed by this instability impacted both on the fragile nature of *‘Argentinidad’* and frequently exploded into mass political protest quelled by the reactive forces of repression and violence, and
underpinned by an economic slowdown culminating in the hyper-inflation of the early 1970s. Within the volatile politics of the 1960s, the nostalgic iconography surrounding Evita, and the clandestine activities of the Peronists plotting the return of El Caudillo as the nation’s saviour meant that Peronism itself remained the defining reference point in Argentine politics, culture and society. The cultural and political significance of football meant that it continued to act as a metaphor for wider societal issues in the post Peronist era. Because the game had become inextricably bound up in the historic constructions of nation and identity, and had been a barometer of the mass populism of Peronism, it mirrored many of the cultural divisions of post Peron Argentina, whilst paradoxically acting as a fragile point of unity and cohesion within Argentine society.

The myths and illusions surrounding the fabled properties of La Nuestra were cruelly exposed when the national team emerged from isolation to participate in the 1958 World Cup in Sweden. In contrast to the vibrant success of arch rivals Brazil, with a youthful and effervescent Pele as the new international star, the national team performed abysmally in the tournament, culminating in the nadir of a 6-1 defeat to Czechoslovakia, the worst debacle in the nation’s football history (Wilson C19). The success of the side in the South American Championship in 1957, based on individual flair, only masked the internal conflicts around coaching and tactics within the Argentinian Football Association and the malaise and disorder in post Peron Argentina. The team’s displays in Sweden, coupled with the subsequent disappointment of the national team’s performance in the Chile World Cup of 1962, presaged not only virulent criticism of adherence to the vaunted values of La Nuestra, which had produced a generation of tactically naïve, poorly organised and indulgent, even lazy players; it also led to more protracted debates within the football authorities and the sporting media surrounding the future direction of Argentinian football (Campomar 247). The restricted compass of the game in its alleged golden period, focussed largely on the limited competition of the Libertadores Cup and the South American Championship suggested that the politically centred protectionism of Peronism and its rhetoric of superiority had concealed the weaknesses of La Nuestra.

The failures of 1958 and 1962 punctured national pride and challenged many of the cultural certainties of the Argentinian way of playing the game. It seemed to produce talented individuals whom could become stars in the richer arenas of Europe; but it also resulted
in failure. The ideals and values encompassing La Nuestra mirrored the bloated assertions of Peronism itself. With El Caudillo in exile, the divided sensibility emerged which was to fracture the Argentinian game until the World Cup victory of 1978 and beyond. Whether to protect the traditional, pure values of La Nuestra, even if this resulted in heroic failure or to adopt a more pragmatic, tactically astute and well organised perspective which would project winning as the main objective, with the genesis of what became known as Anti-Football shaped and defined the debate for the heart and soul of the game during the 1960s and 1970s, when winning became more and more the defining motive at club and national levels (Campomar C7; Wilson C20).

This divided sensibility within Argentine football echoed the paradoxes of Peronism; the idealism and the violence going hand in glove. It also produced distinctive representations of the game in post Peron Argentina during the 1960s and early 1970s, as it articulated and mirrored the escalating violence of Argentine society in the period, and projected repeated negative imagery surrounding the nation’s football to intense international media scrutiny, particularly in respect of television coverage (Archetti). The resort to the gamesmanship, sporadic violence and spoiling rationale of Anti-Football failed to produce the formula of success for the national team, when the raw promise of the side’s performance in the 1964 tournament, which saw Brazil beaten in a style reminiscent of La Nuestra in their pomp, was abandoned in favour of a more cynical, negative approach. The side’s performance in the 1966 England World Cup, in the matches against West Germany and the celebrated expulsion of Team Captain Rattin from the Wembley quarter final against England suggested the demise of La Nuestra, when the technical ability of the team was sacrificed in favour of an ultra-defensive professionalism (Clack; Wilson C26). For all the furore surrounding the allegations of conspiratorial refereeing against the South American sides, and the portrayal of the side as the victims and moral victors upon their return to Buenos Aires, the team’s display matched the darker elements of lawlessness, repression and disorder within the fragmented politics of contemporary Argentinian society (Hedges C10).

The impact of Anti-Football at club level was more brutal and more successful. The latent and explosive violence which lay beneath the idealist protestations of Peronism found its most vibrant articulation in the participation of Racing Club and Estudiantes in both the Libertadores and the Inter-Continental Cup competitions. International television
and press coverage of these harsh, violent encounters reinforced the images of Argentinian football from the 1966 World Cup, and pointed at a moral and political societal decline (Glanville C8; Goldblatt C10). The brutality of the three matches between Racing Club and Celtic in 1967 was a bleak indicator of what was to come in the shape of Zubeldia’s coaching of the *Estudiantes* side, which won three successive *Libertadores Cup*, and overcame both Manchester United and AC Milan in the Inter-Continental Cup in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Zubeldia became recognised as the high priest of Anti-Football, in which every type of provocation and intimidation was exploited to gain advantage in the ruthless pursuit of winning (Campomar C7; Wilson C27, 28). The *Estudiantes* side was tactically astute with a group of talented players; it broke the stranglehold that River Plate, Boca Juniors and the bigger clubs traditionally held over the domestic game, but at the cost of adding to the damaged reputation of Argentinian football. Few tears were shed outside the country when the national side failed to qualify for the Mexico World Cup in 1970, beaten by a resurgent Peru (Campomar 319). Both the nation and football were intertwined in a state of crisis, the one feeding off the other in a cauldron of instability and doubt. Within the game, the furore and internal debate surrounding its image and performance led to calls for a return to its more traditional values; within the political arena the clamour intensified for the return of Peron.

The massacre which marked Peron’s arrival at Buenos Aires’s Ezieza Airport in July 1973 dramatically symbolised Argentina’s descent into political chaos and economic crisis. His brief third period in power before his death in June 1974 coincided with the national team’s preparation for and participation in the West Germany World Cup. The build-up to the tournament reflected the internal struggles for control and direction within the Argentinian game, as the Football Association, the clubs and a succession of coaches remained torn between the traditional values of *La Nuestra* and the aftermath of the success generated by the rationale of Anti-Football. The team’s performance in failing to emerge from a group including Italy and Poland illustrated this ambivalence, in which a group of talented individuals once again flattered to deceive. Moreover, the side’s failure was indicative of the undercurrents of political tensions, which even the mass popular appeal of the game was unable to disguise. The lack of any cohesive sense of ‘*Argentinidad*’ and the rising tide of repression, torture and kidnapping increasingly came to characterise the crisis of the Argentinian state during the
1970s. Cast in this light the halcyon days of the 1940s and 1950s, when the cult of Peronism brought the panache of *La Nuestra* and the working-class attachment to football fully into the political orbit of the regime, became couched in the folkloric politics of nostalgia. The death of Peron left the power vacuum of a deeply divided society, with football reduced to mirroring these divisions in both on the field and off the field violence, particularly in the activities of the *Barras Bravas*, Argentina’s Ultras, which suggested the degeneration of the game into the lawlessness permeating the state itself, although hooliganism had been a traditional feature within the patchwork nature of local and regional rivalry of Argentinian football (Galeano 190; Giulianotti 58; Paradiso 69). It came as little surprise when the coup of April 1976 ushered in an era of military rule, and an attempt to banish the spectre of Peronism from the political landscape, when the idealism of the Peron doctrine was replaced by the brutal authoritarianism of all the trappings of a police state (Hedges C10).

**The Hand of God-Peron and Peronism: Enduring Legacies**

The tickertape iconography of Argentina’s hosting of the 1978 World Cup, and ultimate triumph of the host nation in winning the trophy took place against the backdrop of torture, disappearance, state censorship and the denial of fundamental human and political rights (Galeano 177). Whilst FIFA’s decision to award the tournament to Argentina paid homage to the nation’s rich football heritage, within the interwoven tapestry of football and politics it seemed to offer succour to a failed state and was subsequently exploited and manipulated by the governing junta to legitimise an oppressive regime in a panoply of mass distraction and patriotic fervour (Glanville C11; Wilson C29). Whilst concentration camps silenced and tortured within earshot of the celebrations of victory, the success of Menotti’s team suggested at least a partial return and adherence to the traditional values of *La Nuestra*. The rejection of Anti-Football in favour of the fluent, organised team play of Kempes, Ardilles, Pasarella and Luque paradoxically restored some of the international prestige of the Argentinian game, and reawakened the spirit of Peronism in the fusion between the vaunted values of *La Nuestra* and national pride. Nevertheless, the victory was both tainted by its political and cultural context and by the allegations of corruption which tarnished the achievement of Menotti’s side. The remarkable 6-0 victory in the decisive match against Peru, which denied arch rivals Brazil a potential place in the final, was accompanied by accusations of
bribery, match fixing, with the dark hand of La Junta directly involved in securing the right outcome for the regime (Nadel C2; Wilson C29). Furthermore, the 1978 success continued to embellish the paradoxes and ambivalences underscoring the football-politics synthesis within the Argentinian game. It reinforced the Peronist impulses of populism, patriotism and mass cultural identity within the framework of an autocratic military dictatorship, registering a pattern of similarity and divergence with the past (Goldblatt C15).

The impact of Peron, Evita, and the myriad implications of the Peronist/Anti-Peronist dichotomy still casts a shadow over political and cultural life in Argentina, more than sixty years after his fall from power, and over forty years after his death. The debate surrounding football’s politicisation and the divided sensibility which has characterised the game post Peron has continued (Taylor C2). The victory of Bilardo’s team in the Mexico World Cup of 1986 constituted a return to a more pragmatic approach in which the dazzling individual skills of Maradona were harnessed to a tactically astute and organised team ethos which was not averse to resorting to some of the questionable gamesmanship and unsporting play evoking memories of the Anti-Football dialectic (Campomar C9; Wilson C45). The team’s cynical defence of the trophy in Italy 1990, illuminated only occasionally by Maradona’s brilliance suggested that the values of La Nuestra had been almost completely abandoned (Glanville C14).

During the 1990s when the neo-liberalism of the Menem Government struggled to contain mass protest and dissent, the social drug of football seemed to be the only form of cultural cohesion, constituting the counterbalancing safety valve of Banal Nationalism (Billig). By this time, the continued exodus of ‘cracks’ to the elite European Leagues, coupled with the violent image and reputation of much of the domestic game, resulted in a pattern of falling attendances for club football, pushing the live spectacle to the margins as the burgeoning mediatisation of the commercial impulse located the game within the fulcrum of mass popular entertainment (Wilson C53). The nascent globalisation of the 1980s and 1990s catapulted Argentinian football into the post-modern era of commodification and consumption, so that the traditional ethnic mores of the relationship between ‘La Nuestra’ and ‘Argentinidad’ became more culturally blurred and fluid in the global market place of contemporary sport. The most direct manifestations of political protests in a democratic Argentina surfaced in 2001, coinciding with the national team’s qualification and preparation for the Japan/Korea World Cup.
in 2002 (Goldblatt C18). In the tournament itself, in a display which has tended to define the side’s performances in post millennium international competition; hazardous qualification campaigns, particularly in the bloated South American mega-group, have been followed by failure and underachievement, with Messi’s inability to represent the essence of La Nuestra through winning the World Cup both signposting his inability thus far to emulate Maradona’s success, and echoing the pattern of earlier disappointments for the national side (Campomar C10; Wilson C59).

The cultural legacy of Peronism survives in two main ways. Firstly, the Peron years explicitly legitimised the indelible link between football, politics and cultural identity. This is cogently articulated in the contrasting cultural imagery of the two main cracks, Maradona and Messi, whom have dominated the export of the heroes and villains of the Argentinian game to a global audience, though there are ripple effects of this iconographic landscape which continue to shape understanding of the complexities of the folkloric heritage of football’s divided sensibility.

Diego Maradona constitutes the archetypal ‘Pibe’ (Nadel 46). The rise of the poor working-class street urchin from the wrong side of the tracks, perfecting his skills in the roughly hewn urban wasteland on the outskirts of his impoverished barrio, rising from nothing to become a crack on the global stage, dazzling millions with his skills. His story is that of the underdog, the rebel, the irrepressible individual whose rise to the top and fall from grace captures the very essence of La Nuestra, El Criollo and all the folkloric values endemic to the romanticised idealism of the Argentinian game (Galeano 232). His pivotal role in the defeat of England in the Mexico World Cup of 1986 captures the cluster of associations surrounding ‘El Pibe’. The culturally iconic ‘Hand of God’ goal, in which gamesmanship or even cheating is reconstructed as the morally justified revenge of the patriot defending the nation’s honour after the abyss of the conflict over ‘Las Malvinas’ is quickly followed by the brilliance of his second stunning individual goal (Campomar C9; Wilson C45). The multi-layered complexities of ‘Argentinidad’ are confirmed by Maradona’s place in the nation’s cultural iconography. The case of Lionel Messi, however, is rather more ambivalent (Nadel 58). His lower middle class roots in Rosario, coupled with his departure from Argentina at an early age to be incorporated into the academy of FC Barcelona, have raised questions around his patriotism, and his attachment to the country of his birth has created a paradox in which the skills of his football art fit coherently within
the compass of the values of ‘La Nuestra’ thus defining him as a ‘Pibe’, whilst his presumed cultural conformity prevents him from having the wider cultural values associated with Maradona (Nadel C2; Wilson C65). These cultural mores around the game are rooted in the legacy of the Peron era.

This legacy found a contemporary expression with Christina Kirchner’s reintroduction of the Evita Championships (Wilson C66). Not only did the democratic structures of the contemporary state tap into the politics of nostalgia emanating from the Peron years in a rather slick public relations exercise, the enduring mass populism of football, for all its paradoxes and contradictions, was exploited as a means of nation building and the promotion of citizenship whilst confirming its function as a distraction from economic and political problems (Hedges C13; Wilson C66). Some sixty years after her death, the mystique of Evita and the pastiche of cultural references surrounding Peron and Peronism were still being juxtaposed with the native hue of the Argentinian game in an attempt to foster national cohesion and unity.

The myths of Argentina’s glorious past and the eulogising of the nation’s footballing heritage and traditions are a lasting testimony to the powerful association between football, politics and national identity during the Peronist years. The first presidency in particular secured the cultural heritage of Peronism which shaped the nation’s political identity for at least a couple of political generations. The reality of much of football’s development both during El Caudillo’s exile and after his brief return and death in the 1970s are often at sharp odds with the soaring rhetoric of its mythologised heritage. Violence, corruption, gamesmanship and failure have frequently been close to the core of the game at both domestic and international levels. Yet still the myths, the nostalgia, the symbols and images of Peronism resonate powerfully within the cultural representations of Argentinian football in the vortex of national identity.
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PARTE ABIERTA
Fetishism, Racial Fear and Postcolonial Anxiety in Latin American Culture and Literature

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Abstract: This paper explores the aesthetic, social and political aspects of historical fetishism present in Latin American culture as seen in major representative literary works and cultural phenomena. This paper addresses the study of the figure of the Indian (Native) in the context of the great historical moments in Latin America, beginning with “discovery” and conquest, going through colonial times and ending with independent times. In a Postcolonial context, the issues of race, gender, primitivism, Otherness, slavery, immigration, social change, and their underpinning ideologies inspire and inform literary themes, plots, and representation. This work will contribute to an understanding of the historical development of modern Latin America and will appeal to students and scholars.

Key words: Fetishism, Postcolonial, Freud, race, gender, representation, Native, Indian, literature, film.

Resumen: Este trabajo examina los aspectos sociales, políticos y estéticos del fetichismo histórico en Latinoamérica. Se desarrolla alrededor de la teoría del fetichismo de Sigmund Freud y Homi Bhabha y toma la figura literaria del Indio (nativo) y otros entes subalternos como la mujer y los esclavos en el contexto de la evolución cultural en el continente. El trasfondo de este proceso refleja los momentos históricos en la región como la época del descubrimiento, la conquista, la colonia y los tiempos independientes. En un entorno poscolonial, las cuestiones de la raza, el género, el primitivismo, la Otredad, la esclavitud y sus sustentos occidentales inspira y configura temas literarios, tramas, argumentos y representación. Este ensayo espera contribuir a un mejor entendimiento cultural de Latinomérica.

Palabras clave: Fetichismo, teoría poscolonial, Sigmund Freud, Homi Bhabha, raza, género, representación, nativos, Indios, Otredad, literatura, cine.
There were one-eyed men, and dog-headed creatures who ate people, and when they took a man, they cut off his head, drank his blood and castrated him on November 4, 1492.

Columbus’s Diary

In the restless days of his first trip, Christopher Columbus, still without gold and the riches he had offered the Spanish Crown, finds himself in a steering dilemma, both of self-conservation and geography. At the moment of the entry above, he has been unsuccessful to find the potential treasures for his imperial bankrollers and his aspirations of riches in the Caribbean waters are disappointing. As we see above, projecting his fear on paper, Columbus is anxious and fearful; failing to courtly trust usually meant lost of royal grace and liberty as he himself found out in the wake of his third voyage (Fernández-Armesto 178-179). Faithful to his time, Columbus opts to construct an object to stand as the cause and pretext for his failures. Engaging in rhetorical hearsay, a practice popular in his time, he resorts to construct an imaginary human object, a fantasy enemy metonymically standing for his failure.

In the semantic construction of the epistemology of the New World, the ambivalence of imagination and veracity was hardly an issue because political power had the upper hand in constructing reality. As seen in Columbus’ diary, the predisposed written word, the power wielded by Europeans, takes precedent over the facts they encounter in the New World (Cevallos-Candau 2). This practice which is used to ascribe meaning to geography and the human elements in the Caribbean in the early moments of the Conquest, is not only useful for Columbus, but it has had a long axiomatic presence in Latin America into the next centuries. In his Diary, Columbus envisions danger and uncertainty, perhaps echoing those old tales of monsters which have posed similar imaginary dangers to European sea fearers. In his mind, Columbus magnifies an object which satisfies a political desire, that is, a pretext for his failures; he is fixed on an image standing as the source of his own fears and the target for his frustrations. This figure of desire, the embodiment of what he thinks prevents the fulfillment of

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1 See Columbus 68. The translation is mine.
2 The rhetoric of hearsay together with the rhetoric of personal experience (the writer as a witness) was the basis of knowledge in the medieval mind. See Greenblatt 123-124.
his promises to the Spanish monarchy, is the human entity that he has just come in contact: The Indian.\(^3\)

Columbus’ anxiety about the Indian (native) does not arise from his encounter with the Indian in the flesh whom he, incidentally, has found to be peaceful and helpful as a potential ally (36, 46-48); his anxiety founds its way, as we see above, in the fictional cannibals and Indians with dogs of faces, bending on castration of their enemies. The journey of suffering as the spatial method of acquiring knowledge in medieval times (de Certau 70) has immediate rewards for Columbus. For him, the Indian danger has to be magnified since his economic expectations are similarly high. The Indian becomes the foundation and the excuse for all the European anxiety in the New World. Columbus’ subjectivity is complemented by what Lewis Hanke calls the “Aristotelian” perception of the Indians which sees them as slaves by nature and willing subjects to domination (16-17). In a way, Columbus, without knowing, conceives the first European fetish in the new world.

**Fetishism and the Other**

This paper aims to identify the negative images and the stereotypes of Indians, blacks and women as the Other in Latin America, and, as Homi Bhabha points out, a postcolonial critique must dwell on the socio-psychological origins of the stereotypic fantasies. In order to accomplish this endeavor, it is necessary to explore the “process of subjectification” of the Other which tells how stereotypes and images attributed to specific characters are built (38). The fetish, it should be emphasized, owns its prevalence to the dichotomies of “desire and derision” in the Western world while simultaneously reflecting those wishes of going back to the traditional realm of “origin and identity” in the Western mind. The time when the Other was not around.

In question of Latin American literature, it is necessary to point to the human object that triggers a psychological pleasure when reading, for example, about cannibalistic Indians in Mario Vargas Llosa’s *Lituana en los Andes* (1993), irrational Indians in Jorge Icaza’s *Huasipungo* (1935), lascivious blacks in Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda’s *Sab* (1841), submissive women in Jorge Isaacs’ *María* (1867) and the desire to exclude native women in Romulo Gallegos’ *Doña Barbara* (1929). It seems that these images of Indians, women and blacks provoke in both Latin American literary production and consumption a reassuring

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\(^3\) Indian and native will be used interchangeably throughout the paper.
sentiment while calming anxieties due to the endurance of these signifiers throughout history. Reassuring because these images reflect sociological and canonical referents and anxious since those same images, in the political world, cannot be completely controlled thus posing apprehension in the criollo patriarchal mind. These and many other metaphors of the Other provide psychological pleasure and social stability because they are rooted in an old dominant discourse that has satisfied desires and comforted social anxieties in the postcolonial mind.

This prevailing postcolonial discourse owns its success to what Jacques Derrida calls the “iterability” of the sign which grafts on to a chain of diverse signifiers (93) which in Latin America has ranged from anthropological to political praxis. This phenomenon, which although began in the early years of the Spanish arrival, has been cemented in the nineteenth-century and has persisted until contemporary times. In Latin America, the transfer of this anxiety from the personal to the public realm has been crucial in the construction of national identity.

In Latin America, the transfer of this anxiety from the personal to the public realm has been crucial in the construction of national identity. In this situation, the blurry figure, no well-defined image of the Other, common in any gestational political period, has been analogous to the process of human psychological growth.

Kenneth Burke notes that in psychoanalysis the early stage of human psychological growth is crucial for identity formation; this juncture is vital since it provides a unique insight into peoples’ psychological history; it (the stage) turns to be “an informative period of childhood” in which mental experiences are “strongly personalized” in unique internalized images. The latter do not perish in the immediate moment of their inception and in fact their lasting power is patent in the “vessels of character” of the human subject in adulthood (123). In the aftermath of independence in Latin America, if we use Burke’s idea in a historical context, the criollos (Spaniards born in the colonies) set up a system of social relations based on an axis of fear and distrust of the Other. This is an agenda similar to that of their predecessors, the conquistadores, that in the words of Gerald Martin, was motivated by “lust and power, not love and understanding.”4 This Other being women, blacks and primarily the Indians became the most constant tangible proof of this political anxiety.

In his essay on fetishism, Sigmund Freud argues that those early childhood images, whether real in the physical world or imagined in the psychological realm, are the “object-choice” (the fetish) which

4 Quoted in Beardsell 9.
Fetishism, Racial Fear and Postcolonial Anxiety provides pleasure for the subject and are always satisfying and perceived to be natural (“Fetishism” 152). For Freud, the fetish is a natural phenomenon for the subject since it satisfies psychological dual needs. First, it, the fetish, also known as the Other, exists outside the Self, so the apparent distance calms the subject’s fears and anxieties and, at the same time, provides desire and excitement. Man’s mental fixation on an object happens early in childhood in what Jacques Lacan, who reworked Freud’s original ideas, would call years later, the “mirror stage” of human psychological formation where this split of desire and rejection of the fetish takes place (Ecrits 1-7). The automatic dichotomy of rejection and attraction of the fetish is set.

Freud argues that the subjects’ fears are expressed in the rejection of the image (s) emanated by the fetish or attributed to it; moreover, the subject’s natural “disavowal” of what the fetish represents and the subject’s “desire” of the fetish is articulated precisely in the same image which has produced this fear (“Fetishism” 153). For Freud, this thought process basic axiom is the lack or the absence of normality. The fetish image has sexual origins in that it represents a lack of penis (signifier of absence), thus the male-child disavowal of such image because the subject identifies this lack with the figures of his mother (the female Other). Freud points out that in the subject’s mind this lack is understood as being unmanly, feminine, un-fatherly, and in our case, non-European and non-white thus a specific target of rejection; yet this signifier is, at the same time, an object of desire because of the sexual possibilities that this lack (attributed to women) offers the male-child (“Fetishism” 155-156). The fetish helps the subject achieve his goal of protecting himself from the anxiety arising from this experience; he finds calm as he rejects this lack and, at the same time, his desire for this lack, which is now the source of his satisfaction, is confirmed by the attachment to the fetish.

Freud’s idea of childhood experiences as the preeminent source of human behavior might lead critics to treat literary works in different ways. First, they may approach literature from the vantage point of psychobiography, inquiring about personality traits or traumas that shed light on a writer’s work. Second, others might focus on Freud’s contribution to the language and structure of dreams which emphasizes that all human thought and discourse is fundamentally symbolic that find their way into literary inspiration (Dalton 6-9). I want to dwell more on a third mode of approach which borrows from the above and looks for repetitions within fictional works, across different genres and literary
periods; this approach requires identifying how patterns of images reflecting “the repressed unconscious” find their way in literature and thus fulfilling “forbidden wishes [...] in a way that disguises their true nature so that both the repressed tendency and the wish are satisfied” (Dalton 10). Extrapolating this personal fixation to the political realm, the idea of the fetish helps us understand contemporary problems of human subjectivity in the postcolonial world of Latin America.

The solidity of the Freudian image of the Other in postcolonial discourse depends on both the image’s historical and cultural value and its ambivalent characteristics in both the political and the psychological needs of the fetishist. For Homi Bhabha, echoing Freud, this “process of subjectification” is typical of a type of discourse which owns its lasting efficacy to the fixity of Otherness in the Western mind. The image of the Other is always fixed on a dual manner; the image of the fetish evokes fears of abnormality and degeneration which is believed to be a constitutive part of the Other, away from the Self (37). This fixation is, as one might imagine, diachronic and requires dual qualities. First, the image of the Other is subject to repetition through changing historical times, thus the surviving old lies about the Other; second, the colonial mind perceives the excess of the stereotypes attributed to the Other as the proof of its own claims. To be sure, the psychological genesis of human subjectivity, which for Freud echoes early childhood anxiety, in Bhabha’s assertions it has the same source but its ongoing power lies not on the psychological realm but more on racial and political discourse and social praxis.

The colonial object, for example the natives in Latin America, might be only an image (s) in the head of the child (or the Spaniards) but a discursive truth in the adult world (contemporary Latin America); it is in the latter stage, Bhabha believes, where those fears and anxieties become the basic structure for this “range of differences and discriminations that inform the discursive and political practices of racial and cultural hierarchisation” (38). For Bhabha, fetishism has the additional function of fixating the masking of difference and aiming at restoring “an original presence” in the mind of the subject, like the ever present impractical idea of going back to the old ways.

This desire for Otherness has its basis on the complementing metaphor of “lack and difference” which propose metonymically that all men have penises while others have not (women for example); in the political realm, some men have the same acceptable skin color, others do not (44). The identity of the Other, reconstituted on the
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fetish, owns its texture to the conflicting and recurring feelings of desire and rejection embodied in the dichotomies of “pleasure/unpleasure, master/defense, knowledge/disavowal, absence/presence” which vouch for the continuous reiteration of political fantasies (Bhabha 45). These delusions, although restricted to the imaginary, become determinant as real entities in the mind of the fetishist. Moreover, when these images are metaphors for repetitive phenomena, and later metonymies of real world difference, they are historical and very useful as a discursive currency when confronting the Other.

Fetishism in a Historical Context

Let us now transfer this idea of fetishism to a historical context. What for example, we might ask, arouse ambivalent feelings of fear and desire in the young republics of South America back in the uncertain moments of the nineteenth century? After independence, the new elites in Latin America confront difficult tasks in the construction of the new nations. Their challenges are not only of political and economic nature, but social and racial as well. Their obstacles to nation building come not only from finding a political alternative to monarchic government, religious fundamentalism and mercantilism, but also from the failure to integrate to the new nations the non-European folks amongst their midst who were, incidentally, a majority in absolute numbers (Halperin 76-77). As Benigno Trigo notes, the criollo begins to see Latin America as a weaken, sick entity; for him, the new nations and the people in them are pathological entities subject to cure and renewal, a curious concept echoing the Lamarckian scientific lingo of the nineteenth century in Europe. The new rulers identify their countries as sick men in need of treatment and finds the Indian as the source of this pathology (124). The promise of the nation as a panacea for all the socio-political challenges of the time is preserved for the criollo and not extended to non-whites. The political heirs to the conquistadores make use of what comes naturally to them; they simply rely and apply the Aristotelian form of government, which in the Latin American context, is the rule of the best, the male, the white, the pure blood with the right to wage a “just” war over the “savage” (Hanke 40-41). The new nation is for the criollo to exploit and this decision, which becomes the de facto law, materializes itself in the lasting relationships between them and the non-whites upon whom they have authority. In other realms, such as literature, this desire becomes visible in the ‘aristocratic’ typology of nineteenth century romances which Doris Sommer calls the
“foundational” structure for subsequent literary production (“Love and Country” 118). In them, the new master of the realm goes about identifying the sources of their countries’ problems.

The teleology of progress in the new nations, which has been the spirit of political action, becomes imbedded in an exclusionary set of aspirations. The Peruvian criollo, for example, must reject any links to the Indian past and claims that Peru’s place is in the “concert of European, white and civilized nations”5 perhaps preannouncing what the Europeans have in mind for the future countries: to exclude non-whites from the national membership. It was not strange that well into the twentieth century, Alejandro Deustua, who designed Peru’s educational system, believed that Indians were biological failures and incapable of progress (Hanke 105). It is also revealing Simón Bolívar’s anxiety when discovering the ethnic background of a Mexican freedom fighter.

Early in the wars of Mexican independence, the mere presence of Vicente Guerrero provokes an outburst in Bolívar. Finding out that Guerrero is not of European extraction, Bolívar refers to him as a “vile abortion of a savage Indian and a fierce African.”6 In independent times, the criollo deals with political challenges in a way that was not different from what his Spanish forefathers have done. He demonizes the Other with the ultimate telos of exploitation and political control; soon the target of his anxieties, as it has been for Columbus three centuries before, are the natives thus the old Spanish fetish finds a renewal in the young republics. The natives are now seen not as the sodomites and cannibals haunting the old Spanish mind but as the “lazy, shiftless” individuals identified as the prime “obstacle to national progress” (Ski-more 178). In the worst cases, the criollo’s anxiety soon finds its way in more extreme political programs which violently conveys the idea that the Indian has no place in the new nations.

More radical policies, such as the one carried out in the pampas of Argentina, the llanos of Venezuela, the hills of Guatemala, and many other places, engendered violence toward the Indian in many forms ranging from political and economic oppression to the outright extermination (Bushnell et al 56-57, 213-214).7 The antithesis to the well-being of the new nations is embodied in the mere presence of the original inhabitants; in fact, as ironically as it might sound, some allege

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5 Quoted in Munoz 155.
6 Quoted n Burkholder et al 332.
7 See also Rausch 68.
that, in some cases, Indians fared better under Spanish rule than in the new independent countries (Skidmore et al. 39).

The examples abound. The need for the exclusion of the Indian becomes a prerequisite to build the nation where the land/Indian dichotomy embodies the tropes of desire and rejection embedded in political programs. This desire for satisfaction is completed by the fear of the Indian inheritance which Andrés Bello prefers to bury, at least in the imaginary, calling the native influence merely “shades” in the new Latin American soul (41-47). A man of letters, and one of the early independents poets, Bello sees Indian land as the object of desire and the place of survival and regeneration of the Latin American Self; yet, at the same time, Bello’s musings also imply the denial of the Other’s presence. For Bello, a senator, a foreign minister in Chile and the author of a very influential book on Spanish grammar, it is not sufficient that the land (nation) provides satisfaction in the agricultural dimension but also gratification in the spiritual sense. He calls for his fellow Latin Americans to renew themselves in their desire to own and work in the Other’s land.

This call for renewal, the “process of subjectification,” to borrow Bhabha’s words, requires the removal, the erasure of the antithetical Self. In Argentina, Domingo Sarmiento’s fear of Indians and miscegenated gauchos finds its expression in the rejection of native blood; he sees Indians and gauchos as the usurpers of land promised to European immigrants whom he would entice later on to Argentina when he became president. For him, order and moral are reserved to Europeans along with the deserving land. Sarmiento’s call for the extermination of the natives and the replacement of them with European immigrants as seen as part of the development of the natural world and as the only solution for Argentina; he firmly fixes the disavowal of nonwhites as the central moral value for his country (15, 32-33, 159). In another part of the continent, this is the same fear and desire which prompts the Mexican government to expel the Yaquis from their land so that it can be available for new settlers and not strangely, the same policy is pursued by the Chilean government in its dealings with the Araucanos (Bauer 184) who are put in reservations thus freeing their land for European ownership.

In the psychological realm, the above is precisely the “thetic” stage of personal growth, to use Julia Kristeva’s word, the point at which the subject takes up a position, an identification in the world that surrounds him (113) and in our case it is where Latin American identity is formed.
The mirror stage, to recall Lacan, shows a growing psychology in the new nations refusing to acknowledge difference yet reaffirming a Western identity while advancing the criollo’s not so hidden desires. Even in canonical works of the twentieth-century such as Eustasio Rivera’s *La vorágine* (1924), Rómulo Gallego’s *Doña Bárbara* (1929) there is the reenactment of this underlying longing. In both cases, the land is the object of desire while the native is the target of disavowal and removal.

The tropes of desire and rejection of the Indian fetish reflect the useful dichotomy of “pleasure/unpleasure,” to echo Bhabha’s words, which is how the Indian presence is perceived. Sometimes this pleasure is provided by what is apparent (in the European mind) as having worth in the indigenous culture. On the one hand, this fetishist desire to be identified with what is good in the Indian past reflects a strangely teleology of satisfaction and, on the other hand, this identification parallels the fetishist longing to widen the distance from what is thought to be negative features in Indian life. Political leaders, for instance, identify themselves with the glory of the old Indian empires, like the Incas or the Aztecs, but see the contemporary Indian in the flesh as the antithesis to the national project of modernity. In the early days of independence in Ecuador, the Indian is a useful icon for the political elites; they claim to be heirs to Inca glory yet they manipulate the Inca image and those of Indians to gain political legitimacy and control these images for their own interests (Muratorio 105-107). Something similar happens in Peru; late in the nineteenth century, local politicians preach Inca glory and maintain to be the heirs to that grandeur while simultaneously stressing the view that non-whites (not just Indians) are “socially stagnant” because of their “barbaric customs, idleness, and bad hygienic habits” (Muñoz 159). Wishful thinking however cannot take the place of reality and the uncertainty about the future translates in fear which metastasizes into organic figures as seen above. With the Spaniards gone, the colonial mind, at least in the imaginary, has to find its own enemies to lessen its anxiety of governing the new republics. Masking its inabilities to govern with stereotypes of the Other, the criollo takes for granted the fixed attributions to the Other, and these markers are today the medium of exchange amongst Latin Americans.

**The fetish in the Canon**

The problem with the criollo fetish is that with fetishizing the Indian he was not only masking the Indian ontology, but also his own
inadequacies. In the early stages of the fixation of Otherness, the antithetical Self is constructed and identified permanently in his relationship to the fetish; in our case, it is the human elements, especially Indians, women and sometimes blacks. Esteban Echevarría, writing during the years of political consolidation of Argentina, sees Argentinean blacks in his *Matadero* (1838) as the evil antithesis to civilized society. Even though political anarchy in Argentina reflects the animosity between *unitarios* and *federalists* rather than the presence of blacks, Echevarría’s explanation makes sense because of the social referent in which *El matadero* is produced. Echevarría perceives blacks as the epitome of savagery, primitivism and the opposite to European political habits; the latter were, ironically, the actual sources of political anarchy in Argentina (428-438). Sometimes the image is not organic, such as the body of the black or the Indian, but a moral attribution to their beings. Carlos Fuentes in *Artemio Cruz* (1962) proposes, for example, that corruption of the Mexican persona is the source of Mexico’s problems, a troubling suggestion since most Mexicans are partly of Indian descent. If the masking of political problems translates in the stereotypes of Indians and blacks, this concealing of inadequacies must be repetitive and pliable as needed. The Peruvian eagerness to attribute social problems in the country to specific people is revealing. Besides the natives, blame falls onto the new Others who is causing alarms in the *criollo* mind (Klarén 231, 283). In early twentieth century, Peruvian politicians disguise their own inabilities at governing the nation with blaming Chinese and Japanese immigrants for Peru’s economic problems.

The fetish, which is the embodiment of lack (civilization, good manners, right gender, right skin color) and the potential danger to the civilized Self, is also the immanent object of desire embodied in the fixity of its dual attributions: the psychological split of the Other. The fetish reflecting the Other, besides providing imaginary pleasure, also supplies physical satisfaction and becomes the perennial simultaneous source of desire and rejection-pleasure and perverse need. Recalling Freud, the fetish provides dual services to the subject not just in the psychological realm but in the physical world as well. Bhabha writes that in postcolonial discourse the “black is both savage (cannibal) and yet the most obedient and dignified of servants (the bearer of food); he is the embodiment of rampant sexuality and yet innocent as a child; he is mystical, primitive, simple-minded and yet the sophisticated and accomplished liar, and manipulator of social forces” (51). In Vargas Llosa’s *La Guerra del fin del mundo* (1981). Joao Grande, a
gigantic Brazilian slave fits this fetishist desire. Joao, not only fulfills the characteristics described above but his simple mind is degenerate and carries the eternal split of good and evil. He, although the author of horrendous crimes, and a killer par excellence, is also the sheepish religious follower and, in his past as a house slave, the nicest, helpful and humble servant. In Latin America, this desire for dual satisfaction does not only come from servitude but from the lure of sex as part of the repertoire of the dichotomy of sensuality and danger looming large in the postcolonial mind.

Anthony Pagden writes that forbidden yet soothing sex was a common staple in the Spanish sexual agenda in the Americas (86-87), yet this satisfaction was compounded by the horror of sexual practices that Spaniards thought was common to Indians. Colonial authorities, in fact, would write down a set of sexual behaviors and force the natives to confess the practice of them (Harrison 140-143). This is the disposition which becomes part of the texture of the criollo fetish after becoming independent from Spain. If the Other is a savage and a primitive, it is also the subject of sexual and economic desire. Blacks, for example, are portrayed as savages and pagans yet they are the sought after slave labor needed in the plantations; as expected, they also provide an added service to the criollo imagination: sex. In literature, the images of blacks conveying sexual possibilities to Europeans who feel the metonymical connection to the forbidden fruit is clearly perceived in Getrudis Gómez de Avellaneda’s *Sab* (1841) and Enrique López Albujar’s *Matalaché* (1928). Black women are portrayed to have an acceptable nature yet their precocious and uncontrollable sexuality is part of their subjectivity as seen in Cirilo Villaverde’s *Cecilia Valdés* (1882) and Laura Esquivel’s *Como agua para chocolate* (1989). This duplicity is also seen in the characterization of Rosario in Alejo Carpentier’s *Los pasos perdidos* (1953) which provides a variation of this split in the criollo mind.

The fetish of the tropical women is embodied in Rosario. The latter provides the allure of exotic sex for the criollo traveler plus she might be the reason behind the loss of civilized man to the wild; Marisela in *Doña Barbara* shows the same ambivalence. She is a wild creature, at first no more than a little animal, the antithesis to civility and deportment; she, nonetheless, soon becomes the potential sexual partner to Luzardo, which Gallegos points as the impending contamination of the master of the house. Similar images emanate from Vargas Llosa’s *Pantaleón y las visitadoras* (1973) where dimwitted, ignorant, insatiable and
sex-starved yet very accommodating women are running wild in the Peruvian jungle. To further illustrate this assertion, we might mention incidentally a phenomenon which repeats itself in Latin American on a continual basis. Lack of work, political upheaval and economic pressures compel many Indian individuals to leave the countryside and head to urban centers (Butterworth and Chance 54-58). These poor laborers, specially women, flock to the cities in search of jobs where they become the evil new comer yet, at the same time, the most precious, coveted, ubiquitous cheap source of domestic help and, many times, the unwilling providers of sexual satisfaction to their employers.

Sometimes, the split transcends literary structures and geographical boundaries yet it reflects those wishes in seeing the Other as part of the mental disavowal and desire which translates in symptoms of imaginary vanishing of the Other. Sometimes, sexuality must be vanished to the wild, away from civilized society. It is revealing, for example, the emphasis on the not so subtle sexuality among Colombian blacks which is celebrated as the exotic (yet marginalized activity from cultured society) by Jorge Isaacs in María (1867). In another case, that sexuality is too much to bear to the clean, Western soul (Luzardo in Doña Bárbara) which must expel the potential source of pollution and unbridled sex offered by the Indian vamp Doña Bárbara. To give another example, the fetish presents itself not with sexual connotations but with political desires of control and this Otherness attributed to the fetish is precisely what encourages this disposition. Carlos Paz, in his Labyrinth of Solitude (1950) suggests that Mexicans, for example, can be good citizens if they keep themselves under the umbrella of mejicanidad (9-28) which in Mexico is defined by the local Euro-thinking elites.

The fetish seems to provide diachronic satisfaction to the subject and the mechanics of the fetish and its attributions of desire and disavowal have a natural occurrence for the subject. As Freud points out, the subject enjoys the fetish and is “quiet satisfied with it,” after all, the fetish is “precisely designed to preserve it [the fetish itself] from extinction” (Fetishism 152). This satisfaction and the easing of the subjects’ life, is not necessarily only erotic but political and historical as well. The Self imagines the Other within a range of possibilities which underpin the versatility and endurance of postcolonial discourse and this fixity can only be achieved through “a continual and repetitive chain
of other stereotypes” (Bhabha 47). This satisfaction emanating from the fetish, for example, has provided the base for multidimensional ways of seeing Indians where this pleasure changes accordingly to times and places. Lacan, in his reading of Edgar Allen Poe’s *The Purloined Letter*, tells of the different meanings a letter conveys when it changes hands. The letter, which in the story is stolen, is assigned personal values by different people. The meaning of the letter (the subject of desire) changes according to the person who has possession of it, be the king, the queen, or the minister who stole it. Lacan’s reading allows us to see that the signifier changes qualities according to social and historical agendas yet the meaning (s) of the signifier, as it happens with the contents of the purloined letter, remain unknown.

In Latin American literary history, the Indian signifier encompasses a tremendous range of stereotypical cataloguing, each representing different historical periods and literary genres yet the real Indian has remained absent in the same written pages. Indians, for instance, must be primitives as in the Columbus’ *Diary* (c. 1492) and devil worshipers in Hernán Cortéz’ *Cartas de Relación* (c. 1520-1525). They are sodomites for Díaz de Castillo in his *Historia verdadera de la Conquista de la Nueva España* (public. c. 1632); superstitious as told by a long line of writers: Cabeza de Vaca in *Naufragios* (1542), Domingo Sarmiento in *Facundo* (1845), Jorge Icaza in *Huasipungo* (1934), Miguel Angel Asturias in *El Señor Presidente* (1946), José María Arguedas in *Los ríos profundos* (1956); cannibals if told by Columbus in his *Diario*, Vargas Llosa in *Lituma* (1993); valiants (to a limit) in Alonso de Ercilla’s *La araucana* (c. 1590); the Indian is irrational for Icaza in *Huasipungo*; naïve in Vargas Llosa *Historia de Mayta* (1984); tamed and docile in Clarinda Matto’s *Aves sin nido* (1889) and, finally, Indians bear an intrinsic pathology beyond redemption as proposed by Alcides Arguedas in *Pueblo enfermo* (1909).

The fetishist space of desire and disavowal in which Elena Poniatowska meets Jesusa Palancares in *Hasta no verte, Jesús Mío* (1969), León Mera constructs his natives in *Cumandá* (1879) and when Moema Viezzer writes up Domitila Barrios in *Si me permiten hablar* (1978), for example, embody also these ambivalent desires. These works perform the endless search for *jouissance* (enjoyment) that the Indian fetish provides to writers and readers alike. Co-opting the Other’s plight (at a safe distance) the Self avoids doubts of authenticity and exchange, yet

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8 Lacan’s seminar on Poe’s *The purloined letter* is reproduced in John P. Muller et al. (28-53).
it is this power position which allows the contrived knowledge about
the fetish to circulate in this system of desire. The pleasure in these
cases can only be achieved when Palancares, Cumandá and Barrios are
recognized as the symbols of difference (they are known as such), that
is, the Other, whose positionality is proposed as something to be read
and enjoyed.

The fetish allows the subject to perceive the apprehensions about
the Other and transfer these fears to political systems, ideologies
and economic constructs which are identified with the fetish by episo-
temological categories. Sometimes these fears are not materialized
in organic object-choices but in inorganic images such as the widely
acclaimed exoticism of Rubén Darío, *el poeta de América*. Darío sings
to the sensuality, exoticism, sexual allure of the Orient which he per-
ceives as an object to be enjoyed; doing that, he is contrasting the
object of his desire (the Orient) to the West while unwittingly praising
Western colonial referents from which he elaborates his poem (60-63).
Pablo Neruda in his poem to Macchu Picchu defends ideal Western
(*criollo*) notions of behavior as he sees the Inca ruins as the evidence
of a bloody, non-western (savage?) social system (56-58). On his own,
César Vallejo celebrates European medieval notions of suffering and
helplessness which he sees as the unavoidable and deserving fate for
his fellow Peruvian Indians (104, 116). Without going further, the lion-
izing of Western capitalism and Western-Peruvian bourgeois values
and the rejection of Indian contribution to Peru’s political life is not so
subtly suggested in Vargas Llosa’s *Historia de Mayta* and *Lituma en
los Andes*.

Doris Sommer, in her “For Love and Money,” writes that literary
tropes embedded in Latin American must-reads have reflected political
goals which although restricted to the elites, they have become part of
the popular literary tradition by the twentieth century:

> [those] books, immediately seductive for elite readers,
> whose private desires overlapped with public institutions,
> could reinscribe for each future citizen the (natural and irresistible)
> foundational desires for and of the government in power (382).

These “books” are, in effect, political and economic currency. They
are a body of knowledge, an iterative referent in the region not just in
academic circles and public school systems but also in political traditions.
In them, to specify their teleology, there is the desire to uphold Western-
criollo ideologies and to preclude alternatives which may prevent closure to the pathology of the fetish. Second, their intent in inspiration and use is to establish permanent boundaries between them and us, between savage and civilized, male and female, normal and exotic. In both instances, the written word is the living proof of this desire as it masks social relationships clouded by the presence of the fetish and also conceals the Lacanian Real (the real Indian, the real woman), thus impeding the emerging of it. These methods of enjoying the fetish is part of the criollo Self while cataloguing geographies, ethnic groups, systems of thought and forms of behavior. And this enjoyment of the fetish justifies the interpellation of the native as the target of discursive violence, the site of image appropriation, the object of social reification and the focus of estrangement, ridicule and paradoxically the bearer of aesthetic value.

Pleasure and Commercial Value of the Fetish

In the examples above, we see the enjoyment of the image of the Other resembling the mechanics of Freud’s comment on the “pleasure principle” which dominates man’s psychology from early age and in fact dominates his life. This dominance is such that man will forever try to cling to that object which provides pleasure and thus the “avoidance” of unhappiness becomes his main goal in life (Civilization and Its Discontents 23). But later in history, desire and imagination become conventional knowledge. And this internal jouissance, to use Lacan’s terms, and used by Christian Metz, who writes on film and fetishism, requires now the full attention of the fetishist and requires the rational admission of this absence (lack) on which the fetish is constructed. For Metz, the fetish is narrowly related to the features of the “good object” which repeatedly reassures the subject of the “terrifying discovery of the lack” yet it does not pose a hurdle to the subject’s continuous revisiting the engendering of the fetish without a high degree of anxiety (74). The acceptance of the fetish has been rationalized and accepted. In our case, the different approaches to the Indian image are careful enterprises of repetitive emphasis, always emphasizing the dichotomy of knowledge/disavowal which informs the relationships between the Self and the Other. In this situation, the fetish is a given. In late

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9 For Lacan the Real is subdued by the Symbolic which prevents its emersion thus the Real remain unknown possibility (The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis 51-54, 59-61).
capitalism, this “lack,” now a commercial commodity as a tangible
sign, is appropriated, taken out of its social milieu and enjoyed in that
liminal place that the fetish praxis allows: the metonymic safe space
provided by Latin American consciousness. That is, I tell your story in
my own terms, my own discourse and my own mechanics.

This enjoyment of the object-choice however entails perceptional
processes, which are not only of psychological nature. The desire and
disavowal of the object-choice embedded in the fetish is not an auto-
matic “prop” available, but this fetish itself has evolved into an object
with “knowledge value” (Metz 76). Knowledge of course implies reason
and contemplation of length, size, composure and meaning not only
as a psychological but a commodity in the physical world as well. It is
the consumption of literary images, characters and social groups that
become the object of barter not just in academic circles, as I am doing
now, but also in strict consumerist superstructures. The image of the
Indian has become more than a commodity, it has become what Jean
Baudrillard, in his comments on the value exchange of the sign, calls
a determinant “code managing the exchanges of values,” serving as
an ethnic referent rather than a mere image (146). The fetish, via the
subject, has this power to extrapolate itself from being a pre-adolescent
phenomenon to an event in the real adult world, because it is only
the adult consumer, even transnational ones, who gets excited about
horrors and native brutality which is, to give an example, the selling
point of an English edition of Vargas Llosa’s Lituma en los Andes.10
The condensation of these images which at first manifested onto the
Indians, now manifests itself not only in the object itself but the object
converted into a marketable product. This commodity, a signifier with
purchase power, finds its way in other mediums which did not exist at
the early moments of the fetish formation.

In Latin America, it is not only literary works, but also photography,
the harbinger of film and television, where this fetishism is recurrent.
Deborah Poole, who has comprehensively studied the Peruvian Indian
in photography, asserts that European photography was simply a pro-
fitmaking product and not compassionate anthropology. It did not
reflect real native culture but specific preconceived views of it. As Poole
emphasizes, photography, as practiced in Latin America, especially the
portrait and full body shot, has been one the methods of artificially
constructing race as a “material, historical, and biological fact” (15).

10 See the back cover of the English Edition of Mario Vargas Llosa’s Death in the
In early twentieth century Latin America, the increasing fascination with the picture portrait is revealing.

Deborah Poole scrutinizes, for example, the process in which photographs, especially the postcards of native Peruvians, are manipulated to highlight what are considered “Indian” features: the prominence of high cheekbones and wide noses. Indians’ unkempt hair and looks of anger, also contrived, satisfy what Europeans and bourgeois Peruvian want to believe about Indians. In many cases, nonetheless, Indian subjects appear wary and, at best, unenthusiastic models. Many are forced to pose as “lice-pickers” or asked to hold tools; sometimes, Indians just gaze at the cameras with dread and misgivings (Poole 118-119). However, merely emphasizing Indian features is not enough. The Indian within the frame, as is the case of other European representations of non-European peoples, is not completed unless traditional dances and physical activities “representing” the native’s culture are photographed to complete the intended wider meaning.

Moreover, this photographic obsession is multidimensional; it extends not only to the capture of what is considered exotic and primitive but also the unavoidable techniques of procuring photographs of local natives (Levine 48-49). The continuous re-enactment of power relationships is unavoidable. According to James Faris, photographic images strengthens established systems of social authority; there is simply no representation of culture in them. It is a reassurance of the ongoing fetish. The arrangement of traditional items such as arrows, hats, ponchos within the frame of the postcard where Indians are present continuously define a system of visual consumption and social relationships; the latter not only impose recurring meaning on the native but also on the observer (18). This idea of political power to observe, survey and repeat resembles the panopticon, to use Foucault’s metaphor (201-202), which refers to the ever-vigilant system which labels, controls and essentializes oppressed and oppressors in determined political regimes. A quick glance of postcards of Latin America available in a tourist shop should illustrate the socio-commercial fetishism.

This pleasure extends from the Spanish chronicles to independent texts to other postmodern artifacts such as cinema and television. In fact, what occurs in cinema, to use Laura Mulvey’s words, the “scopophilic draw” (seeing pleasure) in the moving image, whether film or television, rests on the attributions of the fetish which are believed to have a physical presence in the real world (56). This pleasure is achieved in the movie theater, the living room, the library and the
classroom. In Latin American television, to illustrate, this fetishism is ubiquitous. It is very enlightening that telenovelas always have female native characters as cinematic props; these characters continuously play house servants even in situations when the actresses playing them are non-native. The embodiment of degeneracy attributed to native women is seen clearly by the molding and dissemination of La India María, in both Mexican cinema and television. La paisana Jacinta has been, as well, a very popular television show in Peru; its commercial success rests precisely on the idea of the less-than-human native women. This visual pleasure is also seen in the film Like water for chocolate, where one native woman has strange mystical powers and the other is irrational and over sexual. In Camila (1985), in an otherwise a tale of personal endurance, black characters are used as human props in a white drama. Blacks servants even slothfully sleep on the floors of the master mansion as a suggestion of their lazy nature.

To give another example, the Indian fetish as a cinematic consumer product is omnipresent in Francisco Lombardi’s La boca del Lobo (1988) set in the Peruvian mountains. The enjoyment of this fetish however is not only done by multicultural consumers since this film, it would seem, is also meant to be enjoyed by Peruvians because it deals with internal political problems. In any case, in a country where natives and native descendants overwhelmingly make up the social body, is hard to admit that this Indian fetish is consumed naturally. In the film, the seeing pleasure demands that Indians are portrayed as savages, superstitious, violent; unsurprisingly, the film fails to show Indian interiority (or in-depth information about native culture) and nothing is known about them and yet the movie commercial claim is that it is about a political movement which was born in the Andes among the Indians.

The Latin American Self sees what it wants to see, but he does not want to see it. He represses seeing the real Indian and opts to see what gives him pleasure. The Indians fetish is not limited to intrinsic behaviors; it must also provide pleasure of geographic distance. The idea that Peruvian mountains is the land of the savage and the inhabitants of this topography are the precise proof of their own timeless existence. The mountains are the antithesis to the coastal (civilized) part of Peru and the basic pleasure coming from the film is that this precise division of desire and derision marks the Indian as the perennial savage unrelated to coastal Peruvians and the Peruvian state. Sometimes is not the mountains but the jungle which serves as background to
these wild ruminations as seen in the film *Río Negro* (1992) where civilized *criollos* find their doom. The film *La Tigra* (1990), as well, puts together issues of gender, ethnicity and geography to construct a bizarre tale of fetishism in the Ecuadorian jungle.

The use of Indians in different artistic mediums whether novels, postcards and films leads us to perceive symptoms of control and fixation. It seems that the signifier never really changes, but what changes are the interpretations of it according to different historical moments. Jerome Neu recalls Freud’s comments on fixation and exclusive attention in that the object-choice becomes a problem when this object becomes “normal” (184). This is the time when the object-choice which in the past had a temporary usefulness to the subject, now becomes a full-fledged source of meaning. The fetish, in a way, with all its symbolic force now real and dominant in social constructs, becomes the reflection of political desire. To use Lacan’s words, the symbolic owes its currency to the philosophical referent, the “name of the Father” (67), in our case, the foundational beliefs whose power is reflected in that socialized thinking that provoked the establishment to the fetish in the first place.

Perhaps it is time to redirect our gaze toward different object of desire, and find pleasure in different ways. As Freud point out, “[if] the motive force of all human activities is a striving towards the two confluent goals of utility and a yield of pleasure” (*Civilization and Its Discontents* 41) perhaps it is time to find usefulness and pleasure away from the Other. Jerome Neu proposes that the alteration of fetishism can be achieved if the connection between the fetishist and the object-choice is revealed. Closure might come when the thought process with respect to the object is understood, and when the connections and the history between desire and the human object are made transparent. Most importantly, change of patterns of thinking and desire might only come “via reflective self-understanding” (198), that is, the use of the fetish image might only come to an end as the product of a personal decision.

In our case, it is perhaps time to ask why the Indian is the preferred object of desire of writers as in the case of Vargas Llosa, a writer who lives outside Latin America but keeps writing on Indians as antithetical to Euro-Peruvian values. His type of writing continually revisits the precise moment of condensation of both capitalist fetishism and obsessive desire. Laura Mulvey comments very insightfully about this moment. For her “[f]etishism, like the grain of sand in the oyster that
produces the pearl, creates social and sexual constructions of things at intractable points [...] where relations between people are liable to become relations between things” (3). Fetishism of the Other in Latin America points out to patterns of knowledge about Indians in established literary praxis which go beyond psychological fixations. They suggest that early Indian fetishism established back in the sixteenth century might have found a niche not only in psychological pleasure but in the physical world where it provides aesthetic and political pleasure.

In closing these comments it might be instructive to return to the epigraph above when Columbus “hears” about those Indian cannibals, Indian with faces of dogs he writes in his *Diario*. Columbus, who is both, an explorer and a laborer for the Spanish crown, cannot allow himself to find normal beings in the new World. Having claimed that nice Indians populated the New World would have diminished his claims of his sorrowful journey and the looming dangers in Caribbean waters. It is at this the moment that the Indian becomes the fetish of the European mind. It serves a dual purpose; it masks Columbus shortcomings (he has not seen and not obtained richness at the moment) yet provides him with an image which embodies the burden and the pretext for his goals. The Caribbean natives became the object of his desire (of seeing the danger coming from the Indians) and his automatic disavowal of them (the primitive, un-European, pagan being preventing the reaching of his goals). As it was later in colonial times, the fixation on Indians and the appropriation of the Indian in the flesh bears not only a psychological but the symbiotic nature of political, religious and economic objectives. Bartolomé De las Casas’s claims that “his” Indians deserved salvation does not differ from the *encomenderos*’ rights to Indian labor yet both illuminate the abnormality of possessiveness of the Indian fetish. As in literature in contemporary times, the Indian is the fetish not only of imagined danger, but also the object of the physical world.

As indicated throughout, the persistence of literary characters, tropes, images and stereotypes that make for much of literary and cultural production in the region reflect psychological-cum political desires which have reflected old strategies of power. As is the case of the Indian as a fetish in the days of discovery, there is ample evidence that Indian Otherness today comes from the fear of the Latin American socio-cultural establishment whose Indian fetish embodies the pretext for all their political failures. It is true that fictional characters have
their origins in myths, historical events and aesthetic considerations, but they are useful historical commodities, not just in the psychological but also in the institutional realm; they are repetitive within different literary traditions because they provide historical satisfaction throughout the years. Unfortunately, these are the images of racial and gendered subjects which seem to diachronically persist even when the historical referent to literary and popular culture production (the native) is still unknown.

**Works Cited**


Fetishism, Racial Fear and Postcolonial Anxiety


Juan de Vergara y los contradictores del estatuto de limpieza del arzobispo Siliceo: puntualizaciones e hipótesis acerca del Escrito de las diez causas

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Abstract: In this article we show that the Escrito de las diez causas, a text which some authors believed to be lost and attributed to Juan de Vergara, has never been missing, because it is a well-known document of which we conserve many manuscript copies. We also dispute Vergara’s authorship, defending instead that it was a text agreed on by consensus among the opponents of the purity of blood statute promulgated by archbishop Juan Martínez Siliceo.

Key words: purity of blood statutes, Juan de Vergara (1492-1557), Juan Martínez Siliceo (c.1477-1557), Toledo cathedral, conversos.

Resumen: En el presente artículo se muestra que el Escrito de las diez causas, que algunos autores creyeron perdido y atribuyeron a Juan de Vergara, nunca estuvo desaparecido, pues se conserva en muchas copias manuscritas y es un documento sobradamente conocido. Asimismo, se discute la autoría de Vergara y se defiende que fue un texto consensuado entre los contradictores del estatuto de limpieza de sangre del arzobispo Juan Martínez Siliceo.

Palabras clave: estatutos de limpieza de sangre, Juan de Vergara (1492-1557), Juan Martínez Siliceo (c.1477-1557), catedral de Toledo, conversos.

1. Introducción

La historia del estatuto de limpieza de sangre que el arzobispo Juan Martínez Siliceo (c.1477-1557) estableció en la catedral de Toledo es bien conocida (véase, especialmente, Domínguez Ortiz 37-42; Sicroff 125-72; Hernández Franco 97-123). En julio de 1547 el arzobispo presentó ante el cabildo de la catedral una nueva norma que regulaba el acceso a los beneficios catedralicios, la cual establecía:

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Que de aquí adelante, para siempre jamás, todas las personas que en la dicha iglesia ovieren de ser beneficiados y tener entrada en ella, así dignidades, canónigos como racioneros, capellanes y clerizones, sean personas yllustres, o nobles, o hijosdealgo, o letrados graduados en famosa universidad, conque todos los sobredichos sean christianos viejos e que ninguno de todos los sobredichos desciendan de linaje de judíos, ni de moros, ni de herejes (BNE MS 9175, fol. 43v; Horozco 48).

El estatuto se sometió a votación y, a consecuencia de ello, el cabildo se dividió en dos bandos: el de los que se situaron del lado del arzobispo y defendieron el estatuto, y el de los que se enfrentaron a él. El desacuerdo devino en un áspero conflicto que muy pronto se extendió a la ciudad. Hubo momentos verdaderamente violentos, como cuando, a principios de septiembre, Luis Zapata y algunos de sus parientes amenazaron, espada en mano, a los miembros del cabildo favorables al estatuto, obligando a intervenir a las autoridades de la ciudad (BNE MS 1890, fol. 328v). El mismo concejo se hallaba dividido y, ante tal panorama, algunos de sus miembros pidieron la intervención real. Tanto el príncipe Felipe como el emperador actuaron rápidamente y paralizaron la puesta en práctica del estatuto; y, ya a principios de 1548, Carlos V reiteró la paralización y ordenó que el caso fuera sometido al examen del Consejo Real de Castilla.

Durante los meses siguientes se mantuvo la tensión en el seno del cabildo catedralicio, y ambos bandos trataron de recabar apoyos en la Corte y en Roma. En mayo el arzobispo logró que el papa Paulo III confirmara el estatuto. Pero, aún así, el emperador mantuvo su deseo de que el Consejo Real diera su parecer sobre el asunto. Ya en el verano los dos bandos enfrentados comparecieron ante el Consejo para defender sus respectivas posiciones. El arzobispo y sus partidarios presentaron entonces su conocido Libro de causas —“uno de los más importantes documentos de carácter antisemita redactados en España,” en palabras de Caro Baroja (426)—, mientras el bando contrario presentó el llamado Escrito de las diez causas1. Es este último documento el que nos interesa aquí.

Recientemente, en su artículo “Juan de Vergara y el estatuto de limpieza de sangre de la catedral de Toledo,” Rica Amrán realizaba un pormenorizado análisis de las influencias intelectuales del citado documento, el cual había “sido señalado repetidamente como desaparecido” (Amrán 405). Tomando este estudio como punto de partida,

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1 Así lo llamaron el arzobispo Silício y sus partidarios, tal y como aparece en, por ejemplo, BNE MS 1703, fol. 50r y RB MS II/2784(2), fol. 65r.
en este breve artículo realizaremos algunas puntualizaciones acerca de la historia del Escrito y su supuesta desaparición. Igualmente, discutiremos la cuestión de su autoría y plantearemos alguna hipótesis sobre este punto, con el ánimo de ayudar a un mejor conocimiento del conflicto que estalló en el seno del cabildo catedralicio de Toledo en el verano de 1547.

2. Un texto muy conocido

La crítica moderna conoce el Escrito de las diez causas desde, al menos, 1873, cuando Adolfo de Castro, en su introducción a la antología de Obras escogidas de filósofos, lo trajo a colación y lo transcribió parcialmente. Lo hizo para ilustrar la biografía de Juan de Vergara (1492-1557) y, específicamente, su papel como opositor al establecimiento del estatuto de limpieza del arzobispo Silíceo. Según Castro, del documento en cuestión existían dos copias en la Biblioteca Nacional de España, que llevaban por signatura Q-85 y R-60 (Castro xlvii-xlix).

Castro no dudaba de que el autor del documento era, efectivamente, el propio Vergara. No aclaraba, sin embargo, si esa atribución se daba en las copias que él había encontrado. Hoy, una vez establecida la correspondencia entre las signaturas antiguas y las actuales, e identificados los manuscritos que Castro citaba con el 5767 y el 6170, podemos llegar a la conclusión de que, a pesar de que en ambos se encuentra, efectivamente, el Escrito de las diez causas, en ninguno de ellos se atribuye el texto a Juan de Vergara. Por lo tanto, habría que suponer que esa atribución de autoría la estableció Castro sin base en los textos que había utilizado.

En cualquier caso, como decimos, Castro sólo realizó una transcripción de algunos pasajes, y hasta 1981 no pudimos disponer de una transcripción completa. Ésta se incluyó en la edición parcial que Jack Weiner realizó del famoso manuscrito 9175 de la Biblioteca Nacional de España, obra, como se sabe, del escritor toledano Sebastián de Horozco (c.1510-c.1580). Éste, recordemos, copió en el mencionado manuscrito una serie de documentos referentes a la historia de Toledo, incluyendo muchos relativos al conflicto que estalló en el seno del cabildo catedralicio a causa del estatuto de limpieza. Entre esos documentos estaba, claro, el mencionado Escrito de las diez causas, aunque Horozco no lo atribuyó a Juan de Vergara. En 1981, en el Consejo Real de su Magestad los contradictores del dicho estatuto en Valladolid, estando ay, en Cortes,
el príncipe don Felipe nuestro señor (BNE MS 9175, fols. 54r-59v; Horozco 62-73).

Por lo dicho hasta aquí, ya se puede ver que el Escrito supuestamente perdido se ha conservado en varias copias. Pero existen muchas más. Por nuestra parte, hemos podido localizar las siguientes, realizadas entre los siglos XVI y XVIII, y localizadas en bibliotecas y archivos de España y Francia:

a) **Copias del siglo XVI:**
   3. BNE MS 9175, fols. 54r-59v (transcrita por Weiner).
   4. BNE MS 10608, fols. 141v-57v.
   5. RB MS II/2784(2), fols. 65r-84v.

b) **Copias del siglo XVII:**
   6. AHN Clero, L. 19717, fols. 44r-56r.
   7. BHMV MS 251, fols. 49r-67r.
   8. BNE MS 732, fols. 138r-49r.
   9. BNE MS 5767, fols. 66v-74v (citada por Castro).
  10. BNE MS 6170, fols. 25r-32v (citada por Castro).
  11. BNE MS 13267, fols. 326r-32v.
  12. BNE MS 13443, fols. 63-88.
  13. BNF MS espagnol 354, fols. 33r-40r.
  14. BRAH MS 9/1205, fols. 37r-49r.
  15. BRAH MS 9/1208, fols. 80r-92r (foliación establecida por nosotros).
  16. BUSev MS A. 330/115, fols. 36r-47r.
  17. BUSal MS 455, fols. 70r-86r (citada por Amrán).

c) **Copias del siglo XVIII:**
  18. BCLM MS 106, fols. 85r-103r.
  19. BNE MS 1703, fols. 1r-17v.
  20. BNE MS 13043, fols. 48r-63r (transcrita por Amrán).

\[^2\] El Catálogo de manuscritos de la Biblioteca Universitaria de Salamanca (1: 308) afirma que el documento ocupa los folios 70r-87r, cuando, en realidad, el texto acaba en el 86r.
Como se ve, hemos podido encontrar hasta veinte copias completas del \textit{Escrito de las diez causas}, y esto tras una búsqueda poco exhaustiva, por lo que es lógico suponer que podrían existir más. Siendo así, ¿cómo explicar que se haya dado por desaparecido un texto que se conoce desde hace tanto tiempo y que se ha conservado en tantas copias, localizadas en tantos lugares diferentes? La respuesta es que todo se debe a un malentendido.

3. Una copia desaparecida

El origen de este malentendido se encuentra en un comentario que Marcel Bataillon realizó en una nota al pie de su famosa obra \textit{Erasmo y España}. Allí, señalaba:

En el Catálogo de los Manuscritos de la B. N. M. se lee: “Vergara (Juan de), Canónigo de Toledo, \textit{Representación original que con otros capitulares dio al Consejo de Castilla contra el estatuto de Siliceo (Ms. 6751)}”. Parece que este documento desapareció al desmembrarse la recopilación de \textit{Papeles varios} de que formaba parte: hoy no se encuentra por ningún lado (Bataillon 699 nota 2).

Pero, un poco más abajo, aclaraba: “El memorial presentado por los adversarios al Consejo de Castilla se encuentra también en los Mss. 1703 y 13267” (\textit{ibid.}). Así que, después de todo, el documento atribuido a Vergara no se había perdido, sino que había sobrevivido en dos copias conservadas en los dos manuscritos citados. Queda claro, por tanto, que Bataillon no estaba diciendo que el documento se hubiera perdido. Sólo señaló que había desaparecido una de las copias, la contenida en el manuscrito 6751, y que el catálogo de la Biblioteca Nacional atribuía ese escrito a Vergara.

En la actualidad, efectivamente, ese manuscrito no contiene el \textit{Escrito de las diez causas}, pero desconocemos si verdaderamente se debe a que se perdió al desmembrarse ese manuscrito original de “papeles varios” que mencionaba Bataillon. También podría deberse a un simple error de catalogación, y que la copia supuestamente atribuida a Vergara se encuentre, en realidad, en otro manuscrito con una signatura diferente. En cualquier caso, lo cierto es que esa ficha del catálogo de la Biblioteca Nacional de España citada por Bataillon —y que nosotros hemos consultado— es la única prueba que tenemos para poder suponer que una vez existió en esa institución una copia del
Escrito de las diez causas que quizás incluyó el nombre de Juan de Vergara como su autor.

Sea como fuere, el caso es que Albert Sicriff debió entender mal lo que Bataillon quería decir, pues pensó que, efectivamente, el documento en cuestión se había perdido. Así, también en una nota al pie, Sicriff señaló que: “Vergara era el autor de una memoria de ‘contradicción’ de los estatutos que parece haberse perdido”, y citaba como fuente la mencionada nota de Bataillon. A continuación elucubraba acerca de si ese texto perdido pudiera ser otro que había encontrado: “¿Podría ser el Voto de un canónigo contra el estatuto reproducido por Porreño (ms. 13043 [BNM], fol. 9v°-11v°) la obra perdida de Vergara?” (Sicriff 150 nota 185, cursivas en el original). En realidad, si Sicriff hubiera tenido la oportunidad de consultar las Actas Capitulares de la catedral de Toledo, se habría dado cuenta enseguida de que ese voto particular fue realizado por el doctor Pedro de Peralta, y no por Juan de Vergara (ACT Actas Capitulares 7, fols. 217r-18v).

El caso es que, quizás despistado por esa atribución del Escrito de las diez causas a Vergara, Sicriff no se dio cuenta de que, de hecho, él conocía bien el texto y lo había utilizado en muchas ocasiones a lo largo de su discusión acerca del conflicto que se produjo en el seno del cabildo toledano, solo que en la copia que él había utilizado no se mencionaba a Vergara. Efectivamente, había consultado la copia conservada en el manuscrito espagnol 354 de la Biblioteca Nacional de Francia, y había citado el texto reiteradamente, adjuntando las respuestas que Silíceo, por su parte, había dado en contra de las objeciones aducidas por sus contrarios (Sicriff 153-64). Sin embargo, como en la copia que había utilizado no se mencionaba a Vergara, no pudo establecer la relación con el texto supuestamente perdido, por lo que siguió creyendo que verdaderamente estaba desaparecido. Y es que, en realidad, prácticamente ninguna de las copias conservadas menciona a Juan de Vergara como autor del texto, por lo que resulta muy legítimo preguntarse ¿fue realmente obra suya?

4. Una autoría compartida

Desde que se conoce el texto que nos ocupa, e ignorando la primera transcripción de Weiner, no ha faltado quien, basándose en la copia conservada en la Biblioteca General Histórica de la Universidad de Salamanca (BUSal MS 455, 70r-86r), ha seguido citando el documento —e incluso transcribiendo algunas partes de él— como si fuera obra de Vergara (así, por ejemplo, Roth 100; Samson 833-34). Pero la verdad
es que sólo en esa copia, que es, recordemos, del siglo XVII —amén de la citada por Bataillon, si es que realmente existió—, se atribuye el texto al humanista toledano. La mayoría de las copias no dicen nada acerca de la autoría; pero al menos en cuatro de ellas (BNE MSS 10608, 5767 y 13267; y BRAH MS 9/1208) se dice que el texto fue presentado por Juan de Álava, y al final incluso se incluye su firma:

Juan de Álava, en nombre de las dignidades y canónigos de la sancta iglesia de Toledo contradictores del estatuto que el reverendísimo arzobispo de Toledo con la otra parte de su cabildo hiço sobre el examen de los linages de los que adelante oviessen de ser recibidos por dignidades, canónigos, raçoneros, capellanes y clerizones della, deçimos que por vuestra Alteza nos fue mandado diassemos en este Real Consejo por escrito las causas que nos movieron a contradecir el dicho estatuto (BNE MS 10608, fol. 142r).

Por tanto, habría más base para atribuir el texto a Juan de Álava que para atribuirlo a Juan de Vergara, pero no creemos que sea tampoco el caso. A pesar de la firma final, lo más probable es que Álava sólo actuara como representante de los contradictores ante el Consejo. Como acabamos de ver, así se dice expresamente en esas copias: “Juan de Álava, en nombre de las dignidades y canónigos.” Así que, aunque aquí nos movemos en el campo de la especulación, pues no disponemos del documento original, todo indicaría que se trató de un texto consensuado entre todos los contradictores. De hecho, lo que todas las copias tienen en común —no sólo las que mencionan a Álava, sino todas— es que el texto se presenta como una obra colectiva, lo que explica el uso sistemático de la primera persona del plural: “deçimos,” “nos fue mandado diéssemos,” “nos movieron,” “y a nosotros, vista aquella, responder por nosotros,” etc.

Si Vergara puso o no de su parte en la elaboración del Escrito, es algo que no podemos saber con certeza, pero disponemos de algunos datos que apuntarían en un sentido más bien negativo. Así, si tenemos en cuenta las votaciones en contra del estatuto que se realizaron en el cabildo, podemos comprobar que quienes realizaron votos más elaborados, apelando a autoridades escriturarias y eclesiásticas, así como al derecho civil y canónico, fueron Bernardino Zapata, Bernardino de Alcaraz, Pedro de Peralta y, en menor medida, el deán Diego de Castilla. El resto de contradictores se limitó a hacer constar su desacuerdo con el estatuto. Por su parte, Juan de Vergara en la primera votación se limitó a votar lo mismo que el deán; y en la votación definitiva, antes de
reiterar su oposición, únicamente realizó un breve comentario acerca de lo diferente que era el estatuto presentado en comparación con los de algunas órdenes regulares y militares (ACT Actas Capitulares 7, fols. 215v-24v). Así que, si tuviéramos que medir la influencia de cada uno de los contradictores en la elaboración del *Escrito de las diez causas* a partir de lo que dijeron durante la votación, tendríamos que concluir que la influencia de Juan de Vergara fue mínima. Esto, obviamente, no quiere decir nada, porque se podría argumentar que, siendo supuestamente el mejor formado de los presentes, pero, a la vez, el que menos desearía hacerse notar —por su anterior encontronazo con la Inquisición—, quizás utilizó a los demás miembros del cabildo mencionados para hacer oír su voz. Pero esto, en cualquier caso, son especulaciones.

Por otro lado, si tenemos en cuenta el contenido del *Requerimiento* que los arcedianos de Guadalajara y Talavera enviaron al arzobispo para mostrar su desacuerdo con el estatuto (BNE MS 9175, fols. 44r-45v),

3 tendríamos que concluir que también es muy posible que estos dos importantes miembros del cabildo, hijos del duque de Infantado, tomaran parte en la elaboración del *Escrito de las diez causas*, dado que el contenido de su protesta prefigura en cierto modo muchos de los argumentos que luego se desarrollarían en el *Escrito*. Aunque también sería posible argumentar que la misma mano —la de Juan de Vergara— se encuentra detrás de ambos textos; pero esto, de nuevo, no sería más que una especulación sin demasiada base.

Si también tenemos en cuenta el otro importante escrito que elaboraron los contradictores del estatuto, firmado en conjunto por Diego de Castilla, los mencionados arcedianos, Bernardino Zapata, Álvaro de Mendoza, Bernardino de Alcaraz, Rodrigo Zapata, Juan de Vergara, Pedro de Peralta y otros (véase, por ejemplo, BNE MS 10608, fols. 116r-25v), texto que tanto tiene en común con el *Escrito de las diez causas*, podríamos concluir diciendo que muy posiblemente ambos textos se elaboraron de la misma manera y fueron presentados como obra de todos los contradictores.

Así pues, resumiendo, los siguientes datos invitarían a descartar una autoría en exclusiva de Juan de Vergara y a considerar el *Escrito de las diez causas* como un texto colectivo: 1º) la mayoría de las copias no menciona a Vergara como autor; 2º) sólo una de las copias que se conservan lo hace; 3º) cuatro copias mencionan a Juan de Álava en

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3 El *Requerimiento* se incluye en casi todas las copias del “dossier” que sobre el asunto del estatuto se juntó en el Consejo Real.
lugar de a Juan de Vergara, pero más como representante que como autor, a pesar de la firma final; 4º) en todas las copias se presenta el escrito en nombre de los contradictores del estatuto y se utiliza siempre la primera persona del plural; 5º) Juan de Vergara no mostró ninguna idea semejante a las encontradas en el Escrito durante las votaciones en el seno del cabildo de la catedral; 6º) por contra, otros miembros del cabildo sí hicieron votos que contenían ideas semejantes; y 7º) los contradictores presentaron otros textos que prefiguran en cierto modo el contenido del Escrito, y lo hicieron de manera conjunta.

Es posible —y lo apuntamos como mera hipótesis— que la atribución del Escrito de las diez causas a Juan de Vergara se deba también a un malentendido. Su origen se encontraría, quizás, en una mala lectura de la Defensa del estatuto escrita por Baltasar Porreño a principios del siglo XVII. En ella Porreño se refiere a la oposición que el estatuto encontró en Toledo e, incluso, en el extranjero:

Sobre el dicho estatuto hubo tan grandes dificultades y pesadumbres, así en el cavildo como fuera de él, que los jurados de Toledo escrivieron a el emperador, que estaba ausente de estos reinos, pidiéndole pussesse su authoridad en un negoçio de tanto pesso, y de quien podían resultar gravíssimos daños e incombenientes: las cosas andavan alteradas y rebueltas, en las plaças y corrillos no se tratava de otra cossa sino de el dicho estatuto. Los limpios y bien naçidos lo amparavan y defendían, y los desçendientes de judíos y moros se oponían contra él, a cuia caussa muchos de esta casta tomaron la pluma para escrivir contra él. En particular salió un libro de un françés, fraile franciscano (aunque ubo sospecha que el libro era de el doctor Vergara) en el qual haçe una prolixa y bien escusada apología contr el dicho arçobispo de Toledo y contra el dicho estatuto (BNE MS 5910, pp. 6-7).

Como vemos, Porreño hizo constar fielmente el alto grado de oposición que produjo el estatuto, y se refirió a la obra de un franciscano francés, obra que algunos atribuyeron a Vergara. Es evidente que Porreño se refería a la Apología de Henri Mauroy (1553), la cual, de ninguna manera, puede ser atribuida a Vergara (véase Domínguez Ortiz 43-44; Sicriff 193; Méchoulan 149-50). Pero no sabemos con qué base decía Porreño que, en aquél entonces, hubo quien sospechó que Juan de Vergara era el verdadero autor de la obra de Mauroy. De hecho, tenemos otro testimonio, esta vez de un testigo presencial, que no menciona en ningún momento a Vergara, aunque sí la convicción que algunos tenían de que el libro del franciscano se había
hecho en España. Este testigo es Sebastián de Horozco, quien recogió lo siguiente:

Contra este estatuto se hizo un libro llamado Apología, que dizen aver fecho un fraile en París de Francia, donde se imprimió, que hablava sueltamente contra el estatuto y contra el arzobispo de Toledo, aunque se tuvo por cierto que acá en España se hizo, y que no fue fecho por el dicho frayle. Contra el qual dicho libro, y contra todas las personas que le tuviesen, vino provisión de su Magestad y anatema del nunçio de su Sanctidad, la qual provisión real se pregonó públicamente por las calles públicas de esta cibdad, y la carta del nunçio se leyó en el púlpito, entre los dos coros de la sancta iglesia de Toledo, domingo treze días de enero de 1555 años, por voz de Alonso Ortiz, cantor del coro, quiriendo predicar el doctor Barriovero, e yo estuve presente a todo (BNE MS 9175, fol. 66r; Horozco 79).

Independientemente de cuáles fueran las fuentes de Porreño, y cuál la base real que tuviera para decir lo que dijo, lo cierto es que así quedó reflejado, y es posible que algún copista del siglo XVII, despistado por esa mención a Vergara, terminara atribuyéndole la más conocida contradicción del estatuto del arzobispo Silíceo: el Escrito de las diez causas.

5. Una efímera victoria y una conclusión

El Escrito de las diez causas es, pues, una de las más conocidas obras de oposición a los estatutos de limpieza de sangre en general, y, en particular, al estatuto que el arzobispo Juan Martínez Silíceo trató de aprobar en el verano de 1547. Como hemos visto, tal intento despertó una abierta contestación, tanto en el seno del cabildo como entre algunos vecinos de Toledo, que apelaron al emperador y al príncipe en busca de apoyo. Carlos V, como vimos, obligó a los dos bandos enfrentados a presentar sus razones ante el Consejo Real, el cual debía decidir sobre el asunto.

Fue seguramente el Consejo el que terminó adjuntando el Escrito de las diez causas al resto de documentos que sobre el caso se habían presentado. De esta forma se conformó lo que Caro Baroja (425-27) llamó el “dossier” de Silíceo, que incluía, no sólo los documentos preparados por el arzobispo en defensa de su causa, sino también los que aportaron sus adversarios, amén de copias de otros documentos que venían al caso, como bulas papales, cédulas reales, etc. Por esta razón, el documento que nos ha ocupado, además de haberse conservado por
separado, también lo ha hecho en muchas de las copias que existen de ese “dossier”.

En septiembre de 1548 el Consejo Real terminó dando su parecer en contra de las pretensiones del arzobispo: “que el estatuto es ynjusto y escandaloso, y que de la execución dél se podrían seguir muchos ynconvinientes” (BNE MS 1890, fol. 329v). Sin embargo, un mes después Carlos V terminó dando su aprobación, porque, al fin y al cabo, “hauiéndolo su Santidad conçedido”, no había razón para hacer “ninguna prouisión en contrario” (Fernández Álvarez 42-47).

Así, en principio, el Escrito de las diez causas consiguió lo que pretendía: convencer al Consejo Real de Castilla de la injusticia que suponía aprobar el estatuto que defendía el arzobispo de Toledo. Pero la suerte ya estaba echada: el papa lo había conﬁrmado y el emperador no estaba dispuesto a abrir un nuevo frente de litigio con la Santa Sede. Los contradictores, a pesar de todo, siguieron intentando revertir la situación, hasta que el papa, por su bula de 7 de enero de 1549, les impuso perpetuo silencio. Finalmente, Felipe II, en agosto de 1556 —y tras las nuevas conﬁrmaciones de Julio III y Paulo IV—, no hizo sino reiterar la aprobación que su padre había dado:

Por quanto el emperador y rey, mi señor, a suplicación del muy reverendo cardenal don Juan Siliçeo, arçobispo de la sancta iglesia de Toledo, tuvo por bien y dio su consentimiento para que se pudiese hazer e hiziese el estatuto que se hizo en ella cerca de las qualidades que han de concurrir en los que ovieren de tener dignidades, calongías, raçiones, capellanías o otra qualquer prevenda en la dicha iglesia, para que no sean admitidos a ellas ningunos que no sean christianos viejos de pa- dre y madre, y su santidad lo conﬁrmó y aprovó según que en el dicho estatuto a que nos referimos más largamente se contiene, y agora por parte del dicho cardenal se nos embiado a suplicar que porque de la guarda y conservación de él resulta mucho serviçio a nuestro señor, fuesemos servido de le conﬁmar, ratiﬁcar y aprovar por nuestra parte, (...) y nos, acatando lo sobredicho, aviéndosenos consultado por algunos del nuestro Consejo, lo avemos tenido y tenemos por bien, por ende, por la presente loamos, conﬁrmandos y aprovamos el sobredicho estatuto (BNE MS 9175, fol. 175r; Horozco 93-95).

A pesar de todo, el esfuerzo de los contradictores no cayó en saco roto: su Escrito de las diez causas fue copiado una y otra vez, y fue difundido por todo el reino. Sin duda, durante las décadas siguientes, aquellos que siguieron oponiéndose a los estatutos de limpieza de sangre
encontraron en él inspiración y aliento. Así, por ejemplo, cuando en 1566 Felipe II quiso aprobar un estatuto de limpieza para el concejo de la ciudad de Toledo, algunos regidores se opusieron, enviando al rey un documento que retomaba los mismos argumentos que casi veinte años antes habían esgrimido los contradictores del arzobispo Silíceo (Castro xlix nota 2; Martz; Caro Baroja 310).

En definitiva, el efímero éxito del Escrito de las diez causas es una prueba de que la oposición a los estatutos de limpieza de sangre tuvo, al principio, todas las de ganar, y que sólo los cálculos de la Realpolitik decantaron la balanza en su contra. A partir de ahí, la oposición fue silenciada y marginada, pero la difusión posterior del texto que nos ha ocupado muestra que, a pesar de todo, siguió con vida.

Juan de Vergara quizás no fue el autor de este documento, pero no hay que descartar que ayudara en su redacción junto al resto de los miembros del cabildo que se opusieron al estatuto. Más que obra de una sola persona, el Escrito de las diez causas fue el fruto de la lucha colectiva de un grupo de hombres que se enfrentaron a lo que consideraban una gran injusticia que traería grandes males, no sólo a la archidiócesis de Toledo, sino a todo el reino.

Abreviaturas

ACT: Archivo Capitular de la catedral de Toledo
AHN: Archivo Histórico Nacional (Madrid)
AHN-N: Archivo Histórico Nacional, sección Nobleza (Toledo)
BCLM: Biblioteca de Castilla-La Mancha (Toledo)
BHMV: Biblioteca Histórica Marqués de Valdecilla (Madrid)
BNE: Biblioteca Nacional de España (Madrid)
BNF: Bibliothèque Nationale de France (París)
BRAH: Biblioteca de la Real Academia de la Historia (Madrid)
BUSal: Biblioteca de la Universidad de Salamanca
BUSEv: Biblioteca de la Universidad de Sevilla
RB: Real Biblioteca (Madrid)

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Isidre Planes i els seus Successos fatales sobre la Guerra de Successió

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Abstract: The present paper makes an approach to the still unpublished dietary of Isidre Planes. This work —Successos fatales de la ciudad y reyno de Valencia— is part of the Valencian historiographical production about the Succession War and represents one of its best examples, although it has come to us in a fragmentary way, as explained in this article.

Key words: memories, Valencia, Succession War, Isidre Planes, diary.

Resumen: El present treball fa una aproximació al dietari encara inèdit d’Isidre Planes. Aquesta obra —Successos fatales de la ciudad y reyno de Valencia— s’insereix en la producció historiogràfica valenciana sobre la Guerra de Successió i representa un dels seus millors exemples, tot i que ens ha arribat de manera fragmentària, com s’explica en aquest article.

Palabras clave: memorialística, València, Guerra de Successió, Isidre Planes, dietari.

1. Els relats valencians de la Guerra de Successió

La literatura que ens arriba dels conflictes bèl·lics és, quasi sempre, la del bàndol vencedor. De vegades podriem pensar que els vençuts no arribaren ni tan sols a escriure res sobre el conflicte, perquè els rastres dels seus papers són escassos. I així s’esdevé amb la Guerra de Successió a les terres valencianes. De fet, si sabem de memòries dels partidaris de Carles III d’Àustria, és en bona mesura gràcies als seus enemics, que ho anotaven. Josep Vicent Ortí i Major, va recollir alguna notícia d’aquest tipus (Escartí, 2007: 250); i també Isidre Planes, que centra ara la nostra atenció, se’n refereix: “en el convento de Santo Domingo de esta ciudad [...] en un cuadernito del padre fray Joseph Giner hallaron notas contra el señor Felipe V y a favor del archiduque” (Planes, I: 231r.). Josep Giner, per tant, segurament va elaborar un dietari no massa extens,
i pel fet d’haver estat escrit des de l’òptica dels austriacistes, li va fer
perdre no solament el “cuadernito” a què al ludeix Planes, sinó que ell
i d’altres companyys de causa varen ser “por sentencia, dos anys des-
terrados a Castilla” (Planes, I: 231 r.). Un càstig com aquell devia ser
prou convincent per fer que els posseïdors d’escrits a favor de l’Àustria
es desfessen d’ells.

Sabem, tanmateix, que durant el període de domini de Carles III a
València, la producció de papers a favor de la causa no degué ser menor
que en altres llocs —i precisament en aquella guerra on tant de joc va
donar la propaganda (Pérez Picazo, 1966; Camprubí, 2016). I potser
una recerca més acurada donaria fruits destacats (Ibáñez Jofre, 1983).
Ara bé: la literatura de “notícies” i “relacions” que recolzà Carles III i
que va ser confegida a València, sembla haver-nos arribat escassament.
Tot i que podem suposar d’autor valencià, per exemple, la
Relación de la entrada que hizieron en la ciudad de Denia, reyno de Valencia, las
armas de la magestad católica del rey nuestro señor Carlos III [...] el
18 de agosto de 1705, editada a Barcelona —encara que no hi conste el
lloc d’impressió ni l’any—, per Rafael Figueró. Del mateix tipus, però
d’un àmbit molt més privat, és el text que va confegir Doménec Briau,
metge del monarca —ja emperador Carles VI, en aquell moment. Briau,
natural de Castelló de la Plana, redactà, a instàncies de Francesc de
Castellví, una carta-relació on va narrar l’incendi de Vila-real per part
de les tropes borbòniques, el 12 de gener de 1707. Francesc de Castellví
la va incloure entre els seus papers memorialístics i és per això que ens

Encara ens podriem detenir en alguns altres textos —des quals ja
hem donat notícia en altres llocs (Escartí, 2007: 25-27)—, tant manus-
crits com impresos, i, en aquest segon cas, hauriem de tenir en compte
les conseqüències nefastes per als seus editors, en ser represaliats, des-
prés, quan València va caure en mans dels Borbons, cosa que explicaria
 també, en bona mesura, la desaparició d’un gran nombre d’aquells
escrits (Escartí, 2007: 18-19).

Però si aquests podrien haver estat el tipus de materials locals
austriacistes més plausibles per contenir informació sobre els esdeve-
niments d’aquells anys —dietaris, gasetes, relacions—, cal dir que no són
del tot escasses les fonts que, des de l’òptica borbònica, ens han deixat el
relat de la guerra.

Hem d’esmentar, així, un gènere que no podem detectar entre el
bàndol austriacista: la crònica pròpiament dita. Ens referim, òbviament,
a l’obra del trinitari Josep Manuel Minyana, De bello rustico valentino,
posada en circulació novament a finals del segle XX (Miñana, 1985). Aquest text va ser un intent d’escriure una història oficial de la guerra que, des de la perspectiva del seu autor, començava amb l’arribada de Basset a Altea i acabava amb la rendició d’Alacant a les tropes borbòniques. Abans i després d’aquells esdeveniments militars, hi havia un gran buit. És, per tant, un relat des d’un punt de vista estrictament valencià o, per dir-ho en altres paraules, representa l’episodi valencià d’aquella guerra que va assotar bona part d’Europa des del 1700 fins al 1714. Minyana, afecte als Borbons, segurament pretenia una revisió molt concreta de la contesa bélica, rebaixant la participació dels valencians en la mateixa. Els iniciadors que s’uneixen a Basset, per exemple, són qualificats com “los hombres más corrompidos de todas las categorías sociales, y la hez de la población”, i continua dient-nos que són “los que estaban hundidos en la impotencia y pobreza, los vagabundos sin patria, sin casa, sin raíces, los más dispuestos a los desórdenes y crímenes ya fuera por maldad o falta de esperanza de todas las cosas”, per rematar, afegint, que eren “la mayoría de los que habían cometido crímenes castigados con la pena de muerte”, i que sols aquells “se unieron a Basset. [...] o por una esperanza de fortuna más favorable, más gustaban los tumultos y sediciones que el reposo seguro y el ocio” (Miñana, 1985: 43-44). Així, la noblesa restava al marge de la sedició que adduïa la corona. I aquella actitud en Minyana pot resultar ben comprehensible, ateses les seues filies i els seus interessos.

Però, curiosament, no varen ser els “seus” els qui s’ocuparen d’aquell text, sinó Gregori Maians —descendent d’una família austriacista represaliada pels borbònics. Ell va decidir la impressió de la crònica de Minyana, als Països Baixos, en una data ja suficientment allunyada dels esdeveniments com per no aixecar rebomboris (Minianae, 1752). Tanmateix, sabem per Maians que el volum es va enllestar entre el 1707 i el 1723, i l’autor no va voler que, al manuscrit original, hi figuràs el seu nom: “quiso ponerlo en un lado, llamándose a sí mismo Anónimo Valenciano, tal vez porque representó a lo vivo a algunos de los partidarios de las facciones austriacas muy malvados” (Miñana, 1985: 309). L’any 1707, quan Minyana encapçalava la seua crònica amb l’*Anonymus Cosmopolitanum*, València encara podia ser, potser, perillosa, per a un partidari dels Borbons, si retornaven Carles III i les seus tropes.

Més enllà d’aquesta crònica llatina, la literatura valenciana coetània al conflicte ve representada per dietaris com el de Josep Vicent Ortí —del qual ja ens hem ocupat en altres llocs (Escartí, 2007 i 2018)— i relacions dimanades d’autors proborbònics —que ja han estat tractades
en alguns altres treballs (Mora, 2012; Escartí, 2017 i en premsa)—
i que, malgrat es seus defectes, resulten sovint molt més interessants, en
tant que són textos molt més vius, més directes i amb un regust “popular”
que ens permet fer-nos una idea bastant exacta del dia a dia de la València
d’aquells anys i dels esdeveniments militars o polítics més importants.

Cal assenyalar, però, que les obres que han arribat fins a nosaltres són totes en castellà. Com és ben sabut, la llengua pròpia dels valencians, des del segle XVI havia anant relegant-se dels nivells cultes i havia estat substituïda, en molts casos, pel llatí—que permetia una projecció europea— o pel castellà, que era la llengua del poder, d’ençà l’adveniment dels Àustries al tron de la monarquia hispànica i l’establiment de la cort real a Castella. De més a més, la producció literària valenciana i catalana en general, en la nostra llengua, va passar a una fase d’un cert “decandiment” que ha estat qualificada per alguns estudiosos del període com Decadència, i que, a pesar que no va ser tan accentuada com s’ha volgut fer creure des de determinades òptiques (Escartí, 2012: 213-247), el ben cert és que a les nostres terres una gran part dels escrits literaris i historiogràfics es van escriure en castellà. Més concretament, en l’àmbit de la memorialística, on el català va resistir bé fins al temps de Josep Esplugues (Casanova, 1989), a mitjans del segle XVIII (Escartí, 2013), els dietaris i les altres memòries valencianes sobre la Guerra de Successió o que inclouen els esdeveniments d’aquesta —com el dietari d’Ignasi Benavent (Callado & Esponera, 2004)—, tot i que podriem haver-los trobat sense massa dificultats en català, la bona veritat és que, fins ara, tots els coneixuts ho són en castellà, amb lleugeríssimes concessions a alguna frase o vocable a l’idioma del país. En aquest sentit cal dir que tant el capellà Isidre Planes —de qui parlarem tot seguit— com el noble Josep Vicent Ortí i Major, tots dos valencianoparlants —com es veu per l’ús que fan del castellà i per altres obres escrites pel segon—, varen optar pel castellà per deixar-nos el testimoni d’aquells esdeveniments bèl·lics i polítics que tant els inquietaren. I serà en aquest context historiogràfic i sociolingüístic on haurem d’ubicar l’obra dietarística de mossén Isidre Planes.

2. Els Successos fatales d’Isidre Planes

L’obra de Planes és, al costat de la d’Ortí, una de les més riques en observacions, notícies i dades sobre la vida quotidiana a la València del moment. Però, segurament per l’estat en què ens ha arribat, no ha merescut encara cap edició, tot i que ha estat utilitzada en part pels
investigadors més solvents sobre la Guerra de Successió a València. Sempre, tanmateix, de manera marginal, sense arribar a suscitar una monografia sobre aquell interessantíssim paper. De fet, ens hem de remuntar al bibliògraf Vicent Ximeno (1747-1749, II: 216) i a un estudi de l’erudit Almarche (1919: 346-354) per trobar notícies sobre aquell autor i sobre els seus escrits, i els seguirem, ara, en aquesta breu exposició bibliogràfica en bona mesura. Així, el primer ens diu que era “sacerdote natural de la villa de Puzol, doctor en Sagrada Teologia”. I assenyala que va ser “colegial de beca en el Real Colegio de Corpus Christi de València, donde obtuvo después los empleos de ayudante de sacristán, de maestro de ceremonias y de penitenciario”, càrrec on va romandre fins a la seua mort, “sucedida en esta ciudad a 3 de noviembre del año 1729”. Afegeix —segurament perquè el coneixia en persona— que “era hombre aficionadíssimo a escribir las cosas que sucedían en su tiempo, y aunque en sus libros se hallan muchas noticias inútiles y apasionadamente referidas, ay otras memorables, ajustadas a la verdad y que pueden aprovechar para la historia”.

Les obres historiogràfiques de Planes que cita Ximeno en són tres. En primer lloc un Reportorio de varias y raras cosas sucedidas especialmente en esta ciudad y reyno de Valencia, y en España y otras partes, que es conservava manuscrit a la biblioteca del convent del Carme, de València, i de la qual el bibliògraf indica que “empieza desde la metad del siglo passado y llega hasta el año 1727”. Ens indicaria que l’interés per anotar “curiositats” i notícies l’hauria acompanyat pràcticament fins al darrer dia de la seua vida, com, per altra banda, ja hem detectat en algun altre cas de dietarista grafòman (Escartí, 1994-1995). En segon lloc, Ximeno esmenta un volum del 1720, que es conservava manuscrit a la biblioteca de Predicadors de la ciutat de València i que portava per títol Origen de la fundación del Colegio Seminario o Recogimiento de los Niños Huérfanos de San Vicente Ferrer de la ciudad de Valencia. Actualment es conserva a la Biblioteca de la Universitat de València (Gutiérrez del Caño, 1914, III: 37). En tercer lloc, el que més ens interessa ara: Sucessos fatales de la ciudad y reyno de Valencia o manual diario de lo sucedido desde el año 1705, el qual va ser vist per Ximeno en “cinco tomos en 4º, escritos de su letra, custodidos en su colegio de Corpus Christi”.

Per altra banda, a la Biblioteca de la Universitat de València es conserven —a més del volum suara indicat i dos volums dels Sucessos fatales, com veurem més avall—, un parell d’obres més, que porten per títol De las missas del trentenario de San Vicente Ferrer —redactada
el 1690— i Satisfacción que di a un amigo castellano que me escribió satyrico contra los valencianos, por haber proclamado al señor archiduque Carlos, refiriendo brevemente lo que passó, y sintiendo mal de la introducción de las leyes castellanas, redactada el 1709, con el mateix Planes ens informa al títol (Gutiérrez del Caño, 1919, III: 37).

Totes, en un temps, degueren trobar-se al Col·legi del Corpus Christi de València, on sembla que es conservaven les restes de la seua biblioteca personal. Almarche (1919: 346), per la seua banda, afirma que “la cultura literària del Dr. Planes era grandíssima, como lo acreditán estos manuscritos y la numerosa colección de tomos de Varios que legó al Colegio de Corpus-Christi, conteniendo centenares de folletos de toda clase”. Tanmateix, el que no acaba d’explicar-nos aquest autor és com els manuscrits amb el dietari de Planes es varen dispersar, fins al punt que ara com ara una part d’ells és introbable.

De fet, el volum primer, Sucessos fatales d’esta ciudad y reyno de Valencia o puntual diario de lo sucedido en los años de 1705, 1706 y 1707. Tomo I, es pot trobar a la Biblioteca Valenciana, al fons Nicolau Primitiu (ms. 159), però no en el seu original, sinó en una còpia efectuada amb una certa voluntat de rigor pel cronista de València Lluís Cebrián Mezquita, que deixà la seua rúbrica en diferents llocs, però que no es va abstenir de “reorganitzar” part del material documental adjunt i, també, “regularitzà” —encara que no sempre— les grafies i altres qüestions més o menys secundàries que, tanmateix, no resten importància a la còpia. Ell mateix és qui afirma:

Este volumen, como en su misma portada se consigna, es el primero de la serie, que se compone de cuatro, todos en manos de desconocidos —si aún existen los tres restantes—, faltos de publicidad y de análisis. Mis pesquisas por descubrir su paradero y estudiarles no han tenido un éxito completo, pero tengo motivos para sospechar que uno de los tomos ha venido a parar en manos de mi buen amigo y colega, don José Martínez Aloy, y otro lo adquirió hace poco el joven bibliófilo señor Martí, dependiente de don José de Llano, gran aficionado también a libros y antigüedades.

De que existieron los volúmenes 3º y 4º de este curioso manuscrito no cabe ninguna duda, porque en el presente tomo, folio 389, se hace referencia a los mismos (Planes, I: 351 r.-351 v.).

No diu, però, d’on va copiar aquell volum Lluís Cebrián, encara que Almarche (1919: 349) assenyala en nota que el “tomo I paró en manos de una Sociedad obrera católica”.

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Este volumen, como en su misma portada se consigna, es el primero de la serie, que se compone de cuatro, todos en manos de desconocidos —si aún existen los tres restantes—, faltos de publicidad y de análisis. Mis pesquisas por descubrir su paradero y estudiarles no han tenido un éxito completo, pero tengo motivos para sospechar que uno de los tomos ha venido a parar en manos de mi buen amigo y colega, don José Martínez Aloy, y otro lo adquirió hace poco el joven bibliófilo señor Martí, dependiente de don José de Llano, gran aficionado también a libros y antigüedades.

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Més clara és la indicació del mateix Almarche, en referència al volum segon de Planes, que diu que es troba a la biblioteca de Josep Martínez Aloy. D’aquest indica que són 422 pàgines. El volum ha acabat formant part de la Biblioteca de la Universitat de València (ms. 992) i porta per títol *Sucessos fatales de esta ciudad y reino de Valencia o puntual diario de lo sucedido en os años de 1708 y 1709. Tomo II*. També es conserva, en els nostres dies, a la Biblioteca Valenciana, un fragment del mateix, en còpia moderna, potser del mateix Martínez Aloy o algú del seu cercle, i porta per títol *Puntual diario de lo que pasará en esta ciudad y reino de Valencia en la continuación de la guerra de este año 1708* (Biblioteca Valenciana, ms. 394/8). L’autoria li va estar atribuïda per Carmen Pérez Aparicio, experta coneixedora del període.

Per altra banda, d’aquell segon volum també ens consta una edició fragmentària i “periodística” —com l’ha qualificada encertadament Rafael Roca, que és qui l’ha estudiat recentment (Roca, *en premsa*). Així, junt als originals publicats al periòdic *Las Provincias* en el període corresponent entre l’1 de març de 1912 i el 31 de desembre de 1913, aquelles edicions de notícies de Planes es contenen en un volum factici —amb les primeres 15 pàgines manuscrites— que prové de la biblioteca particular de Francesc Carreres de Calatayud, fill de Salvador Carreres Zacarés, al qual el mateix Roca atribueix l’edició d’aquells fragments de Planes al rotatiu valencià. Aquesta col·lecció de retalls es conserva a la Biblioteca Valenciana sota el títol *Sucesos fatales de esta ciudad y reino de valencia o puntual diario de los sucedido en los años de 1708 y 1709* (Carreres, ms. 2542).

Del volum III —ara desaparegut— sols sabem que era “propiedad de don Miguel Martí Esteve” (Almarche, 1919: 352).

El volum IV, *Sucessos fatales de esta ciudad y reino de Valencia o puntual diario de lo sucedido en los años de el Señor de 1712-1713-1714 y 1715*, es troba a la Biblioteca de la Universitat de València (ms. 457), i conté 509 pàgines útils, amb la particularitat que, al mateix títol, ens informa que “algunos del año 1716, 1717 y 1718 los prometo escribir sumariamente en un 5º tomo”. Gutiérrez del Caño, per altra banda, indicà que els “cinco tomos son autógrafos y se custodiaban en el Colegio del Corpus Christi; hoy los cuatro restantes hállanse en poder de los señores Rodríguez de Cepeda, Martínez y Martínez, Martí Estévez y Martínez Aloy” (Gutiérrez del Caño, 1914, III: 37-38).

Comptat i debatut, de l’obra de Planes, que abastava de l’any 1705 al 1729 —data de la seua mort, si va continuar escrivent tota la seua vida—, només tenim localitzats els volumes I, el II —en tres exemplars—
El primer tomo contiene los sucesos de los años 1705, 1706 y 1707, tiene 314 hojas en quarto. Al principio tiene un índice por abecedario y las capitulaciones impresas de Valencia a Baset. A la fin, varios papeles curiosos correspondientes a los sucesos; un aranzel de los butiñferos valencianos de todos los estados; una Relación de lo sucedido en la entrega de Valencia a los generales del señor don Felipe V, que escribió el obispo Gilart; varios papeles y gazetas en el gobierno del señor archiduque en confirmación de estos mis escritos; otros papeles curiosos y un diario de la pretensa conquista de Cádiz, primera intentona de los ingleses y olandeses para conquistar a España, frustada y bien defendida.

El segundo tomo tiene escritas 403 hojas en quarto y, en ellas, escritos los sucesos de los años 1708 y 1709. Al principio tiene índice por abecedario. En el fin, Relación de la forma con que juraron al sereníssimo Luis por príncipe de las Españas en Madrid, domingo, 7 de abril 1709.

El tercer tomo tiene escritas 331 hojas en quarto y, en ellas, escritos los sucesos de los años 1710 y 1711. Al principio contiene índice por abecedario. En el fin, las extracciones que se hicieron de diputados de este reyno, de los braços militar y eclesiástico, para los años 1707, 1708, 1709; y copia impresa del testamento del señor rey Carlos II, y de la entrega que hizo don Francisco de Velasco, virrey de Barcelona, de dicha ciudad al conde de Peterborough, general de los ingleses y olandeses y del señor archiduque.

Este quarto tomo tiene escritas 494 hojas en quarto y, en ellas, escritos los sucesos de los años 1712, 1713, 1714 y 1715. En el principio dice o existe un índice por abecedario de las cosas más notables de este tomo. A la fin de este 4º tomo se hallará, en 23 hojas, un papel histórico, satisfacción que di a un amigo castellano que me escrivió satírico contra los valencianos, por haver proclamado al señor archiduque Carlos, refiriendo brevemente lo que pasó, y sintiendo mal de la introducción de las leyes castellanas en este reyno, destructivas de los contratos echos en espacio de quinientos años en este reyno. Lo escriví en el año 1709 y por curiosidad le he enquadernado en este tomo 4º, hasta el año 1715 (Planes, IV: 494 v.).

No sabem on paren, ara, els volums III i V. Tanmateix, potser en un futur apareixeran i ens oferiran dades i més opinions de l’autor sobre els esdeveniments que va viure. Un temps que, deixant a banda la seua
natural i provada afecció a recollir notícies quotidianes, el degué impulsar a mirar-se el món que l’envoltava amb ulls diferents, encara que amb el partit pres des del començament. Això es pot detectar, perfectament, al llarg de les pàgines del seus volums, però ho fa ben explícit ja a la justificació inicial del tom I:

Si Dios es servido darme vida, intento dexar a la posteridad, para el escarmiento, memoria diaria de los sucesos fatales que se han de representar en esta tragicomedia del intruso govierno, que llama una cruel guerra a este infeliz reyno y ciudad, discurriendo ha de causar varias, raras e inauditas mutaciones de theatros, previendo que todas las ciudades, villas y lugares de este reyno de Valencia han de padecer lamentables estragos en vidas, honras y haciendas, y que me parece ha de oír a los vivientes lastimados. ¡Dichosos los muertos, que no ven las penas y trabajos que nosotros padecemos! Pues el rey nuestro señor, Felipe V, ya que nuestra desgracia quiso que sus armas no nos defendiesen de los sediciosos rebeldes, hemos de sentir los fieles vasallos de este reyno los ecos de estos castigos, padeciendo realmente en haciendas, ya que en premio de nuestra fidelidad no sentiremos en la honra estos golpes, que es el único consuelo que a los fieles vasallos de su magestad nos queda (Planes, I: 14 r.-14 v.).

Perquè, si en alguna cosa és ric el treball memorialístic de Planes, és en la prolixitat de les descripcions i, també, en la gran quantitat de comentaris personals que escampa arreu de les seues pàgines. I bastarà un sol exemple. Les notícies sobre l’assalt i la destrucció de Xàtiva recollides per Planes són, potser, de les més sucoses que ens han pervingut sobre aquell episodi. Així, trobem la conquesta de Xàtiva per part de les tropes borbòniques, el dia 24:

Se supo haber abierto dilatada brecha a la ciudad de Xátiva, y que se entró con intrepidez y se logró el ganar más tierra, aunque se defenden rabiosamente y se ha de ganar palmo a palmo, por tener las calles cortadas y las casas agujereadas (Planes, I: 184 v.).

També, Isidre Planes copia una carta de d’Asfeld a don Antonio del Valle, datada el mateix dia 24:

Se ha entrado en esta ciudad de Xátiva con el rigor que merecía su grande obstinación y rebeldía, pues negándose a todos los oficios de piedad con que se les había procurando disuadir su engaño, han esperado se avançase a toda costa, como se ha hecho, entrándose espada en mano
en la ciudad, y pasando a cuchillo a todos quantos se han hallado que la defendían, hasta en un convento y dos iglesias, experimentando todos el último precipicio de su bárbara resolución. Y si en los parages a que los rebeldes se retirasen, mantienen su obstinación, experimentarán el mismo rigor y castigo. La última cláusula se explica con decir que entre la ciudad de Xátiva y su castillo hay una línea con muralla, y que en este paraje —que se llama Monte Santo, donde hay unas ermiticas— están los rebeldes, que han podido escapar de la ciudad. Y si no se rinden, les pasarán a cuchillo; que los soldados reglados están retirados al castillo y no les quieren admitir a los rebeldes, que son paysanos y gente de la Marina, pues los soldados del castillo quieren capitular. (Planes, I: 184 r.).

I encara ofreceix algunes notícies més, tot seguit (Planes, I: 185 r.). Per una altra banda, anota, el dia 18 de juny, que:

[...] corrió válido que había orden del rey de que se demoliesse toda la ciudad de Xàtiva, sin dexar edificios, ni aun las iglesias; y assí, se partió don Joseph Marmanillo, de orden de los superiores, para sumir al Santísimo y recoger las imágenes y ornamentos sagrados. Ha irritado, la terca rebeldía de los de esta ciudad, a tan católico monarca, a la execución de tal castigo (Planes, I: 189 r.-189 v.).

I més avall, el dia 28 de juny, Planes ens reporta la notícia més esfereïdora sobre Xàtiva, aquella que fa referència al seu urbicidi:

Hoy se supo la representación del Juicio Final que se hizo, en separar los fieles vasallos de Felipe V de los rebeldes, en Xátiva. Pues el capitán executor del orden de su magestad mandó que, pena de la vida, clérigos, frayles, hombres, mugeres y niños, sin excepción de persona, se presentassen con sus farditos de ropa cada uno; y, estando juntos en Montsant, sacó un papel y fue nombrando a los fieles vasallos, buenos clérigos y frayles, y les dio pasaportes para donde quisieron. Y a los rebeldes —clérigos y frayles, unos 300—, les nombró con sus familias, y les mandó seguir la escolta, pena de la vida, llevándoles a pie, prisioneros, a Castilla, sin dexar persona viviente en la ciudad, pues hasta las monjas las sacaron de sus conventos y con decencia las conduxeron a Valencia, donde están, como he dicho. Y luego los soldados saquearon quanto quisieron y dieron fuego a toda la ciudad y derribaron los muros. Este lamentable suceso sucedió día viernes, 17 de este mes, que se contará fatal para castigo de los malos vasallos que obstinadamente tomaron las armas contra su verdadero rey, y para escarnio de que otros no tomen las armas ni se defiendan, pertinaces, contra su legítimo rey y señor. No obstante que consideramos ha obrado
tal castigo con los rebeldes de Xátiva nuestro rey y señor con justificados motivos, nos lastimamos con caridad cristiana, rogando a Dios les mire con ojos de misericordia, dándoles consuelo en tan sensibles penas y trabajos que están expuestos a padecer, y que mueva su divina magestad el ánimo de nuestro magnánimo rey a que se apiade de esta miserable gente (Planes, I: 191 v. -192 r.).

Les informacions aportades s’ajusten clarament al tarannà general d’aquella obra: més popular, més procaç, més desimbolta i crítica amb els poders que d’altres escrits dels seus coetanis –potser emparat l’autor per la relativa impunitat que li conferia el seu estament eclesiàstic; potser per un esperit més crític. Això, i la capacitat d’observació i d’informar-se que sembla tenir Planes, bé que demanen un seguiment més exhaustiu d’aquests manuscrits ara inèdits, per veure de tornar-los a reunir en la mesura que siga possible i preparar-ne la publicació.

Són tan rics que, malgrat que són nombrosíssims els comentaris de reprovació als austriacistes que deixa anar Planes, tampoc no s’està de criticar els borbònics, si cal. I valdrà com exemple el següent fragment, que anotà quan, el 21 de febrer de 1708, el cavaller d’Asfeld convidà les dames de València a un sopar, per festivar el primer aniversari del naixement del príncep Lluís, fill de Felip V:

Este día el caballero Asfeld, en la casa que vive, del marqués de Villatorcas, delante de la iglesia del convento de Santo Domingo, retornó, convidando a los cabos militares y señoras de Valencia. Debió de ser en despique de los convitones que dio Peterboroug el año pasado, 1706, día de Ceniza, celebrando los años de la reina Ana y brindando a la salud de la anglicana, y haciendo lo mismo los españoles a su mesa. En diferentes casas hicieron lo mismo; y el año pasado hicieron lo mismo los ingleses y holandeses. Pero este año han sido los brindis a la salud de nuestro rey Felipe V, de su esposa y nuestra reina, y del príncepe de las Asturias, Lluís. ¡Vítor! ¡Vítor! ¡Vítor las borracheras, que todos las pagamos y no participamos! (Planes, II: 21).

Les crítiques recollides per Planes, per tant, afectaven tant als austriacistes com als partidaris dels Borbons —tot i que, aquestes, menys freqüents. Ens mostren, al remat, un autor amb gran capacitat d’observació i de reflexió sobre el paper. Un paper que encara a hores d’ara demana una edició digna.
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Poesía permutatoria y cábala en la obra de Juan Eduardo Cirlot: el ciclo Bronwyn

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Abstract: Juan Eduardo Cirlot found in the hermeneutical techniques of Abraham Abulafia, Spanish kabbalist from the thirteenth Century, a source of inspiration for his permutational poetry, influenced by the historical avant-gardes, the study of symbology and the heritage of mystical traditions. At the end of his life, inside the called Bronwyn Cycle (1967-1971), he often evocated the figure of Shekhina, feminine facet of God according to the Kabbalah. The permutational poetry, technique that the poet began to use in 1954, reaches in the Bronwyn Cycle a new significance which is intrinsically connected with his dialogue with the work of the Kabbalist Abraham Abulafia.

Key words: Juan Eduardo Cirlot, permutational poetry, Kabbalah, Abraham Abulafia, Bronwyn Cycle.

Resumen: Juan Eduardo Cirlot encontró en las técnicas interpretativas de Abraham Abulafia, cabalista español del siglo XIII, una fuente de inspiración para su poesía permutatoria, a medio camino entre las vanguardias artísticas, el simbolismo codificado y la herencia de las tradiciones místicas. Al final de su vida, dentro del denominado Ciclo Bronwyn (1967-1971), evocó en múltiples ocasiones la figura de la Shejiná: aspecto femenino de Dios según la Cábala. La poesía permutatoria, técnica que el poeta comenzó a utilizar en 1954, alcanza en el Ciclo Bronwyn una nueva significación que está intrínsecamente unida a su diálogo con la obra del cabalista Abraham Abulafia.

Palabras clave: Juan Eduardo Cirlot, poesía permutatoria, Cábala, Abraham Abulafia, Ciclo Bronwyn.

1. Introducción

Leer un texto es también rescribirlo, desarticularlo, explorar sus múltiples posibilidades, dar lugar, a partir de él, a nuevas y sorprendentes creaciones. Tal es la premisa de la que parte Juan Eduardo Cirlot

Se conoce como Ciclo Bronwyn al conjunto de dieciséis libros que Juan Eduardo Cirlot escribió entre 1967 y 1971 a partir del personaje de Bronwyn, doncella celta del siglo XI, interpretada por Rosemary Forsyth en la película *El señor de la guerra* de Franklin Schaffner, e imagen del eterno femenino. Tal como explica Victoria Cirlot:

En torno al ciclo bascuela todo lo demás: los poemas sueltos, los artículos, los dibujos, los esquemas. Todo ello brota de los intersticios del ciclo, a veces como supuestos finales, como indagaciones, como explicaciones. En su conjunto muestran la vivencia Bronwyn y narran la historia. El poeta siempre pensó en un Libro Bronwyn (V. Cirlot 2001: 19).

Ya en el prólogo de *El Palacio de Plata*, el libro con el que se inicia en la poesía permutatoria, Cirlot vincula directamente esta técnica con la Cábala: “Tuve la idea de inventar este procedimiento partiendo de las técnicas de Abraham Abulafia (letrismo cabalístico) y Arnold Schönberg (música dodecafónica)” (Cirlot 2005: 512). En efecto, el poeta encontró en las técnicas del cabalista medieval Abraham Abulafia una fuente de inspiración para su poesía permutatoria. Y, dentro del Ciclo Bronwyn, evocó en múltiples ocasiones la figura de la Shejiná (o Shekhina): aspecto femenino de Dios según la Cábala1.

Abraham Abulafia, cabalista aragonés del siglo XIII, que transmite sus enseñanzas al mismo tiempo que se está escribiendo el *Zohar*2, y funda su trabajo en la búsqueda del éxtasis místico, desarrolla una disciplina peculiar que él denomina *hojmat ha-tseruf*, es decir, “la ciencia de la combinación de las letras”. Por medio de diferentes combinaciones

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1 En el judaísmo, la Shejiná se asocia al Espíritu santo o presencia divina en la tierra. Es la manifestación del Dios incognoscible más cercana a la creación y al ser humano. Los cabalistas a menudo la representan como una mujer que acompaña a los hombres en su sufrimiento.

2 El *Zohar*, o *Libro del Esplendor*, es la principal obra de la Cábala medieval española. Fue escrito por Moisés de León en el siglo XIII, en arameo, y se presenta como un comentario místico de la Torá (los cinco primeros libros de la Biblia hebrea).
letrísticas intenta acercarse al inefable Nombre de Dios\(^3\). Parte del desmembramiento de la realidad y el establecimiento las relaciones justas. Se destruye el sentido común con la intención de permitir que surjan otros, recónditos y exactos, capaces de desvelar los secretos del mundo:

La técnica de combinar letras, utilizada para obtener experiencias místicas, fue usada también, en el sistema hermenéutico de esta cablista, como método exegético avanzado que permite al místico penetrar en los estratos más profundos de las Escrituras (Idel 1999: 49).

Estamos, pues, ante un caso en que los procedimientos hermenéuticos son llevados al límite. El resultado final es la fundación de un orden, el ejercicio de una nueva creación:

Si alguien puede dar expresión a su experiencia regularmente mediante un giro particular en la comprensión de un texto, Abulafia transforma su experiencia en un texto; la experiencia es, en su más alta expresión, un proceso creador de textos (Idel 1999: 50).

El acercamiento a las técnicas interpretativas de este cabalista, basadas fundamentalmente en la combinación y contemplación de las letras del alefato hebreo, permitirá establecer el puente entre esta técnica conducente al éxtasis místico y la búsqueda poética realizada por Juan Eduardo Cirlot en el Ciclo Bronwyn.

2. Las letras y los nombres en el universo cabalístico

Las letras, como unidades mínimas en las que puede descomponerse la lengua —una lengua sobrecargada de sentido— reciben especial atención en la Cábala, que intenta explorar sus cualidades y secretos. Porque si Dios es lenguaje, las letras constituyen su valiosa materia prima: un conjunto limitado de signos combinables que da lugar a todo lo presente, lo pasado y lo futuro. Su cantidad es muy reducida (veintidós letras en el alefato hebreo), y todo el interés reside en las combinaciones resultantes: infinitas como la diversidad de lenguas, sujetas a leyes heterogéneas, llenas de excepciones; capaces, con una leve variación, de alterar todo un sentido.

\(^3\) Para los cabalistas, las cuatro letras sin vocalizar que componen el Nombre de Dios en hebreo constituyen el mayor misterio de la existencia. No se pueden pronunciar, pues su sonido se desconoce y encierra los secretos del propio Dios y de la creación del mundo.
Se abandona la palabra como unidad mínima de reflexión y de análisis: la exploración va más allá del contenido léxico. El valor intrínseco que guardan las letras aparece con fuerza cuando el texto estalla en pedazos. Según determinadas doctrinas cabalísticas, poseen importantes poderes que es necesario saber despertar y explorar: oportunidades para que el místico se acerque a Dios, a través de la meditación, o para producir cambios mágicos en la naturaleza.

Una de las técnicas más empleadas en tales prácticas es la de la combinatoria (de las letras y otros signos gráficos). La idea subyacente es que “todo ha sido creado mediante la combinación de las letras del lenguaje divino. Tales letras, empero, son las letras de la lengua hebrea, como lengua originaria y lengua de la creación” (Scholem 2006: 30). Si afirmamos que la Cábala es una mística del lenguaje, habría que matizar este concepto para incluir en él también a la mística de la escritura, pues “para el cabalista la escritura es el verdadero centro de los misterios del habla” (Scholem 1999: 30). De ahí el valor otorgado a los trazos de las letras, que, lejos de concebirse cual signos gráficos arbitrarios, poseen una simbología trascendente y propia.

El Nombre de Dios —esa única pieza capaz de dar sentido al lenguaje y al mundo— también participa de esta concepción. Cada una de las letras del Tetragrama (והי) es considerada, por sí misma, un nombre de Dios. Y esto podría extenderse al conjunto de letras de la Torá. Gershom Scholem afirma, en este sentido: “El nombre Yahvéh, teológicamente, ocupa el puesto que en otros cultos se reserva a la imagen” (Scholem 2006: 20). De ahí la fijación por la forma de las letras que lo componen, su valor intrínseco, simbólico, y las diversas combinaciones a las que éstas pueden dar lugar. Scholem vincula tales prácticas y creencias con una experiencia universal, que de nuevo uniría a la Cábala y a la poesía:

La magia de la palabra es una experiencia humana fundamental, mucho más amplia, que en la magia del nombre experimenta tan sólo una acentuación especialmente aguda. No es necesario recurrir a la especulación religiosa para ver que las palabras tienen efecto más allá de toda ‘comprensión’, como muestra la experiencia de los poetas, los místicos y de todo aquel hablante que sepa saborear lo sensorial de la palabra. De esta experiencia es de donde brota, ante todo, la concepción del poder del nombre y su magia practicable (Scholem 2006: 21-22).

Para la Cábala, una parte importante de esta magia reside en las letras. El alfabeto se presenta como un ente fundacional: con una
realidad y unas leyes propias. Los distintos experimentos que realizan los cabalistas sirviéndose de él propician una profunda reflexión acerca de la gramatología y las formas de la escritura. La técnica permutatoria aparece como un modo de explorar los secretos del lenguaje a través de sus más pequeñas representaciones gráficas.

La labor llevada a cabo por Abraham Abulafia y el resto de cabalistas exácticos a través del *Hojmda ha Tseruf* (Ciencia de la combinación de las letras) parte de la convicción de que a través de la combinación, asociación y permutación de las letras del alfabeto se puede llegar a la contemplación de los máximos secretos y por tanto al éxtasis místico.

Esto implica una nueva manera de leer y comprender los textos. “Hay que distinguir la ‘lectura de las palabras’ y la ‘lectura de las letras’, hay que dar a las letras la posibilidad de ser letras a pesar de la existencia de las palabras” (Ouaknin 1998: 76). Es decir, no permitir que se conviertan en elementos subsidiarios, desprovistos de entidad propia.

Mención especial merecen las letras que conforman los distintos nombres de Dios —sobre todo las del Tetragrama Yhvh—, y la técnica permutatoria asociada a ellas. Abraham Abulafia crea todo un sistema de meditación basado en la combinación de las letras del Nombre sagrado. Las letras, aparentemente vacías de significado —pero capaces de albergar el máximo sentido— constituyen el elemento ideal para su práctica: no distraen al místico de la labor contemplativa (como sí lo harían dibujos o palabras) y, al mismo tiempo, al formar parte del lenguaje divino, habitan la sustancia misma de la realidad:

El propio cabalista, en un tratado titulado *Sefer ha-hesheq*, advierte a quien quiera adentrarse en su camino de que debe aislar las letras y negarles todo valor superficial, para que éstas no obstaculicen su camino de elevación:

Primero debes asegurarte en tu corazón, de la mejor manera que puedas, de que las letras son sólo signos y caracteres alusivos como lo son las medidas y las parábolas en su esencia, y que sólo existen como instrumentos gracias a los que el hombre accede a la comprensión; para
nosotros están hechas a imagen de las cuerdas del laúd. La producción de sonido por la vibración de la cuerda con la ayuda del arco, el sucesivo roce de las diferentes cuerdas y la combinación de los sonidos que resultan despierta el alma del hombre, que se regocija, busca alegría, felicidad y placer. Se producen entonces una gran elevación y un inmenso arrebato para el alma (Idel 1989: 63).

El fin último es el rescate del alma cautiva y la luz infinita de las cadenas de la materia, que conducirá a un intenso placer en el momento del éxtasis místico. “Abulafia intenta liberar al alma de aquellos obstáculos —’lacres’, ’nudos’— de orden moral, lógico, social, etc. que le impiden sintonizar con las corrientes de la vida cósmica, interpretación cabalística del *intellectus agens* de la filosofía medieval” (Allegra 1977: 11). Y la comparación con la música no es azarosa en modo alguno. Abulafia la utiliza muchas veces como metáfora de sus métodos. En palabras de Gershom Scholem:

Así como el músico expresa el mundo “una vez más” por medio de sonidos que no son palabras, y llega a alturas incommensurables y desciende a abismos sin fin, del mismo modo ocurre con el místico: para él, las puertas cerradas del alma se abren con la música del pensamiento puro que ya no está ligado al “significado” y, en el éxtasis de las profundas armonías que se originan en el movimiento de las letras del gran Nombre, se abre de par en par el camino que conduce a Dios (Scholem 1993: 118).

Las letras se conciben como un conjunto misterioso y superior: su sentido no tiene conexión con ningún significado palpable, dada nuestra radical ignorancia. Sin embargo, la riqueza de sus posibilidades salta a la vista; “de hecho, podemos decir que en la Cábala cada letra individual es un mundo en si mismo” (Scholem 1999: 42). En la práctica combinatoria, el valor de las letras está presente pero agazapado: no se muestra comprensible para la mente humana, pero permite la intermediación entre ambos universos, pues late en su naturaleza la posibilidad de reflejar los últimos secretos:

Las formas son ahora los significados —el sentido primigenio— que el observador puede atribuir a estas combinaciones de acuerdo con el grado de su facultad intelectual de conocimiento. Las letras son, así, la sustancia y la forma del mundo intelectual, cada una en concordancia con las diferentes perspectivas desde las que es observada (Scholem 1999: 42).
El Tseruf necesita de una precisión absoluta, no hay en él lugar para el azar. Es un sistema formal, un método exacto y propuesto, paso por paso, como modelo a seguir. Hay un rechazo manifesto de la anarquía, la subjetividad o las experiencias descontroladas. La técnica ha de ser contemplada como un “arte a partir del que pueden extraerse, una vez completados los ejercicios a los que Abulafia dedicó importantes manuales, unos resultados que no varían” (Allegra 1997: 13). Se trata de un proceso paulatino, que conduce a la liberación del alma a través de un éxtasis provocado y controlado.

El Nombre sagrado contiene en sí ecuaciones “científicas” sobre la estructura del mundo y su funcionamiento; por ello posee una dimensión cognitiva y un poder mágico, y se puede suponer que estas dos características derivan de la estructura particular del Nombre. Pero, según Abulafia, para aprovechar la capacidad estructural de los nombres antes hay que desmantelarlos y reconstruir una larga lista de nuevas estructuras volviendo a combinar las letras del Nombre. Pues paralelamente a las transformaciones que afectarán a la estructura del Nombre, se producirá una modificación en el alma humana.

Un cambio que conducirá a la elevación de la misma, a un mayor grado de conocimiento. Las letras se interiorizan: ya no son entidades abstractas o corpóreas que se encuentran fuera del sujeto y que éste manipula como haría con cualquier otro objeto. Ahora viven dentro del alma, se graban en ella y le muestran caminos nuevos; forman parte de la transformación que experimenta el místico. Moshe Idel comenta, a la luz de los escritos de Abulafia:

Estamos ante un proceso explícito de interiorización: las letras del Nombre divino experimentan un proceso de “purificación” que las hace pasar del estado de letras sensibles —que existen en el exterior del intelecto— al de letras espirituales, que habitan el corazón. A través de este proceso, que parte del mundo sensible para llegar al mundo inteligible, se construye el intelecto (Idel 1989: 33).

3. Juan Eduardo Cirlot y la “ciencia de la combinación de las letras”

La ciencia del Tseruf, caracterizada por los rasgos expuestos, despertó un gran interés en Juan Eduardo Cirlot, que vio en ella un correlato de su poesía permutatoria. Giovanni Allegra, en su artículo “I simboli ermetici nella poesia permutatoria di Juan Eduardo Cirlot”, parte de una pregunta acerca de la filiación de esta nueva práctica
creativa: ¿Se trata de un puro juego surrealista, una variante de la escritura automática? ¿O, por el contrario, remite a “formas estáticas de representación”, siguiendo el ejemplo de Abulafia? (ver Allegra 1997: 9). La disyuntiva se encuentra en la negación, por parte de los surrealistas, de cualquier influjo intelectual en la creación y de su rechazo de las aspiraciones trascendentales. La experiencia mística de Abulafia se inscribe, por el contrario, en una tradición ya codificada, y la combinación de las letras es sólo aparentemente arbitraria y aleatoria, como se acaba de mostrar.

En la poesía de Cirlot también se advierte una defensa de la naturaleza objetiva e impersonal de la simbología4 (y las letras, para ambos, son símbolos, tal como se verá más adelante). Allegra sentencia:

En Cirlot sin embargo no hay, como en otros, un uso arbitrario, caótico e “ingenuo” [de la simbología]. [...] Al decir que [es una poesía] “construida”, no significa artificiosa, sólo se quiere tener presente que el autor se mueve en un paisaje muy preciso y cuyos elementos no pueden ser “espontáneamente” dispuestos y amalgamados (Allegra 1997: 18).

En una carta fechada el 4 de febrero de 1971 y escrita con motivo del envío de Bronwyn, permutaciones, el propio Cirlot reflexiona acerca de los vínculos de su poesía permutatoria con la literatura vanguardista y las antiguas tradiciones sagradas. Su conclusión es muy aclaradora: la labor consiste en buscar sistemas lógicos, y en continuo movimiento, que permitan un acercamiento profundo a lo irracional. Resulta pertinente, en este punto, llamar la atención sobre los procedimientos de Abulafia: letras dinámicas que se combinan según determinadas reglas en un intento por acercarse a lo absoluto: el Nombre de Dios. Éstas son las palabras de Cirlot:

Tras haberme pasado la vida estudiando y defendiendo el arte, la música y la poesía de vanguardia, ahora resulta que (llevo cuatro años estudiando religiones y culturas celtogermánicas a fondo) es ahí en

4 Sirva como ejemplo el final del artículo “Simbolismo fonético BRONWYN-BHOWANI” (16 de abril de 1971), en que el poeta afirma: “Para terminar, diremos que, pese a lo que pueda parecer a los no iniciados en estos conocimientos simbólicos, no se trata de elucubraciones arbitrarias o solamente apoyadas en tradiciones cuya capacidad de fundar la verdad es discutible. Tenemos que repetir que, en el corto espacio de que disponemos, no se pueden aquí dar, ya no razones convincentes, sino ni siquiera las fuentes bibliográficas que ayudarían a penetrar en este mundo ideológico con mayor confianza y seguridad. Por nuestra parte, es evidente, tenemos seguridad y confianza en tales certidumbres".
el oscuro-claro cielo gris del Norte y del pasado donde brilla lo “mío per-
dido”, que en Bronwyn se cristaliza y que, a través de las permutaciones, intento desarrollar, buscando la explicación de la imagen irracional por la cinética de la racional (Cirlot 2001: 430).

Es a lo largo del Ciclo Bronwyn, iniciado en 1967, donde encontramos una mayor cantidad de propuestas relacionadas con la poesía permutatoria. Una de ellas, ejemplificada en Bronwyn, n (1969) atañe a la aplicación del método a las letras del nombre de Bronwyn, y coincide con un momento de inflexión en el ciclo poético: Bronwyn, n anunciaba una nueva vía poética en la que sólo es posible penetrar devolviendo a la palabra escrita su “vocalidad” original, y que fue prosseguida en Inger, permutaciones, dentro del grupo Inger que concurre con el ciclo Bronwyn. “La segunda etapa que inicia Bronwyn, n (antes de junio de 1969) termina en Bronwyn, y (marzo de 1970). Éstos cuatro libros de poemas (Bronwyn, n, z, x, y) fueron concebidos por Cirlot como la imposibilidad de dejar a Bronwyn” (V. Cirlot 2001: 26).

Sin embargo, el nombre de Bronwyn se había erigido en misterio mucho antes de explorar las posibles combinaciones de sus letras –lo hizo casi al comienzo del ciclo. El lenguaje poético, inquebrantable, remite una y otra vez al nombre de Bronwyn:

Si puedes,
    mira cómo me envuelvo en los cabellos blancos de mi espíritu
contra el yerto alfabeto que recita tu nombre,
Bronwyn.

(Cirlot 2001: 128)

Un nombre en el que, de nuevo, se concentran todos los enigmas. La poesía se construye en torno a él: circundándolo, omitiéndolo, alterándolo. Y Cirlot apuesta por la acción, por una escritura que “haga”, que otorgue realidad a Bronwyn abriéndole un espacio inédito. En palabras del autor:

Entonces comprendí que escribiendo versos a Bronwyn no conseguiría nada. Ni tampoco escribiendo un texto “objetivo” sobre los símbolos del “Señor de la guerra”, ni siquiera por orden, ni buscando la...

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5 La serie Inger, desarrollada paralelamente al Ciclo Bronwyn, ofrece también buenos ejemplos de permutación, pero nos ha parecido más apropiado centrar el análisis en Bronwyn por el conjunto del imaginario que concita. No obstante, un análisis completo de la poesía permutatoria de Cirlot —aquello que no se pretende aquí y ahora— sí necesitaría del estudio pormenorizado de Inger.
multiplicación de sus planos, ni su relación con los mitos, celtas o universales. No. Se trata de otra cosa. Hay que hacer lo mismo que el “Señor”. Llegar al pantano, repeler a los frisios, ocupar la torre, ir de caza, encontrar a Bronwyn, apoderarse de ella, darle el anillo del padre (Padre), retenerla, matar al “hermano oscuro” y luego morir por ella, dejándola en poder de los frisios (Cirlot 2001: 17-18).

Una labor, ésta, que roza lo imposible, pero en la que el poeta se afana. Y su principal arma se encuentra precisamente en el nombre de la heroína: palabra que es afirmación de existencia; invocación, pero también territorio vacío, listo para acoger y despertar la vida a sus lados.

He grabado las piedras con tu nombre,
con las letras sagradas de ese nombre
donde tu ser recoge su existencia
aquí.
Las piedras han gritado; de sus rayas
salía un fuego líquido y un vaho
de celestes azules sonrosados.
La superficie de la tierra hablaba.

(Cirlot 2001: 167)

Las piedras, materia inerte por excelencia, han recibido las “letras sagradas” del nombre de Bronwyn, calificado como lugar “donde el ser recoge su existencia”. La primera estrofa culmina con una indicación espacial precisa: “aquí”. Es decir, en el territorio del poema, o en ese mundo cóncavo que el poeta ha creado precisamente para acoger a Bronwyn: entidad que se otorga a través de la inscripción, en la tierra, de las letras del nombre. Las resonancias cabalísticas —fruto de una “coincidencia”, en el sentido poético, entre ambas búsquedas— saltan a la vista: un Dios que crea grabando y esculpiendo las veintidós letras del alfabeto, cuyo ser misterioso reside en un nombre secreto que dota de realidad al mundo, al “aquí”, a lo presente.

En el prólogo a Bronwyn, n Cirlot alude a un nuevo comienzo, a un renacimiento del ciclo basado, precisamente, en el simbolismo fonético. Bronwyn es un poema infinito (sólo truncado por la enfermedad y la muerte del autor), y su protagonista aquella que una y otra vez aflora a la superficie, en un poderoso resurgimiento. No en vano, casi todos los libros están dedicados “a la que renace de las
aguas”6. El poeta escribe, al inicio de Bronwyn, n:

Sería erróneo pensar que mi intención en este poema ha sido hacer letrismos o cultivar una situación límite per se. Terminado el ciclo Bronwyn (I-VIII) parecía imposible agregar nada más a este mito predilecto, situado en la ideología cátara. Entonces pensé que podía, que debía hablar a Bronwyn en su propio idioma. Pero ¿cuál era el idioma de Bronwyn? Imaginarlo me pareció la más atrayente de las ideas: el resultado fue su construcción por variaciones fonéticas mediante las cinco letras diferentes que integran el nombre de la doncella céltica: b, r, n, w, y (Cirlot 2001: 542)7.

La creación de un idioma propio es un paso más para acercarse a Bronwyn. No se trata, además, de un conjunto de signos arbitrario, tal como advierte el poeta, sino que responde a una poderosa lógica interna. La lengua propia de Bronwyn, aquella que conducirá directamente a ella, está formada por las letras de su nombre, que conforman, por extensión, la totalidad de su universo. Estamos aquí ante la misma consideración que llevó a los cabalistas a sostener que la Torá en su conjunto constituía el Nombre de Dios, presente a su vez en cada uno de sus signos. Las combinaciones de las cinco letras —sólo cinco— de BR(O)NWYN dan lugar a una lengua “imaginada” e infinita, aparentemente cerrada, pero en la que todo cabe: herramienta utilizada por el poeta para dar otra vuelta de tuerca y esquivar el final de Bronwyn. El prólogo termina con unas palabras especialmente significativas:

El resultado es un rito verbal, un poema que pudo ser presentado por Bécquer cuando en una de sus Rimas alude a: “Ideas sin palabras / palabras sin sentido”. Aunque la carencia de sentido aquí se da como inmediata y aparente, pues, justamente, la “voluntad” del poema es desvelar un metasentido a través de las resonancias que los fonemas determinen en el lector, al margen de repentina “aclaraciones” que se producen al construirse sílabas con significado en español o en

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6 Escribe Cirlot: “Al ver a Ofelia entre dos aguas muerta en el film ruso [una versión de Hamlet] recordé de pronto el resurgir de Bronwyn de ‘esas mismas aguas y con las mismas flores’. Bronwyn sale del agua para que el señor se enamore de ella, pierda su feudo, su vida misma, es decir, para hacer con ‘él’ lo que hizo Hamlet con Ofelia” (Cirlot 2001: 12).

7 Nótese que la vocal “o” no es considerada como una letra dentro de este grupo, aunque sí forma parte de las composiciones del libro y, por supuesto, del nombre de Bronwyn. Su condición vocálica la excluye del conjunto (en una decisión que no puede dejar de recordar a las lenguas semíticas).
La lengua de Bronwyn se presenta como un intento de arraigar en “lo inexpresable puro”, territorio que según la Cábala ocupa el Tetragrama Yhvh. Como ya se ha visto, en el imaginario de esta tradición las palabras carecen de sentido si no participan de alguna forma en dicho Nombre, que, a su vez, no posee un significado específico por ser ininteligible para la mente humana. Cirlot habla de “oscuros sonidos que aspiran a la luminosidad”. Es decir, sonidos sin un sentido concreto, o que tan sólo suscitan vagas intuiciones por su analogía con algunas palabras de la lengua, pero que sin embargo permiten acercarse a un territorio tradicionalmente vedado: el de la musicalidad del lenguaje puro.

Nos encontramos ante una lengua recompuesta gracias a un ejercicio de destrucción de las reglas preexistentes, que actúan ahora como simples ecos de un pasado roto en añicos. Es posible suponer, por el prólogo a Bronwyn, que la finalización de la búsqueda que culminó en Bronwyn VIII (1969) condujo al poeta, por momentos, a la tentación del silencio. Él mismo, en una carta a Jean Aristeguieta fechada en enero de 1969, nada más terminar la primera etapa del Ciclo Bronwyn, anuncia la escritura de un poema denominado “antiBronwyn”, y continua: “Después de este libro, tal vez escriba mi Réquiem, una especie de himno de Autoinmolación” (Cirlot 2001: 275). No se tiene noticia de ninguno de los dos textos, pero la carta da fe del vértigo ante la visión de un abismo creativo.

El camino de Bronwyn, pues, conduce a la experiencia de los límites, a una tentativa de destrucción de la estructura ordinaria del mundo poético y del lenguaje, pero también constituye, milagrosamente, una vía de retorno; consigue evitar el callejón sin salida y abrir un camino sólo truncado por la muerte.

Así, la labor llevada a cabo en Bronwyn, responde a un intento de comunicación. El hermetismo no implica aislamiento, cerrazón, sino que es transparencia de otro mundo, apertura a una nueva realidad y voluntad de establecer lazos. En una reseña publicada en La Vanguardia el 10 de julio de 1969 se explica con gran pertinencia:

Esta obra prosigue la serie Bronwyn (I-VIII, 1967-1969) de su autor, pero la continúa de extraña manera. A primera vista, el hermetismo del
poema —absoluto— nos hace creer que estamos ante poesía visual o letrismo (cual el que en París dirige Isidore Issou); pero Cirlot, en el prólogo de su plaquette nos advierte de que no es así. El parecido es sólo exterior; se trata de un deseo —ya final y desesperado— de comunicación (no con el lector, sí con Bronwyn), hablándole en su idioma. Un idioma inventado con las cinco letras del nombre de la doncella céltica: b, r, n, w, y, que permite a Cirlot, por combinatoria, crear sucesiones de palabras incomprensibles a la razón (V. Cirlot 2001: 309).

Y, sin embargo, a pesar de su oscuridad, un recorrido por las composiciones de Bronwyn, n arroja, para el lector atento, una indudable luz. Cirlot aclara en el prólogo que la “y” suena como “i” y la “w” se pronuncia “u” o “v” según vaya entre consonantes o vocales. Se realiza así una fuerte apuesta por la lectura en voz alta, que permita apreciar la sonoridad de las combinaciones. El resultado es una musicalidad evidente, que apela a la sensibilidad pero también al intelecto. Veamos dos ejemplos, con sus respectivas tentativas de interpretación:

Onwyn
nyb nyn
Ronwyn
nry nyn
Nonwyn
nyn nyn.

(Cirlot 2001: 288)

La mayúscula con la que se inicia cada serie de dos versos alude al nombre de Bronwyn metamorfoseado. Se podría considerar, pues, que nos encontramos ante una invocación desesperada —y quizá ése sea el verdadero tema de todo el libro: cómo llamar a quien parece alejarse

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8 El parecido formal con este movimiento es, sin embargo, evidente (más allá de las intenciones últimas). Rafael de Cozar explica: “El rumano Isidore Issou, que publicó un único número de su revista La dictature Lettriste en 1946, intentaba operar con la letra como elemento constructivo, disociada ya de la palabra y por su mero valor plástico o fónico. (...) En cierto modo se trataba de usar las letras como notas musicales perfectamente combinables entre sí. El precedente de Schwitters en la pintura o incluso los juegos cubistas o futuristas son bastante claros en el letrismo, pero este movimiento tiende a centrar todo en la poesía, lo que Guillermo de Torre llama ‘punta extrema del panlirismo’. Con el Letrismo y el Concretismo entramos en lo que no muy acertadamente se suele llamar en pintura abstracción” (Cozar 1991).

9 Nótese cómo en hebreo las letras Yod y Vav son las únicas que actúan como semiconsonantes, con los mismos valores que da Cirlot.
sin remedio, cómo retener a aquella que no responde ya a su nombre común, evidente, cuyas posibilidades se piensan agotadas. El segundo verso actúa cada vez con un eco difuso del primero: allí donde la voz se va quedando sin fuerzas y, discretamente, trata de atraer al objeto deseado desde la intimidad y el ofrecimiento de una nueva confianza.

En la primera palabra la letra final varía: “nyb”, “nyr”, “nyn”, pero la segunda se presenta siempre fiel a la forma “nyn”, que parece afirmarse en la repetición final. Sonidos cercanos a una indefinida onomatopeya, que podría relacionarse, por ejemplo, con la terminación de los diminutivos y que resulta, en cualquier caso, sugerente para el lector.

El poema siguiente presenta una forma que recuerda a las tablas de Abraham Abulafia, pues se basa en la combinación de la letra “Y”, inicial, con cada uno de los sonidos que conforman el nombre de Bronwyn. El resultado es una serie de seis combinaciones distribuidas del siguiente modo:

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Yr  
Yn  
Yb  
Yw  
Yy  
Yo  
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(Cirlot 2001: 289)

La descomposición —se podría hablar de disección— del nombre es aquí máxima. Las letras aparecen desperdigadas, pues no hay dos que vayan seguidas si atendemos a la ordenación “Bronwyn”; y además, para completarla faltaría una segunda “n”. No estamos, por tanto, ante una palabra escondida que pide ser reordenada, sino que se trata de una apuesta por la esencia: aparecen los elementos fundamentales del nombre, pero fuera de él. Abren espacios, se colocan en torno a la “Y”, su columna vertebral. Y no deja de llamar la atención la combinación final, “Yo”: coherente dentro de la composición, por un lado, pero a la vez irremisiblemente ligada al sujeto, que se introduce en el poema para dejar su impronta en ese intento de relación con Bronwyn.

A lo largo del libro, las letras intentan conformar una armonía a través de las combinaciones: actúan cuál notas musicales, distribuidas en escalas, y su significado —fuera de la racionalidad a la que acostumbramos— deriva de su pronunciación y del simbolismo fonético. Se trata, pues, de una propuesta a medio camino entre el habla y el canto, de un “rito verbal” (Cirlot 2001: 309), siguiendo la denominación del propio autor.
Abraham Abula, además de comparar su técnica con la música, daba gran importancia a la pronunciación o recitación de los nombres divinos. En sus escritos abundan las indicaciones acerca de la forma de conducir la respiración, el movimiento de la cabeza y las manos, y la modulación de la voz. El momento álgido de la experiencia mística se encuentra precisamente en esa lectura en voz alta: pronunciación cuyos sonidos invocan, musicalidad que otorga sentido. En el *Sefer hamelammed* Abula alienta a sus discípulos: “Recitando las palabras provenientes de la combinación, algo del soplo divino caerá sobre ti mientras tu corazón se calienta” (Idel 1989: 56).

Los sonidos de la voz atraen la atención sobre sí mismos y eso hace que resplandezca su sentido, imposible de apreciar por la razón. No se trata ya de fonemas al servicio de la producción de significados, sino de “notas articulatorias”, ahora que el mismo aparato fonador se ha convertido en un instrumento musical y, liberado de toda subsidiariedad, entona un canto.

*Bronwyn*, n es precisamente un ejercicio de revitalización del nombre, atendiendo a sus potencialidades olvidadas, intentando establecer una nueva comunicación con él. El libro acaba con su reconstitución, en una suerte de resurrección del ciclo poético: “NWYRNY BRONWYN” (Cirlot 2001: 308).

Sin embargo, la incertidumbre continúa: el poeta parece moverse en un terreno fangoso en el que la continuidad del ciclo bascula entre la imposibilidad de dejar a Bronwyn y el necesario hallazgo de nuevas formas de expresión. En *Bronwyn, z* (1969) encontramos una sección escrita en inglés cuyo encabezado reza: “No more Bronwyn”. Decir o no decir, abandonar o seguir al borde del abismo.

A partir de *Bronwyn, x* (1970) se opera una transformación que convierte a Bronwyn en Shekina (la Shejiná, aspecto femenino de Dios). Cirlot otorga a este cambio una importancia radical, tal como especifica en el prólogo a *Bronwyn, y* (1970), en el que hace un breve repaso de su trayectoria:

*Bronwyn, x* significó tan sólo una nueva explicación de lo ya escrito, necesaria para verificar qué grado se había podido conseguir en la metamorfosis. La dedicatoria es lo esencial, a Bronwyn-Shekina, es decir, a Bronwyn como manifestación del aspecto femenino de Dios. (...) Se trata ahora, en *Bronwyn, y*, de dar plena realidad a la rectificación señalada por la dedicatoria aludida y de confesarme deudor de una visión teofánica que pude tomar primero —durante tres años— como mera aparición subyugante de belleza ambigua por transhumana (Cirlot 2001: 354).
Los libros posteriores se abren con la dedicatoria “A Bronwyn-Shekina”. Y el dinamismo propio de la poesía permutatoria se acerca entonces a ese movimiento que buscaba hacer un espacio a la Shejiná, permitiendo su acoplamiento, a través de las infinitas combinaciones de letras. Las distintas variaciones del nombre continúan circundando a la esencia de Bronwyn, siempre inapresable, en Bronwyn, y:

Yrwyn de inextinguible
aurora de aureola
inmensidad reciente
de lejanía la
El ruido del silencio
penetrando
La pausa que afilada
recoge
Yrwyn de inacabada
rosario de rosal

(Cirlot 2001: 364)

El nombre roto coincide con una sintaxis fragmentaria. Las palabras y las frases se mueven en los márgenes de la lógica gramatical. Se dice “Yrwyn” porque Bronwyn es inextinguible e inacabada: sola imagen de lo infinito. Pero a continuación, en el segundo y el último verso, se establecen nuevas asociaciones de palabras, basadas en la etimología y el significado. Las metamorfosis en el nombre remiten a la derivación, y llaman la atención sobre procedimientos lingüísticos que se asemejan a la permutación de las letras. La preposición “de”, en este caso, sirve para establecer una relación que no es de posesión sino de semejanza, que presupone un origen común. “La penetración del ruido del silencio”, por otro lado, es imagen de la irrupción de lo inefable, de su manifestación a través de la palabra. “Yrwyn” es un nombre imposible: una vez más, lo inexpresable puro, el dinamismo que busca atraer a Bronwyn-Shekina.

En el prólogo a Bronwyn, Permutaciones (1970), un libro en el que la técnica permutatoria se aplica a un modelo propio y alcanza una de sus más altas cotas de intensidad y precisión —el poeta “se decanta por una vía media, o sea las permutaciones sobre versos en un idioma normal” (V. Cirlot 2001: 28)—, Cirlot se relaciona de forma explícita con los cabalistas que intentaban rescatar a la Shejiná a través de las sucesivas combinaciones de las letras del Nombre de Dios: “El carácter cinético que posee esta poesía (puesto que todos sus elementos “se
mueven”) intenta expresar un movimiento creciente de vértigo hacia la Shekina” (Cirlot 2001: 413).

Y es éste un movimiento presidido por la búsqueda de la luz, por el resplandor celeste del cuerpo de Bronwyn —pues el nombre, tras las transformaciones, renace convertido en cuerpo. La amada, deidad femenina, es un libro de fuego:

\begin{verbatim}
No muy lejos
las olas se aproximan con relieves.
El mar, mi corazón, verde de estrellas
se descompone en tu blancura negra.
Las páginas de fuego de tu cuerpo
desnudo entre las nubes.
\end{verbatim}

(Cirlot 2001: 424)


\begin{verbatim}
De pronto vi la luz y no era luz,
era el sonido, Bronwyn, de tu nombre.
Iré en tu busca Bronwyn hasta que
el valle de las ruinas no se calle,
y el árbol de los ojos y las hojas
no deje de gemir entre las ruinas.
Anegado en la luna de aquel lago
las aguas absolutas que me anegan
me ciegan y crepitan en las llamas.
Sólo trozos encuentro, sólo pozos
de sollozos y gozos.
Y mi locura busca en la llanura
la altura de la albura,
\end{verbatim}
inmaculada rosa desolada.
Umbral desconsolado del erial,
azulado cristal de lo alejado,
ven.

(Cirlot 2001: 498)

La luz apreciada es y no es un espejismo: luz y no luz, o más bien, luz nueva\textsuperscript{10}, proveniente del sonar resplandeciente. El poeta, arrebato por la visión, desconoce sin embargo cuál es el foco del sonido: un eco que alimenta su búsqueda, que desconcierta y que provoca. Pues a los dos primeros versos les sigue toda una declaración de intenciones: la de un esfuerzo incombustible, una determinación hasta la muerte. El poeta empieza tomando la iniciativa: “Iré en tu busca”, para llegar, en el último verso, al movimiento contrario: “ven”. Dejarse la piel en la búsqueda para forzar la venida, para esperar a Bronwyn en una imploración que es humildad máxima, conciencia de que la voluntad, en la poesía, no todo lo puede. Lo que se anhela, además, parece sólo un alivio, un “umbral desconsolado” o “cristal de lo alejado”: reflejo audible, nombre de Bronwyn que da su tenue luz a lo existente. El final del Ciclo Bronwyn coincide con la enfermedad y la muerte de Cirlot. Sus últimas manifestaciones fueron un conjunto de “variaciones fono- visuales sobre el nombre de Bronwyn” (Cirlot 2001: 555-563 y 565-5769), fechadas en junio de 1972, que el poeta no llegó a publicar en vida. El aspecto visual y sonoro de las letras aparece aquí finalmente añadido, y se reitera el misterio que alienta el nombre de Bronwyn. Los poemas se acercan, por sus características externas, a lo que ha dado en llamarse poesía visual, pero Cirlot advierte de la primacía de lo fónico:

En realidad, el proceso que me ha inducido sobre todo a realizar estas obras es igual al de otras anteriores, como \textit{Inger, permutaciones}. Sea en el idioma que facilitan las variaciones sobre las letras de un nombre, idioma incomprensible aunque a veces contenga alusiones (niger, regine), o en el castellano, al extraer de una palabra sus componentes, como en el caso de la palabra “maravillosas” (= mar, losas, vi al...), esto es lo esencial. Luego, la disposición “visual”, que viene ya de muy lejos (caligramas, futuristas, constructivistas: Lissizky dijo que “la poesía debía verse, no leerse”), resulta un expediente adicional, pero complementario. No le niego —de lo contrario no lo hubiera usado— posibilidades de estímulo al configurar en “dibujos” más o menos

\textsuperscript{10} En otro poema de este mismo libro se puede leer: “He vuelto a ser la luz donde la luz / deja de ser la luz para ser luz” (Cirlot 2001: 518).
perceptibles como tales determinadas agrupaciones de letras. También es una vía para nuevas disociaciones y acumulaciones o reiteraciones dotadas de valor rítmico: ven ven ven ven... (Cirlot 2001: 566).

Como insistente muestra del marcado componente rítmico de las composiciones, destacan dos “variaciones”, una en cada libro, en las que las letras del nombre de Bronwyn aparecen dispuestas como en sendas escalas musicales: teclas a la espera de ser tocadas, combinadas.

En otro poema fonovisual, fechado en julio de 1971 y que no pertenece a ninguna de las dos colecciones citadas, se recalca la centralidad del nombre, su capacidad para albergar la totalidad de lo existente. El título, ya muy significativo: “Alfa y Omega=Aleph y Tau”, hace referencia a la primera y última letras de los alfabetos griego y hebreo. El mundo aparece contenido entre esos dos extremos. En el poema se aprecian dos escalas con el nombre de Bronwyn que confluyen en un mismo punto y, más abajo, un conjunto de letras ya diseminadas, casi por primera vez impronunciables. Circundadas por la nada, por el vacío y el silencio; pues en realidad son ellas, las letras —sonidos e imágenes— las únicas que, en un mundo devastado, pueden salvar al poeta:

Por eso no abandono ni el abismo
que se parece a ti por la carencia
que me mueve a buscar donde no hay nada,
sino un orden de letras y de imágenes.

(Cirlot 2001: 475)

Orden que Cirlot se afanó en explorar y construir, como último reducto de actividad y de vida. Con el sabor agridulce de quien sabe de sus limitaciones —las impuestas por el propio lenguaje— y de la derrota inminente —cercanía de la muerte. Muerte que acecha en un campo poblado de símbolos, donde las letras, luminosas, intentan levantar su último vuelo:

Y perderse en el sueño de las manos alas
aprendidas de pronto entre las luces hierbas
suyas
Bronwyn y se morir entre palabras.

(Cirlot 2001: 668)

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12 Ver imagen 3 (Cirlot 2001: 549).
4. Conclusión

El Ciclo Bronwyn constituye una de las más ambiciosas empresas creativas de Juan Eduardo Cirlot, e incluso de la poesía española de la segunda mitad del siglo XX. A través del personaje de Bronwyn, que conecta con su fascinación por el imaginario medieval y la idea del eterno femenino, Cirlot desarrolla una intensa búsqueda poética y existencial que desemboca en propuestas de deconstrucción del lenguaje cada vez más radicales. En dicho camino, allí donde la Vanguardia se topa con la fuerza del simbolismo ya codificado y el poder evocador de las tradiciones místicas, en este caso la judía y cabalística, el poeta encuentra una fuerte conexión con la obra de Abraham Abulafia y su ciencia de la combinación de las letras. La poesía permutatoria alcanza entonces un nuevo impulso, y es precisamente en el Ciclo Bronwyn donde conquista sus mayores cotas de profundidad poética.

Imagen 1
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ALFA Y OMEGA = ALEPH Y TAU</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B R O N W Y N</td>
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<tr>
<td>W Y N</td>
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<td>N W Y N</td>
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<td>N R O N</td>
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BIBLIOGRAFÍA CITADA


LIBROS RESEÑADOS

De poesía medieval. Con sus glosas agora nuevamente añadidas, es una recopilación de veintiún artículos sobre poesía castellana y lírica tradicional cuyo punto de partida es la amplia producción de Carlos Alvar, autor de más de trecientos títulos dedicados a la literatura medieval española y románica. Los trabajos seleccionados cubren un lapso de tiempo de casi cuatro décadas, desde el 1976, año de defensa de su tesis doctoral, hasta 2012.

El coordinador del volumen, Josep Lluís Martos, tras explicar la cuidadosa elección de las aportaciones incluidas, propone el orden cronológico como estructura del material escogido. Esta decisión permite al lector apreciar la evolución del filólogo “desde intereses lingüísticos... hasta su dedicación a la transmisión textual de la poesía de cancionero castellana” (17), una evolución que muestra no solo el desarrollo del método de trabajo empleado, sino también su maestría en el manejo dis-cursivo del empleo de las fuentes primarias, de los estudios previos y de los elementos comparados. Cada artículo, explica Martos, se acompaña de una glosa redactada por un especialista en el tema tratado, amigo, compañero de trabajo, o discípulo del profesor Alvar. Esta es la novedad fundamental de la recopilación-homenaje a la obra científica del gran filólogo.

Después de las palabras del coordinador, siguen las de Isabel de Riquer. Su texto nos proporciona las circunstancias y el contexto en el que empezó el camino intelectual del filólogo. Son palabras de elogio y de cariño, pero, sobre todo, de recuerdo de sus primeros pasos en el campo de la investigación.

Dentro de los textos preliminares, sigue el análisis de Giuseppe Tavani sobre el método de investigación que el autor desde el comienzo de su camino académico ha ido desarrollando. Tavani ofrece otro tipo de lectura y orden de los trabajos de Alvar (“sugerir una lectura personalizada de los estudios, empezando por los trabajos dedicados a los cancioneros para después pasar al resto, o viceversa” (35)), además de hacer una valoración de su entera producción científica (“Una amplitud
de intereses y competencias que, unidos a una notable escrupulosidad... ponen de manifiesto su capacidad para moverse con sabia desenvoltura entre los complejos mecanismos que la vida de la poesía lírica...” (36)).

Cierra esta sección un capítulo de Marta Haro Cortés y José Manuel Lucía Megías, que reseña las antologías sobre poesía lírica en lengua romance compiladas por Carlos Alvar. Estos repertorios, por su carácter práctico y la pulcritud de sus traducciones, ofrecen “materiales textuales de calidad, con todos los aparatos (comentarios notas, traducciones) que los hagan útiles para el mayor número y tipo de investigadores” (46).

El cuerpo principal del volumen está dedicado a los artículos del autor y a sus glosas, como el propio título indica. Los estudiosos encargados de comentar los distintos trabajos que conforman esta antología, por un lado profundizan en el tema de cada uno de los trabajos y, por otro, desentrañan las elecciones metodológicas adoptadas por Alvar, los puntos fuertes y novedosos de su investigación, así como la ascendencia y fortuna que tuvieron los textos dentro de la tradición filológica española y europea. Todos coinciden en el rigor de su método de análisis, el carácter innovador de su investigación y la claridad expositiva de sus aportaciones, tanto en los artículos aquí citados, como en el resto de su producción científica. También concuerdan en que en distintas ocasiones los retos lanzados por el autor han impulsado y abierto nuevas líneas de pesquisa.

Por último, es interesante destacar que el coro de voces que conforman las glosas de este homenaje engarza una atípica semblanza del autor cuando, en sus análisis —algunos en tono más didáctico, otros más distendidos—, enlazan recuerdos, anécdotas, impresiones y juegos de palabras. Pondré unos ejemplos, que no quieren ser exhaustivos, sino ilustrativos de mis palabras. La profesora Patrizia Botta escribe: “Alba, albor, albar / Alvar de mis amores / El dístico (facticio) que en cabeza esta glosa juega, lógicamente, con el apellido Alvar. Pero no solo. Tomando a préstamo voces de la poesía tradicional, con alba y albor quiero aludir al despertar primero de la pasión científica en un jovencísimo Carlos...” (70). Vicenç Beltrán apunta: “es una muestra más de la diversidad del currículum del autor, de su curiosidad por los más amplios campos de la investigación literaria” (107). Carmen F. Blanco Valdés añade un inciso personal sobre la reflexión final del trabajo glosado: “a mi juicio, es una manifestación palpable no solo de un conocimiento exhaustivo de la corriente lírica amorosa medieval
en su conjunto, sino de esa intuición literaria, tan necesaria, que debe poseer todo filólogo que se precie” (165); María Jesús Lacarra dice: “En una posible exposición oral estas palabras habrían venido subrayadas por una leve sonrisa irónica” (418). Fernando Gómez Redondo subraya su “benedictina paciencia” (462); Elvira Fidalgo cuenta “Una de las características que, en mi opinión, distinguen los artículos de Carlos Alvar, más allá de su habitual solidez científica, es la de acompañar al lector en un delicioso paseo por diferentes obras, géneros o corriente literarias...” (515).

Termino con una valoración general del libro. Esta antología no es un simple homenaje sino que cumple, a mi juicio, con dos funciones principales. En primer lugar es una obra que destaca por su utilidad: se encuentran reunidas por primera vez las principales aportaciones sobre la lírica castellana tradicional que ha realizado uno de sus máximos especialistas. Es útil para el joven investigador que quiere acercarse a este tema por primera vez y lo es para el estudioso ya experimentado, que va a tener en un único lugar estos artículos de referencia, cuyas reflexiones siguen vigentes. En segundo lugar, las glosas, modernizan los textos primigenios y los completan, sea con interesantes reflexiones personales, sea con la aportación de nuevo material bibliográfico que guía al lector hacia un nuevo camino de investigación, cuyos primeros pasos se sitúan en las sugerencias y retos que el profesor Alvar apuntó de forma pionera en sus trabajos aquí sabiamente reunidos.

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Isabel I de Castilla es uno de los personajes más importantes y decisivos de la historia de España sobre los que más se ha escrito. Su figura tiene detractores, sin duda, pero también se ha vertido mucha tinta a su favor, y desde hace siglos, a partir de la época misma en que transcurrió su vida, potenciándose durante el franquismo, en que hasta incluso se inició abrir un expediente para un proceso de beatificación, en 1958. Y el caso es que la sucesiva producción de nuevas obras sobre ella no decae en absoluto. Tanta es la bibliografía acerca de la que fue
reina de Castilla que resulta difícil escribir al respecto aportando una visión distinta y novedosa. Pero el libro que reseñamos la aporta, porque Maruxa Duart Herrero ha enfocado a Isabel preferentemente desde el punto de vista de la historia de las mentalidades, y de la historia de la cultura, calificando su libro como ensayo, que es un género que se añade a otros cultivados por esta historiadora valenciana, entre los cuales están la narrativa, expresada en novelas y cuentos, la dramatúrgica y la periodística.

Esta obra de Duart Herrero consta de dos partes, cada una de las cuales comprende diversos capítulos, cuatro y once respectivamente. En la primera estudia cómo se fueron construyendo los modelos ideológicos, religiosos y éticos que serían vigentes en tiempos de esta soberana legendaria. Ésa parte inicial culmina con un capítulo en el que se abordan las problemáticas habidas a propósito de cuestiones concernientes a la legitimidad o ilegitimidad de su ascenso al trono. La parte segunda es más extensa. Se examina cómo se fue construyendo la leyenda que envuelve a la reina castellana, la cultura que ella misma tenía, las relaciones con su marido, Fernando II de Aragón, las que mantuvo con sus hijos, y asimismo las que dispensó a sus diferentes confesores, y de manera singular a fray Hernando de Talavera. En esta parte segunda, por tanto, se intensifica el protagonismo de Isabel en este ensayo. Antes de las conclusiones, el libro versa acerca del legado de la soberana.

La leyenda de Isabel 1ª de Castilla es obra que está repleta de información proveniente de muchas y varias fuentes. Y como es obvio la dimensión histórica es la más relevante, pero igualmente las facetas costumbrista, religiosa y moralista. El reto que acecha a un libro de tales características y que alcanza las cuatrocientas páginas era el de lograr que los lectores lo pudiesen leer complacidos. Y Maruxa Duart Herrero ha logrado este objetivo, porque su texto está muy documentado, es denso en muchos momentos, pero lo sazona la amenidad. Y la principal causa de este ingrediente es la gran porción de noticias curiosas relativas a costumbres, el aporte de datos que no suelen manejarse, y el de hechos históricos relevantes que el lector tiene la posibilidad de ir leyendo a lo largo de los capítulos.

Es éste un libro que habría de interesar mucho al público lector en general, a los historiadores y a los filólogos. Uno tiene la convicción de que los estudiosos de la literatura creada en el período histórico en el que vivió Isabel de Castilla, por ceñirnos al marco de este libro, desconocen en su mayoría muchas de las costumbres epocales que en él
se exponen, y que, de conocerse bien, podrían ser utilizadas en las clases, para amenizarlas y hacerlas más didácticas, y en las ediciones de textos, para introducir anotaciones que los hiciesen más comprensibles.

Algunas corrientes de crítica han enfatizado que hay que atender sobre todo a los textos como escritura literaria, y es verdad. Pero a veces esa indiscutible atención ha convertido los contextos culturales e históricos en un complemento irrelevante, cuando en realidad en no pocas ocasiones resultan decisivos para la comprensión cabal y más completa de las obras literarias. Actualmente, este inconveniente se ha ido superando con el progresivo interés en insertar las obras literarias en los contextos culturales en los que se crearon, y en los contextos previos que los precedieron. Y en esta línea de atención contextual podría inscribirse el ensayo de Duart Herrero.

Al hilo de lo que se acaba de afirmar, piénsese en las *Coplas a la muerte de su padre* escritas por Jorge Manrique. O piénsese en *La Celestina*, por alegar dos únicos ejemplos. En el primer supuesto, la lectura de las páginas que Duart Herrero centra en el reinado de Enrique IV son de una utilidad notable, porque contribuyen a completar un retrato de unos tiempos históricos a los que esos versos manriqueños hacen referencia poética. En el supuesto segundo, la variopinta sociedad del XV y en especial el mundo de las mancebías, o las situaciones varias de las rameras, también son aspectos sociales de los que conviene estar informado para una lectura más atinada de esta obra atribuida a Fernando de Rojas. Y *La leyenda de Isabel Iª de Castilla* resulta también en este punto una obra merecedora de consulta.

Nos llevaría muchas páginas ir pormenorizando los ingredientes de amenidad costumbrista y asimismo los de relevancia histórica que concurren en el libro de Duart Herrero, y que la historiadora y también ensayista consigna, extrayéndolos de fuentes muy diversas, muchas de ellas con noticias curiosísimas. Por esa razón me limitaré a mencionar tan solo unas cuantas referencias al respecto, seleccionadas del caudal ingente que se contiene en esta obra tan unitaria y variada al mismo tiempo.

Ciñéndonos a la parte primera, y con relación a modelos de pensamiento que llegaron a construirse en el mundo grecolatino, llama la atención saber que en los ejércitos griegos la unidad táctica de base podían formarla parejas de amantes masculinos. La que se consideró más contundente fuerza armada en el período helenístico la formaban en exclusiva homosexuales. También es valioso tener noticia de que fue el rey visigodo Witiza quien dio autorización a los sacerdotes para...
amancebarse, disposición que perduró a lo largo de los siglos medios. Se suele olvidar que Alfonso VI tuvo hasta seis esposas, en contraste flagrante con la sola unión familiar que mantuvieron El Cid y doña Jimena.

Acercándonos más a la época de los Reyes Católicos, sorprende la crítica que el interesantísimo escritor Enrique de Villena hizo del “afeminamiento” del aseo masculino, en un anticipo de lo que en el siglo XX se ha designado como el hombre metrosexual. Otro anticipo es la legislación contra los ruflanes explotadores de mujeres, como lo revela un artículo legal del XVI contra “Rufianes que pongan una mujer a ganar”. Curioso resulta asimismo que a Santo Domingo de Silos se le tuviese como abogado de los buenos partos, de ahí que una reliquia suya, por ejemplo su báculo, se tuviese como auxiliar seguro para los felices alumbramientos.

Tocante a la figura de Enrique IV, son muchas las noticias que este libro proporciona, y no siempre resultan abrumadoramente negativas, como suele suceder. Es cierto que su cronista Enrique Díez del Castillo no podía sino transmitirnos una imagen positiva, pero esa imagen también hay que conocerla. Dada la fama de impotente que arrastra este monarca, no puede extrairnarnos que aboliese la costumbre de mostrar las sábanas nupciales ensangrentadas. En su corte se acusó de concubina a su hermana Isabel mientras tanto su matrimonio con Fernando no contó con la dispensa papal a causa del estrecho parentesco que unía a los cónyuges. El citado Díez del Castillo retrataba a su monarca como un pacífico que sostuvo que no debía aventurarse la vida de un hombre porque no tenía precio. Y ciertamente parece muy adelantada la supresión que hizo del besamanos. No faltan en el libro de Duart Herrero las obvias referencias a cuanto de censurable hubo en este reinado convulso. Pero aunque el retrato favorable no superará nunca al negativo, no hay que obviarío, y en este libro no se silencia.

La parte segunda está plagada también de noticias que nos atraen por su curiosidad. Elegiré unas pocas: en la biblioteca de la reina había un ejemplar de una obra tan lúdicamente erótica como es el Libro de Buen Amor, del Arcipreste de Hita, un dato que añadir a los que se tienen sobre la recepción, en este caso áulica, de esta creación excepcional del llamado mester de clerecía en el XIV. Otra sorpresa que copió del libro, y que contrasta con la realidad actual en la mayoría de países, entre ellos España: “Mientras vivió Cisneros ningún estudiante pagó nada en los colegios universitarios ni casa de huéspedes [...]” (308).
Enfoca Duart Herrero la figura de la reina desde varios prismas, y por tanto recoge en su libro toda clase de opiniones, lo que permite al lector hacerse su propia idea personal acerca de esta figura histórica, y al mismo tiempo darse cuenta también de la complejidad de enjuiciarla respecto a los distintos acontecimientos de enorme relieve en los que estuvo involucrada, la mayor parte de las veces con un rol decisivo. Lo que me queda claro es que, gracias a estas varias perspectivas que se ofrecen sobre la soberana, resultaría inapropiado encasillarla en tópicos manidos de un signo o de otro.

Aduce la historiadora y ensayista en su libro textos de Isabel que me parecen sumamente conmovedores, y que dan la medida de su gran talla moral. Uno de ellos no puede ser sino su testamento, tan impresionante en tantos aspectos. Como es muy conocido, y fue glosado numerosas veces, no me detendré en sus disposiciones. Por esta razón voy a limitarme a poner el acento en un escrito suyo sobre el que se ha prestado mucha menos atención. Se trata de un fragmento de una carta en el que confiesa sentirse culpable del intento de asesinato de su esposo en Barcelona, hecho que sucedió el día 7 de diciembre de 1942. Copio el pasaje al que aludo: “[…] una de las penas que yo sentía, al ver al rey padecer lo que yo merecía, no mereciéndolo él que pagaba por mí” (228).

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Con esta colección de artículos, en su mayor publicados con anterioridad y ahora recopilados en este volumen, Castillo Gómez se adentra de manera magistral por el universo de la lectura y la práctica lectora tempranomoderna, analizando en qué medida los libros “sólo adquieren su verdadero sentido al ser leídos” (12). Abandonando el simple estudio de registros, fuentes y bibliotecas de uso particular accesibles a los lectores áureos, que había guiado la investigación sobre el libro y los lectores hasta la década de los años ochenta del siglo pasado, el autor pasa revista por las prácticas de un amplio espectro de lectores, desde
aquellos que viven rodeados de libros y afanados en labores eruditas y de estudio hasta los menos familiarizados con la cultura escrita, aunque no menos expuestos al libro en su vertiente oral.

La división del libro ya da cuenta fehaciente de los espacios que se intentan abarcar. El capítulo I, “Del donoso y grande escrutinio”, toma el episodio quijotesco como punto de partida para una reflexión sobre las diatribas coetáneas sobre los libros caballerescos por deshonestos y profanos, lo que implica analizar la sociedad contemporánea como persecutoria y el concepto de lectura como conducente a un utilitarismo de aprendizaje y edificación moral. “Por ello la Iglesia y los hombres del saber procuraron con tanto denuedo que aquellos libros estuvieran a buen recaudo, para evitar que historias tan fabulosas pudieran ser tomadas como verdad y azuzaran el ingenio y la imaginación de los lectores” (44).

En “Leer y anotar. La lectura erudita” nos plantea el autor un recorrido de numerosos ejemplos de lectores bien formados y preparados que componen cartapacios o cuadernos de anotaciones con extractos de sus lecturas y/o lugares comunes, o anotan en los márgenes de libros, dando así fe de su proceso lector (“de lo que se leyere, viere y oyere”) y memorístico. Asociada esta lectura a cambios en los espacios de la misma (desarrollo del estudio-biblioteca), se consuma con ello “un aislamiento físico que ya lo era mental, en definitiva, una radical transformación en la forma de entender y practicar la lectura entre los eruditos de los Siglos de Oro” (70).

El apasionante tercer capítulo, “Pasiones solitarias. Lectores y lecturas en las cárceles inquisitoriales”, repasa el acceso o falta del mismo a lecturas (de mayoría piadosas y legales) en las prisiones de la Inquisición, ya sea como defensa, consuelo o distracción, prestando particular atención a varios casos novohispanos (Luis Carvajal el Mozo o Guillén Lombardo, entre otros).

“Leer con comunidad. Moriscos, beatas y monjas” repasa varios casos pertenecientes a las tres comunidades mencionadas (ejemplares en cuanto a la función dada en ellos a la lectura) en que la lectura comunitaria resulta significativa por presentarnos el papel del lector como mediador cultural, la conexión de la lectura con la sociabilidad y la práctica lectora como refuerzo de la identidad. Muestran, asimismo, implicaciones en lo que toca al control jerárquico sobre la palabra escrita y sus posibles apropiaciones y a la “experimentación de los caminos trazados por aquellas personas a las que el grupo mostraba respeto y obediencia” (120).
“Leer en la calle. Coplas, avisos y panfletos” presenta el apasionante estudio de esa literatura o materiales menores compuestos por canciones, coplas, avisos, cédulas de excomuniones, pliegos, cartas de relación o informaciones y edictos (entre otros) por gradas, plazas y mentideros de España y el Nuevo Mundo, que complementa la de cenáculos letrados o estudios de eruditos, donde la palabra se hace pública ya sea leída de forma individual o mediante su lectura pública y exposición compartida. “A fin de cuentas, entonces como ahora, la gente siempre ha leído algo más que libros, y eso a pesar de que numerosas historias de la literatura y algunos estudios de la lectura siguen empeñados en retratar lo contrario” (152).

El último capítulo, titulado “Lectura y autobiografía”, pasa revista a numerosos autores y personajes de los siglos XVI y XVII (ilustres o de menor nombradía) y a la relevancia que las lecturas tuvieron en sus vidas como material de vida para los mismos, conformando lo que el autor denomina la “biblioteca interior”:

Una comparación de las autobiografías áureas permite atisbar distintos modos de establecer el vínculo entre la lectura y la escritura, maneras diversas de mostrar el peso de lo leído, vestigios varios de representar la “biblioteca interior”. (186)

Con lo descrito hasta aquí no hemos hecho justicia al libro de Castillo Gómez, sino señalado tan sólo las líneas maestras seguidas por el autor. Si se atiende a las mismas, este investigador recoge en su totalidad el fenómeno de la lectura tempranomoderna, ya sea en su manifestación personal e individual, ya sea en su modalidad pública de recitado oral. Asimismo, le interesan todos los ámbitos de manifestación social de dicha lectura, desde los más elevados del erudito o más regulados del monasterio, a los del pasquín público que se adosa a una pared en la plaza, pasando por cáceles inquisitoriales, cenáculos letrados, grupos de conversos y heterodoxos, incluyendo sujetos con mayor o menor preparación letrada pero a los que lo escrito llega por igual, en sus variadas modalidades. Si algo resalta Castillo Gómez con todo esto es que la palabra está viva en la sociedad que él estudia, que no es letra muerta, sino cala hondo en las mentalidades e identidades y se difunde por doquier impulsando a la información, la sabiduría, el deleite o el consuelo/pasatiempo, hasta llegar a su ejemplo máximo con la imitación de lo leído en personajes ficcionales como don Quijote o las no tan ficcionales monjas y beatas de la época, lectoras de vitae sanctorum, que quieren poner en práctica lo leído en su vida diaria.
Lo que pasa por este libro es un retrato apasionado y apasionante de la sociedad si se quiere lejana de la época áurea, que se nos acerca a nosotros por mor de su interés por la palabra leída y por las variadas imbricaciones entre escrito, ficción y vida que pueblan las vidas de muchos de sus personajes.

Podemos recordar en estas líneas, por completar un trabajo que es *opera aperta* como lo define el propio autor, tres instancias de relevancia en lo que toca a la lectura que hemos tenido ocasión de rastrear en nuestra propia investigación. Así, podemos comenzar citando los casos de Bernardino de Mendoza o Carlos Coloma de Saa, dos de los grandes historiadores de Flandes, cuyas obras responden el deseo expreso de replicar a la *historia mentirosa* de historiadores extranjeros (como Conestaggio) que no habían representado, al decir de los historiadores españoles, de manera fidedigna lo que ellos consideran verdad de la historia que ellos mismos, como partícipes y soldados, vivieron.1 En este mismo sentido se expresa Lope de Vega, también soldado y escritor, que construye todo un subgénero literario como son las comedias de Flandes para responder a dichos historiadores *mentirosos*.2

En el ámbito religioso, dos contextos de los analizados en nuestros estudios muestran la relevancia especial de la lectura en ellos. Los chuetas, grupo judeoconverso perseguido en Mallorca durante los siglos XVI y XVII, concitan un ataque enfurecido de las autoridades inquisitoriales a finales del siglo XVII. Entre los motivos investigados por los inquisidores, resulta de interés su preocupación por conocer los libros a que tuvo acceso dicho grupo chueta y los canales como les llegaron (procedentes de Liorna o de Ámsterdam).3 En la deposición de Margarita Moreira de 1646-1647 ante un tribunal inquisitorial de la Nueva España (México) por judaizante, aparece numerosas veces la relevancia que tuvieron determinados libros en su iniciación a la doctrina de “Moisés”:

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También dice que se excusaba de oír misa los días de precepto y obligación cuanto le era posible, fingiendo enfermedad. Una de las personas con que en cierta ocasión se había concertado cierto grupo de judaizantes les dijo “que no habían llegado las profecías para que viniese Cristo al mundo” y otras cosas “que no se acordaba y estaban en los libros que mandaban quitar los señores inquisidores” (Cortijo 2013, 499).4

Por último, James Salgado, exsacerdote católico convertido al protestantismo y que escribió una gran cantidad de obras de polémica religiosa o antiespañolas hacia 1680, menciona en numerosas ocasiones en sus escritos (The Slaughter-House, London: Printed for William Marshall, 1683; A confession of faith of James Salgado, a Spaniard, and sometimes a priest in the Church of Rome dedicated to the University of Oxford, London: Printed for William Marshall, 1681) la relevancia de la lectura en el proceso de su conversión; del mismo modo, acusa a la religión católica del crimen de negar a sus fieles el acceso a la lectura directa de la palabra de Dios; así como acusa a la Inquisición de cruel por negar el acceso a los reos a la palabra escrita y edificante.5

Los tres ámbitos y contenidos mencionados en nuestra investigación (el converso e inquisitorial, el del monasterio y la lectura edificante, el de la historia como garante de la verdad y la lo escrito como conformador de identidad) están recogidos con creces en la monografía de Castillo Gómez. Si algo nos da a entender su estudio es que la lectura es modelo de vida y de comportamiento, de información y entretenimiento, amén de palabra viva que proporciona un contenido al que se da vida de mil maneras por parte de los lectores áureos. Podemos concluir con el recuerdo de una frase atribuida a varios autores clásicos (entre otros a Tomás de Kempis), que resume gran parte del valor vital del libro leído:

*In omnibus requiem quaesivi, et nusquam inveni nisi in angulo cum libro.*

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5 A. Cortijo Ocaña, *Herejía, Inquisición y leyenda negra en el siglo XVII. (James Salgado, el Hereje: Vida y obra de un exsacerdote español).* New York: Calambur, 2016. “Esta duda reflexiva, nos dice Salgado, nació espontánea en él ante la lectura de la palabra de Dios, luego con el aditamento, por conductos desconocidos, de otra literatura protestante, que fomentó en él dudas con relación a dos temas doctrinales paradigmáticos de peso: el número y entidad de los sacramentos” (16).
Recomendamos efusivamente la lectura de Leer y oír leer, libro de excelente factura y que con una exhaustividad elogiable aborda un tema apasionante: la lectura en los Siglos de Oro.

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El erudito y prolífico investigador Antonio Cortijo nos entrega un nuevo libro sobre El Quijote en el que reelabora y profundiza en postulados anteriores. El episodio de Grisóstomo y Marcela, a la luz de sus fuentes sentimentales, sobre el que escribiera en 2012, entra aquí en relación con otro episodio de la obra, la cueva de Montesinos, en los que se desarrolla una suerte de transgresión: el locus amoenus de Marcela y Grisóstomo deviene infierno de enamorados y la cueva-infierno de Montesinos se vuelve espacio de maravilla.

Igualmente ofrece una nueva lectura carnavalesca de ambos episodios “con dosis de sátira menipea-lucianesca y burla aristofánica” (22) en la que don Quijote es comparado con Dionisio al experimentar una iluminación dionisiaca en la cueva, de la que sale renacido, y para transformar los códigos caducos del amor y la vida pastoriles y el del romance y la caballería de amor.

Dividida en tres partes, en la primera estudia el casus amoris de Grisóstomo y su porfía y la defensa de la libertad de Marcela. Para rebatir a los críticos que han dudado del suicidio de Grisóstomo, Cortijo lo ve como heredero de las obras sentimentales y pastoriles. Considera el carácter fúnebre del ciprés y el tejo que portan los pastores del cortejo como símbolos de muerte y resurrección y los va ilustrando con notas de similia en pasajes de la Galatea o en el mismo Quijote, a la vez que se remonta a fuentes clásicas para ilustrar que de los frutos o de la corteza del tejo se extraían venenos o infusiones usados para suicidarse, pero también se depositaban en la ventana de la enamorada la noche de San Juan, o sea, llegó a simbolizar la vida y la muerte, aunque también se consideró antídoto contra la mordedura de serpiente, como si la procesión pastoril necesitara coronarse de antídotos para pertrecharse
contra la serpiente Marcela, quien, en su defensa, se refiere tres veces a la palabra porfía, lo cual le da pie a Cortijo para volver y abundar en un asunto muy familiar, que ya había tratado en su edición de Porfíar hasta morir de Lope de Vega.

Compara entonces a Grisóstomo con otro personaje muy querido por el investigador, Macías, “el mártir de amor y ejemplo sin par de enamorados constantes y sin ventura” (66): El Macías de Rodríguez del Padrón que rompe el hechizo de amor de Ardanlier y Liessa será el modelo para don Quijote en la cueva como el desfacedor del encanto de Merlin sobre Durandarte y Belerma, según propone Cortijo en esta iluminadora lectura sentimental de ambos episodios.

Muchas otras cuestiones entran en relación: Marcela y don Quijote son dos figuras emblemáticas de la libertad. Marcela es un personaje construido “para neutralizar (desequilibrar y subvertir) el proceso de supresión de la mujer en la época mediante una resistencia obstinada o una manipulación suprema de las diferentes situaciones” (92), por eso nunca hubiera accedido a un matrimonio impuesto por algunos de sus pretendientes y es capaz de enfrentarse al egoísmo del amante masculino. En ese sentido, Marcela se asemeja a Laureola y a la mujer de la novela sentimental por estar dotada de voz “que replica, comenta, discute y debate” (102), al contrario que en la lírica, donde es afásica. Así pues, el episodio de Marcela y Grisóstomo rebasa los referentes petrarquistas y de los cancioneros y hay que situarlo, como lo hace precisamente Cortijo, en el contexto sentimental y sobre todo, en uno de sus motivos más recurrentes, el triumphus amoris.

La segunda parte está dedicada a otro espacio de la maravilla, la cueva de Montesinos, episodio que considera el central del libro. Apoyado en la documentación asentada en las notas de su edición de El amor más verdadero, Durandarte y Belerma de mosén Guillén Pierres (2002), lo contextualiza en la tradición romancesca y ve su difusión en el mundo folklórico para poder entender el significado burlesco en Cervantes. Romanceros, cancioneros, pliegos sueltos, glosas serias, burlescas y a lo divino dan cuenta de la amplia difusión del tema de Durandarte y Belerma en los siglos áureos. Igualmente recrea la tradición paródica en la que se inscribiría el episodio en estudio, donde se habla de la “asadura” para referirse al corazón o se tratan aspectos esclatológicos del mal olor del órgano.

Incursiona después en el motivo de la cueva como centro oracular en el mundo griego y en este sentido, relaciona a don Quijote con Orfeo por su poder adivinatorio. La cueva también representa lo femenino,
se relaciona con el útero materno y con “un camino de iluminación y adquisición de la verdad divina o conocimiento sobrehumano” (168). Para Cortijo, don Quijote realiza un descenso penitente liberador, mitad viaje, mitad visión, cuyo tema principal es el amor que todo lo vence. La cueva se asemeja al Seno de Abraham porque la visión que tiene don Quijote “la más agradable vida y vista” se acerca al arrobo de los místicos y porque los encantados de la cueva esperan la llegada del Mesías que los rescate y los lleve al paraíso.

Ambos episodios comentados por Cortijo recrean un ascensus ad empirium y un descensus ad inferos, respectivamente. De ambos encuentra los hipotextos certeramente: del primero, la literatura sentimental y su heredera, la pastoril; la epifanía de Marcela en el sepulcro de Grisóstomo recuerda la resurrección de Cristo y su triunfo tiene su parangón en los Triomphi petrarquistas; los de Montesinos son el romance, el descenso de Eneas a los infiernos, la cueva platónica y la literatura caballeresca. En ambos el prado y la caverna son espacios de maravilla, espacios liminales en los que los personajes viven una experiencia transformativa.

En la tercera parte acude de nuevo a cielos e infiernos y esta vez comenta el episodio de Clavileño y la caída de Sancho en la sima. Concebido como una suerte de réplica al de Montesinos, en el episodio de Clavileño se cuestionan también los temas de apariencia-verdad, ficción-realidad. Don Quijote cree que Sancho sueña o miente respecto a lo que ha visto en el cielo igual que Cide Hamete pensaba de don Quijote en la cueva. Respecto a la sima, Sancho ha caído en una especie de purgatorio y don Quijote es el encargado de sacarle de penas, tal vez por haberse dejado llevar por la imaginación y las locuras de su amo, como caída por la soberbia del poder como gobernador y por haber sido él mismo encantador. En una relación quiástica, don Quijote cae y se levanta y Sancho se eleva en el ascenso celestial de Clavileño y cae en la sima, pero los dos acaban renaciendo como hombres nuevos. Los episodios analizados establecen una relación temática (bajada al infierno, subida al empíreo) o sea, en todos los espacios (prado, bosque, cueva, cielo) hay descripciones del Más Allá y se desarrolla la maravilla. En ellos se analizan casos de amor, sobre todo, en el de Grisóstomo y Marcela. Don Quijote y Sancho profundizan en la verdad de las cosas y reciben un conocimiento por la experiencia del Más Allá. Igualmente, los personajes se dan voz unos a otros. A don Quijote le da voz Montesinos al concebirlo como salvador, a Marcela se la da don Quijote “al reconocerla como mesías de la ira justa y de la libertad”
La cueva se concibe, de acuerdo con Antonio Cortijo, como un purgatorio donde don Quijote purga las culpas de invalidez e incapacidad moral por no haber podido liberar a los héroes encantados y Sancho expía la culpa del pecado de la soberbia y la ambición después de su gobierno. Los movimientos de subida y caída, ascenso y descenso son, a juicio del autor, los que entremejen la tela de la novela. Con erudita fundamentación, Marcela queda asociada a la mártir romana del mismo nombre, a Blesila y a Paula de las tradiciones paulina y patrística y se asemeja a don Quijote en que ambos son célibes, virgenes y proclaman continuamente el deseo de libertad.

Completan el libro tres valiosos apéndices, que le sirvieron de corpus y que apoyan su investigación: uno sobre los romances del ciclo de Durandarte y Belerma; el segundo, sobre la porfía amorosa en la obra de Cervantes: en El curioso impertinente, en el episodio del mozo de mulas, don Luis y Clara, en las bodas de Camacho y en varias ocasiones más en las que el término porfía adquiere diversos significados: insistencia, debate o lucha dialéctica o física. El último versa sobre la comedia burlesca de tema quijotesco y dedica un breve análisis a El Hidalgo de la Mancha de Matos Fragosos, Diamante y Vélez de Guevara, representada en 1673. Cierra el apéndice con el argumento de otra comedia burlesca, El amor más verdadero, Durandarte y Belerma.

Sin duda, esta nueva entrega es una original propuesta de lectura de ciertos episodios cervantinos y un libro extremadamente documentado por la especialización en cultura clásica, medieval y áurea y la ingente erudición que posee Antonio Cortijo, que ha ido derramando en todas las ediciones y los abundantes trabajos que conforman su rica bibliografía.

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Este libro presenta el texto de la Vita coaetanea de Ramón Llull en cuatro versiones: la original latina de ca. 1311, la traducción catalana del siglo XIV, y las traducciones originales de A. Cortijo al inglés y
... castellano del original latino. La obra luliana es un texto fundamental para entender la vida y obra del filósofo mallorquín. Como indica el autor,

 [...] when he was seventy-nine years old (or seventy eight), Llull himself dictated an account of his life to some monks at the Carthusian monastery of Vauvert in Paris (where he was residing temporarily), who in turn were in charge of giving his oral narration a final written form. We cannot be sure that we are reading Llull’s words directly and rather suspect that there has been some sort of mediation between his oral account and the final written form of his Vita. (3)

Cortijo sostiene que, en vísperas de la marcha del filósofo mallorquín al Concilio de Viena de 1311, Llull se planteó la escritura de una obra biográfica en que diera cuenta del propósito de su vida y obra. Pero lo que era más importante, quería recabar el futuro apoyo de las autoridades civiles y eclesiásticas del concilio para sus planes de creación de escuelas de lenguas y de preparación y formación de un grupo humano dispuesto a acometer la conversión de los fieles islámicos al cristianismo. Para ello Llull adopta un tono a medio camino entre autoconsolatorio y profético: él ha sido elegido por Dios para llevar a cabo esta misión, empezando con una serie de visiones, y su afán proselitista no implica deseos de autopromoción personal sino obediencia ciega a Dios. El tono del libro, escrito en los años finales de su vida, rezuma el mismo carácter que las obras un tanto “pesimistas” de Llull, sus Descenhort y Cant de Ramon”, donde se ve a sí mismo como “poor and despised, / without the help of anyone born / and bearing too great a burden” (vv. 37-39; Cortijo 5).

Cortijo estudia en la Introducción los entresijos que motiva la escritura de la obra. Pasa después revista de modo somero a la producción completa de Llull, enmarcándola en el contexto de los elementos centrales de la biografía luliana y del papel, relevancia y significado de la escritura de su Ars, definido por Pring-Mill como “a thoroughly practical art of finding truth as the basis of the practical arts of conversion and salvation” (11). Cortijo dedica también un capítulo muy original (el 3) a analizar los modelos literarios de la Vita coetânia, que encuentra en la literatura hagiográfica y homilética, en gran parte de influencia franciscana, como no podía ser menos. Se demora en una comparación novedosa entre una obra primeriza de Llull, el Llibre de l’ordre de cavalleria, y la Vita, para mostrar las concomitancias entre ellas y el concepto central de cavalleria en que insiste una y otra vez la obra luliana, haciendo hincapié en los conceptos de meditación,
conversión a penitencia y caballería espiritual. El capítulo 5 se dedica a analizar (igualmente con originalidad y rigor) la estructura de la obra, que gira alrededor de un punto medio en la narrativa (Pentecostés): “Chapter VI occupies a central role in a narrative composed of eleven main chapters (and forty-five subsections) and gives particular relevance to Llull’s discussion with Muslim learned authorities in Tunis. The chapters preceding and following number VI offer some sort of crisis, as Bonner interprets it (the Genoa temptation and the expulsion from Tunis)” (35). La Introducción se cierra con un análisis de los hitos más relevantes de la crítica en su interpretación de la Vita coaetanea, así como una amplísima bibliografía.

La edición propiamente dicha (el texto latino parte de ROL VIII/CCCM 34 (1980), 259-309 y el catalán de Salvador Bové, “La vida coetánia segons lo ms. del Museu Britànic”, Butlletí de la Reial Acadèmia de Bones Lletres de Barcelona 8 (1915): 89-101 [BSAL 15 (1915): 349-357]) presenta en páginas enfrentadas los textos latino-catalán y castellano-inglés, lo que permite al lector seguir con facilidad el paso de un idioma a otro. Las abundantes notas dan cuenta de los pasajes de mayor dificultad, con numerosas referencias bibliográficas para ayudar al estudioso especializado. Cierran este libro varios apéndices que incluyen la lista de obras de Llull según el Electorium, una reproducción de los gráficos de Bordoy sobre las acciones y actividades de las partes formal y material del cuerpo humano y las tres almas formales y sus correlativos, así como un resumen de la Introductio in Artem Raimundi en la traducción inglesa de Yanis Damberg.

El lector tiene, pues, en sus manos una obra muy cuidada y completa, que da cuenta con gran rigor no sólo de un texto capital de Llull, sino que explica su significado en el contexto total de la producción del filósofo. Asimismo, Cortijo acierta al establecer una conexión esencial entre la vida y obra de Llull para analizar no simplemente su producción, sino lo que para el mallorquín constituyó una misión de vida (“his Ars is precisely the instrument with which Christians can prove faith (fidem probare) and he devotes his Vita to the explanation of how he received it directly from God and how he has devoted his entire life to a mission that he claims was directly ordained by God”) (42), convencido de la bondad de la misma, como expresa él mismo en Desconhort LVIII:

Ramon, how shall we convince the pope and the cardinals and secure the undertaking? I want to persevere in something so noble
forever and to invest my every strength in its pursuit, for the world will be better as a result of it. [...] Let us go the court and without fear. (LVIII; Cortijo 6)

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1. Presentación de la obra, descripción

Antologías de poesía española contemporánea y presencia en ellas del “compromiso” político son los dos temas del libro que reseñamos: *El compromiso en el canon. Antologías poéticas españolas del último siglo*, coordinado por Miguel Ángel García y publicado por Tirant Humanidades en 2017 y dedicado a la memoria del hispanista y filósofo recientemente fallecido, Juan Carlos Rodríguez Gómez.

El libro es resultado de un proyecto de investigación dedicado a las antologías de poesía, enlazado a otros y ampliado varios años. El presente volumen consta de siete trabajos de una treintena de páginas cada uno, con excepción del primero, más largo, que cubren varios aspectos relacionados con las materias citadas: la historia de la formación del canon de poesía española tal y como fue construido por las antologías en el siglo XX, las ideologías literarias que lo sostienen, cómo los poetas bregan con la cuestión del compromiso y cómo sucede su presencia —su práctica— en los poemas de las antologías —si es que está o no presente de manera literal o en forma velada.

Consignaré ahora los títulos y autores de los trabajos, porque muestran las áreas tratadas: “Historiografía, canon, compromiso: los poetas del 27 en las antologías (1932-1965)”, ensayo de unas 60 páginas, de M. Á. García (Universidad de Granada), director del volumen y autor asimismo de la presentación que encabeza la obra; “Compromiso para una guerra y bajo una dictadura: antologías y canon”, de Encarna Alonso Valero (Granada); “Algunas notas sobre el compromiso en las antologías del grupo poético de los años 50 (1960-1968)” de Ginés Torres Salinas (Granada); “Los novísimos y su examen de conciencia:
bajo el compromiso de una ruptura”, de Sergio Arlandis (Valencia); “Au-dessus de la mêlée? Compromiso, canon y antologías poéticas en la escena del posfranquismo”, de Araceli Iravedra (Oviedo); “Tomando la palabra: el género como compromiso en antologías femeninas españolas recientes”, de María Paz Moreno (Cincinnati); “El realismo... ¿solo o con leche? Los ‘otros’ realistas en las antologías recientes”, de Luis Bagué Quílez (Murcia).

Tenemos, por tanto, una serie de estudios sobre la poesía española del siglo XX e inicios del XXI, pues los títulos abarcan desde el 27, la poesía de posguerra, los poetas del grupo poético de los 50, los novísimos, hasta la Transición y época contemporánea, área esta tratada en dos trabajos.


Los perfiles metodológicos en los diferentes artículos varían, si bien en todos se observa rigor científico, seriedad interpretativa e inspiración en los comentarios de texto, la crítica y el análisis de las obras. En los trabajos de los profesores de Granada se observa un aire de escuela, del magisterio del catedrático J. C. Rodríguez (JCR), aunque en el caso del E. Alonso, se percibe una traza mayor de la teoría de los campos de Bourdieu.

La cantidad de poetas, poemas y escuelas englobados en las antologías, mencionados en el libro, produce en el lector una sensación extraña de perplejidad y saturación, debido a la sobreabundancia de producción literaria, teórica y crítica en el siglo XX (y sólo se habla de poesía en español). De “sobreproducción” teórica habló Eagleton hace unos quince años, en su ensayo After Theory. En el capitalismo tardío, ahora en crisis, el rumor o murmullos de palabras escritas, editadas —por no hablar de la internet y de las redes virtuales— es vertiginoso, enorme, pero al mismo tiempo muy solitario. Ser escuchado-leído hoy es muy difícil, porque hay que formar parte de un centro de atención, pero aún más difícil es la consagración. Puede decirse que hay tres formas de consagración para un escritor: consagración de los pares, institucional y de público (Moreno Pestaña, “Consagración institucional, consagración intelectual, autonomía creativa. Hacia una sociología del éxito y del fracaso intelectual”).6 El número de combinaciones...
posibles es considerable, pero se puede decir que la crítica universitaria y los pares se encargan de la segunda. Sin embargo, el reconocimiento de otros poetas y de los hispanistas no está garantizado a pesar de que se publiquen varios libros, y todo poeta sabe que, probablemente, solo será comentado y estudiado —en serio, entiéndase— no por la crítica periodística—tarde; la pasión poética (“pasión inútil” podría llamarse a la literatura) es un juego serio-no-serio o ilusio, en cuyo porvenir el sujeto emplea toda su existencia y su forma de vida. Las antologías juegan un papel clave en el reconocimiento, creación y supervivencia de los poetas de renombre. Podría hablarse de un segundo nacimiento, de un renombramiento. Las antologías y, desde hace medio siglo más o menos, los premios. Y consagración significa, a largo plazo, formar parte del (o al menos de un) Canon literario. Las antologías producen ideología no solo del Canon, sino de la ideología de la “poesía” como un algo idéntico a sí mismo, como una comunidad imaginada. Las antologías son una herramienta para convertirse en centro de atención, por eliminación de los contrincantes.

Compromiso en el canon parte, primero, de una crítica al Canon, pero la sensación es que no hay una negación rotunda del mismo, salvo en el trabajo de M. Paz Moreno, que señala su falologocentrismo o patriarcalismo. Particularmente, creo que el canon es un constructo ideológico, falso y verdadero al mismo tiempo como toda ideología, impuesto por necesidades educativas por una clase social dominante, es decir, que domina, que tiene poder para decidir qué enseñar, a quién, dónde y cómo (las últimas reformas educativas en España creo que han dejado clara esta cuestión). La ideología la producen individuos en sus prácticas vitales, pero también hay superestructuras estatales en las que hay estructuras educativas que transmiten una visión del mundo determinada..., o varias, en conflicto, puesto que el proceso no es tan simple: siempre habrá conflicto con los que no están de acuerdo con esas visiones o tienen otras paralelas, puesto que el mundo hoy no es una fantasía distópica como la cueva platónica, la novela 1984 de Orwell o como lo fue la situación en España en 1939. Pero si se quiere cuestionar el Canon o los cánones, quizás en ocasiones, como Rubén Darío, “ser sincero es ser potente”, por “common decency” (esta vez es Orwell), sin olvidar que J. C. Rodríguez tenía razón cuando afirmaba que de la sinceridad solo sale mala literatura. O sea, aprender a ser sinceros sin parecerlo. Harold Bloom no se cortaba un pelo, a la hora de defender un canon tan limitado e imperalista como el suyo.
Por tanto: el canon no es una esencia universal y si lo es, lo será para críticos y lectores que creerán en él, prerreexivamente, como hay personas que creen en la Virgen María o en la transubstanciación del Espíritu Santo en la oblea durante la santa misa. Eso no es malo ni bueno a priori: como la política, la ideología son personas, no abstracciones o metarrelatos, y las hay estupendas. En definitiva, el Canon es una formación ideológica, un mito, la “ideología del Canon”, producida y reproducida en los campos literario y universitario, enlazada al inconsciente dominante de la naturaleza humana y el sujeto. Reconozco que todo esto es tajante y espero que se entienda que ahora escribo una reseña sobre un libro que trata dos cuestiones tan complejas como el compromiso y el canon.

Pero el canon existe en el mundo y, además, como toda ideología, una parte de su galaxia de significantes se arraiga en el inconsciente, y por tanto implica a la vez memoria y olvido. Qué es un autor “bueno”, “canónico”, está abierto a polémica, pero la realidad es que hay que leer, estudiar, enseñar, escribir y Canon (con mayúscula) va a haber siempre. Y junto al (un) Canon, habrá conflicto de cánones (por usar una expresión de Norbert Elias). Probablemente no haya solución, probablemente estamos ante una prolongación del hecho de que sin conflicto no hay literatura.

En este sentido, Compromiso en el canon deja claro que las antologías son elementos de agrupación generacional y de resumen de la producción de un momento o periodo histórico, pero poco se insiste en lo que también implica una antología: la exclusión de otros. En el caso del 27, como se ha venido insistiendo en los últimos años, se ha hablado de una deliberada construcción de un canon masculino, cuya enseñanza en las aulas ha marcado a generaciones de estudiantes.7 El tema es bien conocido por los autores del volumen, de forma que no es una “falta” del libro, pero el caso es que quien redacta ahora esta reseña cree que, como lector, no se insiste en la realidad de —insisto— la “exclusión” que envuelve una antología. La construcción del Canon es, sin duda, el de un instrumento de poder y explotación ideológica. El lector menos

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7 Afortunadamente eso está cambiando, de lo que es una muestra el éxito del documental de Tania Balló, Las Sinsombrero (2016), proyecto en el que se implicó un gran número de universitarias a nivel internacional. Pero el verdadero trabajo viene de mucho antes, p. ej., A. Olalla, “Mujeres como sombras en la generación del 27”, en (Sancho Rodríguez et al. 181-200). Posteriormente han aparecido obras como Machismo y vanguardia (Alonso Valero) o La mitad ignorada (García Jaramillo), ambas Premio de Ensayo Miguel de Unamuno. Pero que hagan falta unos 90 años para una forma de reconocimiento da que pensar.
versado no encuentra tampoco en este libro una teoría e historia del concepto de “compromiso”, salvo algunos párrafos, aclaraciones y breves digresiones aquí y allá. Los autores también conocen bien el tema y, tal vez conscientes de la dificultad y complejidad del mismo, no lo han tratado, porque además el objetivo no es ese, sino el análisis y comentario crítico de las diversas formas de manifestación del “compromiso” político en las antologías de poesía más importantes. Además, Compromiso en el canon es un volumen colectivo en el que no siempre hay una coincidencia ideológica (de ideas) en algunos de los planteamientos de sus autores.

Sin embargo, como se sugirió al inicio de este apartado, la sobreabundancia de material impide ocuparse de todo y además se presupone que el lector especializado sabrá dónde se ha escrito sobre el compromiso y sobre el canon, puesto que el volumen trata de las antologías y basta. Paso ahora a un breve comentario de los diferentes trabajos. (Obviamente, no trataré en esta reseña la cuestión del “compromiso”, por su complejidad, pero creo —es inevitable no querer decir algo— que el problema está relacionado con estas cuestiones: (1) el nacimiento de la ideología del sujeto romántico, la “libertad” y autonomía creativa, (2) el voluntarismo kantiano, la decisión “moral”; (3) la separación —posterior— de los campos político y cultural, la dicotomía autonomía / heteronomía; (4) la democratización del conflicto político y la aparición de la figura del intelectual moderno; (5) hoy hay un retorno de algo no del todo desaparecido en el posmodernismo.8)

La presentación del volumen deja claras muchas cuestiones que ya se han mencionado: una antología no es un archivo, sino que construye la (una) Norma literaria. El compromiso consciente del escritor, sus intenciones, puede no coincidir primero, con su propio inconsciente ideológico, segundo con su propia ideología literaria, con la Norma ideológica de la misma —en palabras de JCR— o la Norma del campo —según Bourdieu. Interesan las relaciones entre poesía e ideología, no entre poesía y poder. Las antologías son condensados ideológicos

8 Creo que un análisis certero del problema del compromiso, al menos en el aspecto de la autonomía creativa, está en “Pour un corporatisme de l’universel”, de Les Règles de l’art (Bourdieu 459-472), trad., aparte de en ed. Anagrama (Bourdieu y Navarro). En ese texto clave se propone una superación de dicotomías fáciles como la de autonomía y heteronomía. Pero la propuesta —a más autonomía más efectos políticos, como el caso de los grandes creadores- plantea dudas, sobre todo respecto al estatus ontológico de esa “autonomía” o del arte en general. Particularmente, creo que el arte más “comprometido” políticamente es, mutatis mutandis, el de Sófocles, pero no puedo tratar de ello aquí.
y pueden ser pensadas como la ideología o cartografía poética de una época. Se deja claro que (a) el canon es un constructo —Bloom— que, por tanto, se puede historiar la literatura usando las antologías como termómetro de la literatura de una época (b); (c) probablemente no hay un canon, sino varios cánones; (d) que la cuestión del canon está ligada a la pedagogía. Finalmente señala el objetivo del libro, una “contribución a la historia del compromiso poético en antología”.

M. Á. García, coordinador del proyecto de investigación y autor de la presentación y del primer trabajo, expone en este la relación entre compromiso y antología en un extenso trabajo que cubre tres bloques antológicos: 1932-1934, 1946-1959 y 1960-1965, finalizando en un apéndice comentando una antología de Manuel Mantero.

El trabajo de García destaca por su rigor, riqueza de fuentes y argumentación. Se atiende a la terminología bourdeyana, analizando la relación entre la construcción del canon y la lucha por el capital simbólico en el mismo, en un marco teórico fundamentado en Juan Carlos Rodríguez. García señala que las antologías son estrategias no de canonización, sino de autocanonización, y el matiz es importante. En el caso del 27 triunfó, porque la estrategia autopromocional de G. Diego acertó también poéticamente (los novísimos, señala, fracasaron). El “Canón”, o, “consagración”, en el caso de G. Diego y sus antologados, por tanto, tiene algo de auto-consagración, o, autobombo. He sugerido antes que, en el caso de España, sobre todo en la segunda mitad del XX y el XXI, los premios literarios son más importantes para la consagración individual, aunque de rebote se legitime una corriente o escuela. El rechazo de Juan Ramón Jiménez a aparecer en 1934, puede leerse de esa forma. La “antología” es más bien una forma de creación de “generaciones” o “grupos generacionales”, en realidad muy pegados a las redes de trabajo y contacto; un grupo generacional se auto-dota o es dotado de prestigio (“capital simbólico”), a través del personaje que haga la antología, sobre todo, o del eco que produzca. Por otro lado, una antología puede pasar desapercibida si la escribe don Nadie, pero también este don Nadie puede ser creado si la atención recibida por su antología es nula.

9 Un apunte de JCR sobre Bourdieu se encuentra en Tras la muerte del aura (Rodríguez Gómez, Tras la muerte del aura); véase “El legado de Juan Carlos Rodríguez” (Moreno Pestaña), p. 150 y ss.: “El inconsciente ideológico y el campo literario”. Un servidor trató sobre ello p. ej. en La mirada pijoapartesca (Bellón Aguilera).

10 El caso de Juan Ramón es ejemplar sobre cómo el agrupar o etiquetar en una generación u otra depende de contactos y formas de trabajo colectivo, que tienen efectos en la producción de un creador, obviamente.
En todo lo que vamos contando, puede verse como la matriz ideológica dominante (la ideología del sujeto) se entrelaza a la ideología literaria (de raíz kantiana) y a las maneras de transferencia y transmisión de las distintas formas de trabajo humano o capitales que circulan en el campo: el capital simbólico (prestigio), capital social (contactos, redes) y capital cultural. En relación con este último, en el caso del 27, habría que contraponer los “profesores-poetas” a los autodidactas: la posición marginal de Miguel Hernández es ilustrativa al respecto, aunque también su incorporación a la red fue tardía, y problemática.\footnote{El tema de los “profesores-poetas” y como esta forma de capital cultural acumulado influye en la configuración de los conflictos en el campo es más importante de lo que parece.}

Para la construcción de un canon del compromiso —explica García— hay que considerar las luchas internas en el campo literario. Pero una antología, además, es una propuesta ideológico-poética. Los poetas del compromiso tienen una posición periférica en el interior de un canon, algo que se relaciona con la debilitación del Canon en los últimos años, por la irrupción de lo periférico —señala García. Hay una “desconstrucción posmoderna del canon”, pero, “al asaltar el canon, al intentar abrirlo o desmoronarlo, los “resentidos” no lo historizan precisamente”. Esto es cierto relativamente, puesto que hay trabajos teóricamente sólidos discutiendo a Bloom y la idea de la arbitrariedad del Canon es ya un lugar común, e incluso cabría añadir, con un matiz, que lo que se desea no es “el” Canon, sino un reconocimiento literario en las instituciones, y que este deseo de Canon refuerza la ideología dominante. En el discurso posmoderno hegemónico sobre el sujeto, todo es artístico y, al nivel ideológico, es la ideología la que hace que la poesía sea un “discurso puro y de la intimidad privada” o un “no-lugar social”.

García analiza las distintas antologías, señala la casi ausencia de poemas comprometidos en las primeras hasta la guerra, y la pervivencia de la pieza “Mujer con alcuza”, de D. Alonso.\footnote{La permanencia en el campo universitario en España de D. Alonso —donde a partir de los relevos generacionales de mediados y finales de los cincuenta dirigirá tesis doctorales como la de Julio Rodríguez Puértolas— puede que tenga que ver con esta supervivencia.} Recorre el paso de la “deshumanización” a la llamada “rehumanización”, la función ideológica clara, durante la guerra, para comentar luego la famosa antología de Castellet, Veinte años de poesía española (1939-1959), como un segundo bloque de consagración y autopromoción, señalando el predominio de un marxismo vulgar (“rudimentario” es el adjetivo), y de un “dogmatismo pedante” e incoherencias en la construcción de un canon “realista” que,
sin embargo, da lugar hegemónico a los poetas del 27. Entre los textos comentados al final está el Panorama poético español (Historia y antología 1939-1964) de Luis López Anglada, el de Mantero, ya citado, y señalar la entrada del 27 a la institución educativa con la primera antología escolar o académica de V. Gaos, en 1965. (Recuérdese que, en 1959, se reeditó en Taurus la antología de G. Diego, de 1932-1934; quizás se pudiera establecer el límite de una generación, unos 20 años, para la consagración institucional, y siempre a partir de alguien de las redes de la agrupación generacional anterior.)

La presencia e impronta de Pierre Bourdieu es indiscutible en el trabajo de E. A. Valero, que estudia antologías de guerra y posguerra, del bando republicano y del vencedor. El campo literario fue triturado pero su lógica —señala su autora— no se anula. Puede planteársele que la completa reorganización de la vida cultural en España (académica, literaria, filosófica) implica la creación, casi desde cero, de nuevos campos, aunque exista una herencia del campo republicano persistente (por ejemplo, Ortega en filosofía, el 27 en poesía), incluso tenaz, o resistente, hasta la transformación de la Norma filosófica, en el caso de Ortega. Pero nuevas demandas ideológicas y una relocalización de hegemonías, implican, hasta cierto punto, una nueva lógica, aunque las herramientas que empleemos en su análisis sean las mismas, como efectúa Valero, usando los conceptos de capital (simbólico, cultural) y de posicionamiento.

Los aciertos de su trabajo son numerosos, como señalar el paso de una estética populista (Mono Azul) a otra elitista (Hora de España), durante la guerra, así como, posteriormente, la “desincronización” de la antología de G. Diego del 34 reeditada en 68. Esta desincronización, como se ha señalado, puede marcar la consagración —la canonización final— del 27.

En el análisis de las antologías del bando vencedor destaca la autora la existencia de lógicas de competitividad y de lucha iguales entre los poetas seleccionados, lo que parece explicar la existencia de diferentes antologías. El trabajo de E. Alonso señala los ejes sociológicos de las antologías que estudia y sus coordenadas ideológicas. Un uso de la importante Literatura fascista española (1986), de J. R. Puértolas, y un tono de denuncia en algunos casos de poetas del bando vencedor, por su compromiso con el franquismo, enriquecen al tiempo que hacen

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13 Véase, para conocer los procesos de trituramiento y reconstrucción cultural, La norma de la filosofía. La configuración del patrón filosófico español tras la Guerra Civil (Moreno Pestaña).
parcial a su autora. Un análisis no puede ser aséptico ideológicamente y, en este sentido, se podría añadir la siguiente reflexión: quizás sería útil un ejercicio de reflexividad teórica, sobre los posicionamientos de compromiso y con relación al canon, de este proyecto de investigación sobre el compromiso en el canon. Pero es solo una idea. Una reflexión vuelta hacia uno mismo que ayude a penetrar asertos tan duros como que “la poesía social nunca se concibió como una auténtica ruptura poética”.

El trabajo de Ginés Torres Salinas, presentado como unas “notas sobre el compromiso en las antologías del grupo poético de los años 50”, parte señalando la falsa imparcialidad de las antologías (operaciones todas similares a la de G. Diego) y la utilidad de la definición de compromiso de Sartre, matizando con la constatación de que el compromiso real de muchos textos lo es con la ideología dominante, como García a partir de JCR. Analiza el autor las antologías de Castellet (1960, 1965) y Batlló (1968). La descripción crítica de este trabajo es de destacar, al señalar contradicciones e inconsistencias tanto en las propuestas de, primero, Castellet, como en las diferentes poéticas de los creadores, con respecto a sus obras. El compromiso es siempre analizado y debatido por los poetas, pero nunca la naturaleza ideológica de los poemas, así como sus propios presupuestos ideológicos, uno de ellos la “valorización del lenguaje cotidiano”. (En este sentido, constatar en la lectura de R. Langbaum, The Poetry of Experience (1957), la introducción en España de una forma de ideología empirista que ve en el lenguaje cotidiano un núcleo artístico o trascendencia). El autor señala que la referencia canónica es Machado y las deficiencias teóricas de Castellet. (Curiosamente, la influencia e importancia de este, autor de numerosas obras, es inversamente proporcional a lo mal que se le suele tratar por parte de los críticos.) Torres estudia la poética de A. González y otros, señalando que casi en ningún momento los poetas sociales “imbricaron verdaderamente la poesía en la Historia” coincidiendo con García. Llama la atención —señala Torres— que los poetas tengan que bregar con el compromiso desde un punto de vista disquisitivo, como si tuvieran que justificarlo, para preservar lo “poético” de “manchas” ajenas (al campo, a su autonomía). Sus dudas ponen de manifiesto la posición precaria de los creadores con respecto a la heteronomía, las dificultades teóricas y prácticas a la hora de cortocircuitar los campos político y poético. Reflexionar sobre las concepciones del mundo y formas de vida de individuos multiposicionales, que viven en dos o más campos a la vez —como los profesores poetas, como los universitarios militantes— extendería las potencialidades del análisis del “compromiso”.
Finalmente, el autor estudia la poética de J. A. Valente, quien defendía el carácter de “conocimiento” frente al de “comunicación”. El eterno tema de “para qué sirve la poesía”. Y la poesía no sirve para nada, o el problema se enfrenta desde un ángulo equivocado: la poesía es producción ideológica, de una ideología siempre en “crisis”. Valente parece, por los pasajes marcados por el crítico, una especie de Heidegger al revés: una valorización estetizada de la palabra, paradójicamente así “des-cotidianizada”. Valente es un caso de reposicionamiento en el campo con la crisis de la ideología del compromiso alrededor de los 60 y el repliegue del campo literario sobre sí mismo. El trabajo de Torres concluye con una reflexión que, a pesar de su simplicidad, es para mí importantísima: los poetas pueden hablar mucho de conceptos teóricos, pero “que esas tesis se plasmen en los poemas”... es otra historia.

El artículo sobre los novísimos de S. Arlandis comienza discutiendo el término novísimos y luego debate sobre si hay que extenderlo todo a lo social o no, así como las salvedades y peros que se han hecho al respecto. Es una discusión necesaria, y espinosa, con “lo poético” y la “autonomía creativa” de fondo. Arlandis usa la la reedición de 2011 de la antología de José María Castellet Nueve novísimos poetas españoles, en la editorial Península. Como se esperaba, Castellet juega un papel de Pope absoluto con sus antologías. Ahora se quieren superar estereotipos y se rechaza a Machado (incluso Ángel González reconocía que se había abusado de esa figura machadiana). Arlandis intenta comprender el mal de conciencia de los novísimos, por el silencio, claro. Concibe, no sin algo de razón, que la escritura es una “herida abierta”. Señala que el fracaso del marxismo es importante, y ciertamente lo es, como la entrada de la posmodernidad a través de las clases medias cultas, siendo el campo artístico y literario, en este sentido, el que recoge —desde Francia y Estados Unidos, sobre todo— el cambio de hegemonía teórica hacia el postestructuralismo y de ahí a esa extraña amalgama de ideologías llamadas (desde el debate Lyotard-Habermas hasta la teorización de F. Jameson) “posmodernismo”. El giro argumental que hace Arlandis consiste en que los novísimos dieron entrada en la poesía a lo verdaderamente social, con el uso del collage y los elementos pop y de la cultura consumista, la “poetización” de lo popular o del lenguaje cotidiano, de la cotidianeidad del cine y los anuncios, etc. Este argumento, interesante, obvia dos cuestiones, que, en parte, ya hemos señalado: la cuestión de la estetización de la cotidianeidad y, dos, la poetización de la lengua cotidiana para valorizarla como “artística”, una especie de alquimia realizada por el campo literario, la cual solo
funciona si la ideología correspondiente existe previamente. Explicar esta es más complicado: se trata de la creencia en la capacidad del artista consagrado o agente creador reconocido de convertir (especie de chamanismo del campo), con un toque mágico o transsubstanciación, la palabra cotidiana en palabra literaria. El acierto de los novísimos fue ese: la estetización de lo cotidiano capitalista. F. Jameson ya habló en su Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (1991), de esa estetización-mercantilización de todas las esferas de la realidad en las formaciones sociales capitalistas avanzadas, a partir de la fusión de lo económico y lo cultural. Pero, más allá de esta abstracción teórica, convendría analizarlo en comentarios de los textos. Lo que se plantea aquí (lo que planteo) no es una crítica política, sino que hay un inconsciente ideológico producido en unos textos. La radical estetización de lo cotidiano manifiesta algo que Arlandis plantea, a partir de los textos: la necesidad de “suturar” algo que está roto, primero, y luego proteger la autonomía del arte con respecto a la mercantilización radical, especie de prolongación del “aura”, a través del culturalismo evidente de los novísimos, “sostener la naturaleza esencial del arte y no limitarla o someterla al mercantilismo del uso y consumo”. Dos salvedades caben aquí: primero, que la autonomía de la creación poética no significa autonomía ideológica: se la puede desear, pero seguir comprometido con la ideología dominante; segundo, el campo se transforma porque van llegando nuevas generaciones de aspirantes que compiten con cosas nuevas, en general opuestas, debiendo bregar con lo hegemónico: en el caso de los novísimos fue bregar con el “compromiso” de los consagrados, por rechazo o relectura. Al fin y al cabo, en el campo literario la lucha principal entre ortodoxia y heterodoxia (hasta cierto punto homóloga de la existente entre consagrados y aspirantes —puesto que unos y otros pueden ser ortodoxos o heterodoxos según convenga y según las redes en que se insertan) se juega siempre en torno a la definición de qué es lo literario.

La actitud novísima será, además de lo explicado por Arlandis, de escepticismo. Se daba un segundo portazo a la poesía social y al lenguaje realista, desde una “una posición moral nueva” —dar dar entrada a lo “auténticamente social” — “la cultura era una tabla de salvación (¿de sutura?) y el único modo de perpetuar lo esencial humano hacia el futuro, de unir lo roto, lo fragmentado”. El compromiso poético es tan plural como necesario para la poesía, concluye el autor. A ello se puede objetar que el “compromiso”, la literatura engagée, es siempre política; que los novísimos pertenecen a una época en que eso se cierra
—no sé si momentáneamente, en el sentido en que ese engagement se entiende entonces— y lo que se busca es una experimentación de formas, o, un repliegue de la cultura sobre sí misma, o, “culturalismo”. Pero también es probable que no se pueda aplicar el mismo patrón, el mismo estereotipo, a todos los “novísimos”. Hacerlo contradice la diversidad, riqueza y matices que las antologías, así como la ideología del Canon, no respetan o ahogan, en su esfuerzo por fijar límites, trazar líneas y borrar relieves. No se puede olvidar que los mapas no son una imagen de la realidad, algo que —afortunadamente— hace el trabajo de Arlandis.

El trabajo de Iravedra trata de las antologías poéticas en la escena del posfranquismo, dedicando bastantes líneas y análisis a la “otra sentimentalidad” y la “poesía de la experiencia”.

Señala Iravedra que hubo un descolgamiento ideológico (lo llama “desfondamiento”) y una “reprivatización de la literatura”, así como una retirada al tono personal. Cabe preguntarse si no se puede decir lo mismo del paso de la poesía social al grupo poético que forman A. González o Gil de Biedma. Alude luego a las “propuestas marxistas” de los ochenta, sin mencionarlas, diluidas en la experiencia, y a JCR como “animador teórico”, el cual invalida la tradicional dicotomía “pureza versus compromiso”. La adjetivación constante e ironía de Iravedra hace a veces difícil saber si habla en serio o no. Ve una “operación propagandística” en el manifiesto de la otra sentimentalidad, en 1983, pero ya era —añade— el final del movimiento, más o menos, el principio del fin. Encuentro aquí dos cuestiones a debatir: primero, “propaganda” es una denominación que vale tanto para un roto como para un descosido, con un resabio negativo que mejor sería guardar en el cajón. Segundo, que la “otra sentimentalidad” finalizara ahí. Respecto a lo primero, es cierto que la lógica de los manifiestos es una especie de oficialización pública necesaria, en cierto sentido una forma de propaganda. Los detalles y circunstancias especiales de esa “operación” (quién, cuándo, cómo y dónde), son más oscuros, pero, al fin y al cabo, incontestados en el momento de suceder. Segundo, es discutible que la Otra sentimentalidad terminara en 1983, con el manifiesto. La deriva o bifurcación “experiencial” no sucedió de la noche a la mañana y resulta difícil establecer el momento de corte o ruptura (más aún, una escuela o movimiento no se define por cómo se llevan sus miembros). Con todo, lo que se echa en falta en el análisis de la “otra sentimentalidad” es ver que hubo un intento, quizás fallido, de mantener la autonomía creativa (poética) al tiempo que existía
un “compromiso” moral con la dimensión política del marxismo. Se intentaba, por usar una conocida y polémica expresión a contrario de la escritora y activista afroamericana Audre Lorde, derribar la casa con las herramientas del Amo, para hacer una transformación ideológica. Se pensaba quizás en una revolución ideológica en y desde el interior de la poesía, en una lucha de clases en la poesía, solo que no se sabía bien qué era eso.14

Pero el trabajo de Iravedra destaca por su rigor empírico y su riqueza de apreciaciones y datos estimulantes para la lectura. Se puede no coincidir con ella en todo, pero es obvia la calidad académica del artículo. Y no le falta razón cuando escribe:

[...] pese al signo adverso de los tiempos y unos procesos de canoni- zación poco propicios que invisibilizaron sus propuestas en las anto- logías más inmediatas, no pocos artífices de la poesía de nuestra de- mocracia se emplearon en la búsqueda de fórmulas estéticas que les permitieran situarse a la altura de las nuevas circunstancias, por más que el consabido agnosticismo posmoderno invitase a acomodarse au- dessus de la mêlée.

Posicionarse en el interior del campo y ser visto como poeta, hoy, es difícil e implica muchos sacrificios vitales, incluido el de la propia integridad y coherencia ideológica (en el sentido de “ideas”), en el compromiso con la propia ideología (en el sentido de “inconsciente”).

El trabajo de M. Paz Moreno, excelente, estudia las antologías feme- ninas, Las diosas blancas (1985) y, de Sharon Keefe Ugalde Conversaciones y poemas. La nueva poesía femenina española en castella- no (1991). En 1997 se publica en la editorial Hiperión Ellas tienen la palabra. Dos décadas de poesía española a cargo de Noni Benegas y Jesús Munárriz, que también estudia. El trabajo se centra en las an- tologías comprometidas con la cuestión de género, señalando que, junto a la agenda de género, el elemento común de estas antologías y de otras similares es “el compromiso con la ampliación del canon y la reivindicación de la poesía escrita por mujeres”. Se trata, por tanto, de una “nueva forma de compromiso”.

Luis Bagué se ocupa del “realismo” (posmoderno, a partir de una expresión de J. Oleza) en las antologías recientes. Bagué muestra el mestizaje lírico, el collage intertextual y la vuelta a la realidad, en un

14 Viene a la mente, en este sentido, la invención del animismo en España por Garcilaso, Boscán o Herrera, en conflicto con la sacralización feudal y el organicismo, en las primeras literaturas burguesas (Rodríguez Gómez).
tránsito del realismo a la realidad, en una nueva etapa en la poesía española en la que se puede constatar la vuelta de una “poesía de la conciencia crítica” (denominación que el autor toma de Alberto García-Teresa y su trabajo homónimo de 2013, publicado en Tierradenadie Ediciones), en un contexto político social marcado por la crisis y las revueltas ciudadanas y el nacimiento de una forma de asamblearismo como el 15M. El artículo de Bagué analiza con seriedad y prudencia crítica las diferentes poéticas surgidas de este momento histórico que aún atravesamos, lleno de cambios en curso y abiertas posibilidades, entre las que se cuenta una explosión en la producción, consumo y diversificación de la escritura poética.

(Breve) Conclusión

El título del libro que reseñamos señala las dos áreas de estudio a las que van dedicados los trabajos: el “compromiso” literario y las antologías de poesía en el siglo XX, dos temas importantísimos para comprender la historia de las literaturas de las formaciones sociales capitalistas. El estudio que representan los trabajos del volumen presenta una coherencia y linealidad capaz de ofrecer una visión de conjunto de la poesía española producida entre el 27 y las últimas voces creativas. Visión de conjunto a veces matizada por los no muy numerosos comentarios de poemas individuales que aparecen.

La coherencia metodológica es también de destacar, si bien en algunos trabajos hay una metodología más tradicional, historicista, que contrasta con lo que, tal vez, pueda denominarse como “escuela de Granada” (con las excepciones y salvedades que puedan existir en tal universidad). En este sentido, tal vez habría que considerar la posibilidad de extender los trabajos empíricos de campo, de tipo sociológico, sobre los agentes de los campos estudiados, además del comentario inspirado —interno— de las obras leídas. Estudiar por medio de entrevistas, memorias, diarios y conversaciones, las prácticas poéticas y las formas de compromiso, comparándolas a las obras. Por ejemplo, en lo que se refiere al compromiso, en la lógica de competitividad implacable en la república de las letras, ¿hasta qué punto no es el deseo de singularizarse por encima de los demás, con frecuencia al precio de pactos ideológicos, renuncias y cambios de posición, el que rige la lógica de los conflictos por la hegemonía en el campo literario?
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Luis García Jambrina (Zamora, 1960) es profesor de literatura española en la Universidad de Salamanca. Investigador muy acreditado en el campo de la poesía española contemporánea, destacan en especial sus estudios y ediciones de poetas conocidos como de los cincuenta, y de manera preferente los dedicados a uno de ellos, Claudio Rodríguez.
Notable crítico literario, es director de los Encuentros de Escritores y Críticos de las Letras Españolas en la localidad asturiana de Verines. Cuenta con una acreditada experiencia como narrador, avalada por varios libros de relatos, y por cuatro novelas anteriores a la que es objeto de la presente reseña. Son éstas: El manuscrito de piedra (2008), El manuscrito de nieve (2010), En tierra de lobos (2013) y La sombra de otro (2014). Novelas históricas todas ellas, han hecho del escritor zamorano uno de los cultivadores del subgénero más interesantes en el amplísimo mosaico de la novelística española de los últimos lustros, y creo que una de sus bazas primordiales para ese logro ha sido la atractiva y tan sui generis combinación que ha sabido hacer entre lo que se da por verídico y lo ficticial.

Tanto en El manuscrito de piedra como en El manuscrito de nieve García Jambrina había demostrado con creces su pericia narrativa, y había transmitido a sus lectores su lúdico placer de narrar. En La sombra de otro puso de manifiesto fehacientemente que acaso se podía acceder mejor al palpito de la vida de Miguel de Cervantes con una novela que a través de biografías escritas sobre el autor del Quijote, y parecido puede decirse acerca de la vida y entorno del rey aragonés Fernando el Católico, figura central de La corte de los engaños, relato a tres bandas, y lo digo así porque lo narran tres personajes, como luego veremos.

El relato gira en torno al atentado que sufrió en Barcelona este monarca el 7 de diciembre de 1942, pero en realidad es casi todo ese año de 1492, en el que tantas cosas de enorme trascendencia ocurrieron, el tejido histórico en el que se inscribe la obra. Claro que no solo es a este monarca a quien conoceremos mejor leyendo esta narración, sino también a otras figuras históricas, sobre todo a su esposa Isabel de Castilla y a la salmantina Beatriz Galindo, personaje que permite al escritor zamorano mantener parte de su novela vinculada de algún modo a un ámbito tan caro para él como lo es el de Salamanca.

En una documentación histórica abundante en extremo había basado García Jambrina sus novelas precedentes, y este rasgo caracteriza también La corte de los engaños, un título que pudo crearse al albur de una intertextualidad valleinclaniana, la construida con el título del escritor galaico La corte de los milagros, una obra de 1927 inscrita en la serie El ruedo ibérico. Claro que en la obra de Valle lo que se enfatiza es el comentario oblíquo de una época, mientras aquí lo que se pretende retratar es la faceta de intriga palaciega continua, de la que no estuvo exenta la reina Isabel, la cual hubo se aprender desde joven a manejarse en muy difíciles coyunturas que la convertirían en una experta en política. Esta documentación tan notable y precisa le permite al autor...
localizar en lugares y tiempo lo que cuenta, y sumergir a los lectores en las circunstancias que contribuyen a explicarnos mejor los hechos. Este rasgo lo ha conjugado siempre el novelista con sus conocimientos literarios, haciendo desfilar por sus relatos a personajes emblemáticos de la literatura española, como Fernando de Rojas, Lázaro de Tormes y Cervantes, que cobran en el texto fictivo vida propia de una manera seductora, pues ¿a quién no le seduce seguir la pista de Fernando de Rojas, el Lazarillo y Cervantes, aunque lo que se narre sea ficción y asimismo hasta cierto punto ficción sobre ficción?

En esta quinta novela la dimensión literaria de índole temática se manifiesta mediante el atrevimiento de insertar varios romances creados por el propio García Jambrina, versos que revelan su gran capacidad de inmersión en el romancero y su lenguaje, el cual remeda convincentemente, lo que redunda en el toque de color épocal que impregna la novela. Esa coloración alcanza un punto muy álgido al recrear con gran brillantez una fiesta palaciega en la que intervienen el bufón Alegre y Catalina de Dalt, valiéndose de canciones adaptadas procedentes de los cancioneros.

El planteamiento de la novela consiste en contar el atentado del que salió vivo, pero herido en el cuello, el rey Fernando desde tres perspectivas, ejemplificando una idea de William Faulkner que se cita antes de comenzar la obra, y según la cual nadie posee la verdad, sino que ésta es el resultado del conjunto de visiones de un hecho. Fundándose en este pensamiento, García Jambrina pone en boca de tres mujeres su visión respectiva de aquel suceso histórico. Son la citada Beatriz Galindo, que tantos años convivió con la soberana de Castilla; la dama noble catalana Catalina de Dalt, un personaje al que el novelista dota de extraordinaria complejidad, y la judía Sara Dertosa.

Estos tres personajes son los principales, a la vez que son los que narran desde su respectivo punto de vista el porqué había causa para justificar el atentado. Otros dos de no menor relieve son los Reyes Católicos. García Jambrina explicaba que la noble catalana Catalina de Dalt fue su creación más compleja. Y no extraña que fuese así. La retrata como una mujer que había sido amante del rey, y que carecía de escrúpulos en materia de sexo y de moral, hasta el punto de hacer el amor con su propio hermano. En ella y en su familia habría habido motivos para el regicidio, por causas relacionadas por la política real en tierra catalano-aragonesa, y en concreto por decisiones del monarca respecto a cómo puso término al conflicto con los remensas.

Otro personaje de mujer es el de Sara Dertosa. Esta judía es otra perjudicada por decisiones de la monarquía, no solo del propio rey...
Fernando, porque en las medidas que se tomaron contra los judíos intervinieron muchas presiones e intereses, y la reina pudo tener un papel importantísimo también en estos hechos, no sin acaso se llegó a decir de ella que gobernaba de modo que parecía que en realidad gobernaba su esposo. Ambos se propusieron construir un estado centralista y católico, lo cual se hizo con resultados nefastos para musulmanes y judíos. Y hay un párrafo de una carta suya que indirectamente daría validez a la hipótesis de su gran rol político: manifestaba sentirse culpable del atentado por creer que se lo hubiese merecido más que el rey Fernando. Había en Sara, por tanto, y en el pueblo judío que se expulsaba de España, una motivación también muy grande para acabar con la vida del monarca aragonés, hecho que intentó un demente que, de acuerdo con la trama urdida por García Jambrina, pudo ser hábilmente manejado por quienes odiaban al rey por distintas causas.

Beatriz Galindo pudo albergar asimismo odio hacia Fernando, pues se la presenta en la novela como una víctima más de los afanes sexuales depredatorios del soberano, de quien fue forzada y del que quedó encinta, ocasionando esta situación que la reina Isabel urdiese su casamiento. Al vivir junto a la reina, esta mujer salmantina a la que se asocia el dato de haber asistido a clase vestida de hombre en la Universidad de Salamanca, es el mejor testigo de cómo eran los avatares de la convivencia entre Isabel y Fernando, plagada de episodios de amor y de celos, de encuentros y de desencuentros. Pero su lealtad la hace asumir, a veces irónicamente, y recordándolo en otras no sin gracejo, el papel que entiende será más útil a sus reyes en la corte de los engaños o, si se quiere, de los enredos permanentes.

Esta novela de García Jambrina contiene pasajes muy brillantes, como aquel de las celebraciones cortesanas celebrando la toma de Granada, por poner un ejemplo entre muchos. Asimismo tiene la virtud de llamar la atención sobre episodios históricos que no suelen ser puestos de relieve, y quedan en un segundo plano, y el del atentado es una muestra bien patente. El novelista demuestra también tener capacidad para plasmar de manera convincente lances eróticos muy subidos, e igualmente para ir administrando con pericia la intriga de modo que vaga ganando en interés de manera gradual. Ahora bien, el reto más difícil era impostar un multiperspectivismo valiéndose de tres voces de mujer, y salió bien airoso de él.

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Desde hace más de veinte años Jesús G. Maestro es profesor de Teoría de la Literatura y Literatura Comparada en la Universidad de Vigo. Es además director de la Cátedra de Filosofía Cervantina en México. Ha desarrollado su labor investigadora y docente en muchas universidades europeas y norteamericanas. Ha ejercido como traductor, autor y editor de muchos libros y publicaciones académicas sobre Miguel de Cervantes, literatura española, literatura comparada, hispanismo y materialismo filosófico. Sin duda alguna, la obra monumental de su producción es la llamada *Crítica de la Razón Literaria: el Materialismo Filosófico como teoría, crítica y dialéctica de la Literatura* (2017), en tres volúmenes, que constituye uno de los principales referentes de la teoría literaria actual.

El libro que aquí reseñamos —*El origen de la literatura. ¿Cómo y por qué nació la Literatura?*—, publicado en 2017, ofrece la primera explicación racional sobre la génesis de la Literatura, y de su interpretación y convivencia con la Religión, la Filosofía, la Historia, la Política, las Ideologías y las ciencias, desde la perspectiva del Materialismo Filosófico, el sistema de ideas cuya autoría pertenece al filósofo español Gustavo Bueno (1924-2016). Esta obra responde a preguntas clave: ¿por qué nace la literatura?, ¿cuál es su genealogía?, ¿cuál es su núcleo?, ¿qué y quiénes la engendran y conciben primigeniamente?, ¿por qué su desarrollo estructural se abrió camino a través de sociedades políticas y racionales, y no a través de sociedades irracionales, primitivas o bárbaras?, ¿cuál es y ha sido la relación entre literatura y religión?, ¿por qué la censura de poderosos moralistas, junto a regímenes autoritarios feroces, no ha logrado extinguir la construcción, comunicación e interpretación de los materiales literarios?, ¿por qué se niega la literatura como objeto de conocimiento científico, sobre todo en las universidades actuales, de las que prontamente será expulsada, en nombre de la political correctness, y se exige una interpretación a la sombra de una determinada ideología, sea feminista, indigenista, nacionalista o etnocrática?, ¿por qué hemos pasado del mito de la “literatura comprometida” a la literatura “comprometidamente interpretada en favor de fratrárias, lobbies o gremios socio-políticos”? Estas son algunas de las cuestiones a las que responde esta obra,
La Literatura es una construcción humana que existe real, formal y materialmente, y que puede y debe ser analizada de forma crítica, mediante criterios racionales, conceptos científicos e ideas filosóficas. Su poder radica en la alianza con el racionalismo. Nace de operaciones racionales humanas y, aunque en su origen estuvo en el seno de culturas desarrolladas en muchos casos irracionalmente, en las imperó la oralidad, la barbarie, el mito, la magia, la religión (conjunto confuso de saberes irracionales y acríticos que exigen que se cumplan sus ilusiones y que explican los hechos de manera ideal o imaginaria) y la técnica, sólo pudo desenvolverse, como hoy la conocemos, en sociedades políticas organizadas racional y políticamente. Sólo a través de este tipo de sociedad es posible una relación entre los materiales literarios existentes: autores, obras, lectores e intérpretes o transductores. La literatura tiene sus raíces en la Grecia arcaica, es una forma de expresión, comunicación e interpretación que ha acompañado —y acompañará— al ser humano en su trayectoria histórica, y que se ha nutrido del desarrollo progresivo del conocimiento racional. Al racionalizarse, la religión, el mito y la magia pasan a ser su juguete, a ser vulgar ficción: la literatura invadió (y sobrepasó) el espacio de la razón y del logos. De su distanciamiento con la religión, surgieron las primeras obras críticas, las obras homéricas: 

*Ilíada* y *Odisea*.

La genealogía de la literatura se expone en comunión con cinco órdenes o ámbitos coordinados entre sí: 1) el espacio antropológico (ejes circular, radial y angular); 2) la teoría de las esencias plotinianas (identificación de un orden genético entre las especies de un género), a partir de las cuales se puede distinguir un núcleo genético, un cuerpo estructural y un curso evolutivo; los estadios metodológicos que se emplean para examinar los materiales literarios, respecto a 3) la constitución de la literatura como realidad efectivamente existente (ontología), 4) la construcción de sus interpretaciones lógico-formales y lógico-materiales (gnoseología), y 5) la filogénesis, o evolución de los materiales literarios, desde una primitiva forma genuina hasta el actual cierre categorial de tales materiales (autor, obra, lector e intérprete o transductor).

La teoría de la Literatura, como ciencia que es, tiene como finalidad demostrar que la literatura es inteligible, conforme a una serie de criterios racionales y lógicos, y acordes con un sistema de pensamiento crítico y dialéctico. Maestro parte de cinco postulados fundamentales: razón, ciencia, crítica, dialéctica y *symploké*. 

siempre a través de un pensamiento crítico y en contra de sus posibles adversarios.
La finalidad de esta obra que reseñamos es la exposición y explicación de una genealogía literaria, de una clasificación genética de los materiales literarios. Maestro tiene en cuenta su desarrollo en momentos concretos e importantes de la Historia, a partir de cuatro familias, modalidades o linajes, que conforman el genoma literario, fundamentados en el espacio antropológico del Materialismo Filosófico, cuya división se articula en tres ejes: el eje circular o humano (relación hombre-hombre), el eje radial o de la naturaleza (hombre-naturaleza) y el eje angular o religioso (hombre-divinidad).

Los cuatro linajes o familias literarias serían las siguientes: 1) literatura primitiva o dogmática, 2) literatura crítica o indicativa, 3) literatura programática o imperativa y 4) literatura sofisticada o reconstructivista. Esta genealogía es producto de una clasificación resultante de combinar un tipo (crítico/acrítico) y un modo (pre-racional/racional) de conocimiento, lo que permite delimitar totalmente el campo de la literatura.

Las obras literarias más antiguas atienden a una revelación, profecía o apocalipsis, siempre han estado empapadas de mito, magia o religión, y ofertaban un carácter dogmático (Literatura Primitiva o Dogmática).

Con la irrupción de la ciencia y de la filosofía, el conocimiento del medio se impone. Ciencia y filosofía han ido e irán siempre de la mano: no se puede hacer ciencia desde la ignorancia, y no se puede hacer filosofía de espaldas a la ciencia, ya que ambas necesitan definiciones, demostraciones, clasificaciones y modelos, a fin de encontrar un por qué en el que se fundamenta la desmitificación y el racionalismo (Literatura Crítica o Indicativa).

Hay también materiales literarios que se solapan bajo una determinada idea de Estado, religión o movimiento intelectual y artístico. Una vez asentado el racionalismo, se puede imponer o enaltecer determinados aspectos o ideas (Literatura Imperativa o Programática), conforme a programas políticos, estéticos o religiosos, como la literatura del realismo social (política), el creacionismo (vanguardia estética) o la teología católica (autos sacramentales calderonianos).

En otros casos, los materiales literarios pueden recrear conocimientos propios de una literatura primitiva, así como hechos que se remontan a un mundo pretérito o arcaico, mítico, combinados estéticamente con el racionalismo dado en la época de su elaboración literaria (Literatura Sofística o Reconstructivista). Ante todo, la literatura se desarrolla en el eje radial o de la naturaleza, a través de la interacción del ser humano con diferentes recursos disponibles, para abrirse
camino desde la oralidad hasta la literatura digital, pasando por las tablillas de cera o arcilla, el pariro, el pergamoño, el código, el libro impreso o el pdf.

Para conocer los tipos, modos y géneros del conocimiento literario desde el Materialismo Filosófico, se parte de tres ideas fundamentales: la idea de Mundo (M), que es la materia ontológico-general, entendida como una pluralidad indeterminada e infinita; la idea de consciencia o ego trascendental (E), como interpretación de un individuo respecto de algo, y finalmente la idea de Mundo Interpretado (Mi), que es el conocimiento que tenemos de la realidad a través de tres géneros de materia (física, o M1, psicológica o fenomenológica, o M2, y conceptual o lógica, o M3).

En este contexto, la literatura primitiva o dogmática interpreta la realidad a partir de la materia ontológico general para desembocar en un mundo empírico, y satisfacer así su ego trascendental, de tal forma que postula una metafísica próxima al monismo axiomático de la sustancia (todo es fuego, todo es agua, todo es texto...). La literatura crítica o indicativa parte, por el contrario, del mundo interpretado (Mi), y sitúa al ego trascendental en la segunda secuencia de la tríada, de modo que el mundo metafísico o materia ontológico general queda en el último lugar. Por su parte, la literatura programática o imperativa se construye sobre un racionalismo acrítico: busca apoyos en la pseudociencia, la ideología, la tecnología y la teología. Con frecuencia sirve para explicitar contenidos ajenos al arte. Parte de la idea de Mundo, se apoya en el ego trascendental y a través de él intenta resolver el significado del Mundo (idealmente) interpretado conforme a un programa político, religioso o poético. Por último, la literatura sofisticada o reconstructivista se apoya alternativamente en el idealismo y en el materialismo: aquí las cuestiones de carácter divino pierden su sacralidad y pasan a ser herramientas para la manifestación de ideas objetivadas formalmente en una obra, con frecuencia de forma lúdica o incluso cómica. Este tipo de literatura se sirve de un racionalismo procedente de épocas primitivas o arcaicas, un racionalismo extemporáneo, que se combina de forma sofista con el racionalismo del mundo contemporáneo. Lo irracional en estas obras es por completo un fingimiento: se pretende superar así las deficiencias del racionalismo convencional para alcanzar de este modo, sin duda crítico, un racionalismo diferente, e inédito en el arte.

Es evidente que la obra de Jesús G. Maestro se sitúa frente a muchas corrientes posmodernas y no posmodernas: la hermenéutica, el luteranismo, el protestantismo, la bibliomancia y la sofística contemporánea,
exige la supremacía de lo inteligible ante lo sensible, al insistir en que toda obra literaria no atiende únicamente a la sensibilidad del lector, como de forma engañosa hace creer la posmodernidad. Este planteamiento requiere en toda obra literaria la presencia de un sistema de ideas, dialécticamente interpretadas. El *Origen de la literatura* se adentra en problemas esenciales y actuales, como los géneros en la literatura, los tipos de conocimiento, la diferencia entre ciencia y cultura, la relación entre literatura y religión, la idea y los tipos de cultura, las corrientes sociológicas e ideológicas encarnadas en *lobbies* y gremios académicos, la política como sistema de ideas y realidades que afectan directamente a la constitución y eutaxia de un Estado, etc.

Quizá uno de los problemas con los que se encuentra el lector al enfrentarse a una obra de tal calibre no es ni la documentación, comprobación, verificación o estudio de sus contenidos, sino la falta de más índices: un índice de términos, un índice de referencias, un glosario o índice de algunas definiciones, lo más ejemplificadas posible, para acabar de ilustrar un resultado tan riguroso, vertido en menos de trescientas páginas. Esto evitaría tener que buscar en otras fuentes la nomenclatura empleada en la obra. Este libro de Jesús G. Maestro es una revolución contra las falacias de la retórica y las ideologías, contra las corrientes posmodernas que deterioran la investigación científica de las instituciones académicas y universitarias, y que adulteran, deturpan o mutilan, como él mismo señala, los materiales literarios en pos de intereses no literarios.

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verdad extraña en la que las composiciones comprendidas en el libro, esta vez de 858 páginas, abarcan hasta 2017. La edición y el estudio preliminar han corrido a cargo de Carlos Peinado Elliot, profesor de la Universidad de Sevilla.

La edición de publicaciones que se reiteran incrementándose cada vez que salen a luz de nuevo es característica en el proceder de Manuel Ruiz Amezcua. No solo es su obra poética la que se ajusta a esta pauta. También se atuvo a la fórmula su prosa recogida bajo la titulación de Lenguaje tachado, e incluso las sucesivas entregas de la colección de estudios sobre su literatura titulados Singularidad en la poesía de Manuel Ruiz Amezcua, cuya más reciente puesta al día es de 2016, acumulando cerca de seiscientas páginas. Sin duda estamos ante un procedimiento atípico, porque lo habíamos visto practicar en el campo de la poesía, pero no en el del ensayo, y tampoco en el de la suma de artículos, estudios y entrevistas y otros materiales. No cabe duda de que los tres gruesos volúmenes que contienen, respectivamente, la poesía, la prosa, y los escritos diversos sobre su obra ponen a disposición del estudioso una documentación valiosísima para quienes lean y estudien al escritor andaluz.

Sobre la poesía de Manuel Ruiz Amezcua se ha escrito bastante, aunque nunca es suficiente, y entre esos escritos hay muchos cuya firma es de alto valor crítico. Sin embargo, el prólogo que ha elaborado Carlos Peinado Elliot para esta edición de Una verdad extraña es uno de los estudios más lúcidos que se han confeccionado acerca del poeta. Su extensión es muy dilatada, hasta el punto de que cabe ser calificado como una monografía que pudiera publicarse exenta, acaso con algunas páginas adicionales. Y su contenido resulta excepcional. Es atinada su hermenéutica, en la que el filólogo hispalense ha puesto en juego saberes teóricos de gran modernidad, y es admirable y clarificador su discurso y su limpia manera de exponer su discurso crítico. Creo que esta introducción es un hito en la exégesis de un poeta español contemporáneo.

Se ha dicho que la poesía de la etapa de los novísimos supuso, entre otras aportaciones, una reacción frente a los condicionantes de la poesía social. Fue una suerte de alternativa literaria que hizo propuestas muy distintas a las de la poesía más comprometida, a las que consideraban limitadoras y agobiantes. En aquellos tiempos rupturistas Manuel Ruiz Amezcua eligió su propio camino, evitando el seguidismo tanto de las poéticas de compromiso al uso y declinantes como el de los poetas emergentes de los setenta. Y ese camino personal, como suele pasar,
encuentra dificultades de encaje en las tendencias mayoritarias que se han ido sucediendo en las últimas décadas.

Quien lea la obra poética del autor podrá comprobar que su práctica literaria no se compasa con la de los poetas sociales, ni con la de los cincuenta-sesenta, ni con la de los novísimos, ni con la de los llamados poetas de la experiencia, ni tampoco con cualesquiera opciones posteriores finiseculares, o de comienzos de la presente centuria. Ruiz Amezcua justifica su propia aventura creativa como fruto de haberse sumergido en la tradición poética española, habiendo encontrado en ella perspectivas y modos de expresarse cuya originalidad se alimenta en los poetas que han sido más ejemplares en la historia secular de las letras hispanas, y con ese poso crea la suya propia en el ámbito de los desafíos contemporáneos. Es una forma de referirse a su poesía que resulta convincente.

Pero atengámonos a partir de ahora al estudio preliminar de Peinado Elliot, destacando algunas de sus observaciones fundamentales sobre la poesía de Manuel Ruiz Amezcua, aunque no voy a detenerme, pese a su interés, en cuanto se refiere a las variedades métricas y estructurales de distintos poemas y conjuntos, porque se trata de aspectos técnicos que no resulta necesario incluir en una reseña. Con todo, tampoco procede que se silencie el énfasis que en el estudio introductorio se pone en la maestría del poeta en la confección de sonetos y romances, por nombrar los dos ritmos más fundamentales de la serie poética española.

Respecto al título puesto por el poeta al conjunto de su obra, lo interpreta Peinado Elliot como revelador de una extrañeza que la recorre desde el principio, de modo que “Su verdad es la del extrañamiento, la que desnuda a la verdad oficial de su ropaje, y deja al descubierto lo que es: una verdad vacía...” (11). Esa extraña verdad también resulta extraña por manifestarse a través de una dialéctica de los extremos.

Hay más factores esenciales atravesando la poesía de Ruiz Amezcua. El amor es uno de los destacados, pero también el motivo de la huida, señala Peinado Elliot, no sin puntualizar que esa huida no implica abandono en la lucha por la justicia, sino que paradójicamente supone defender una visión comprometida con la rebeldía. También reconoce el prologuista otros estímulos, así el de la marginación, la búsqueda de refugio, el anhelo de lo sublime, el asedio al justo y su combate contra este estado de sitio, el mal social que produce el hombre, el mal metafísico o bien ontológico, la dialéctica producida por la unión de opuestos. La lucha continuada en el seno del ser, esa guerra interior,
diríamos, que caracterizaba la poesía metafísica quevediana. Siendo así, no extraña que haya podido considerársele un poeta neorromántico, amén de decirse que su poética se vale tanto del realismo como de la simbolización.

Si es meritorio haber anotado esas claves, a mi entender lo es más todavía que se hayan ido descubriendo y comentando, a lo largo del prólogo a *Una verdad extraña*, los diferentes símbolos que jalonen la creación lírica del escritor jiennense, aunque algunos se concentren en una fase de su obra, sin alargarse por toda ella. Una de las simbolizaciones más cruciales es el de la sangre, pero no resultan menos intrínsecas en su poesía las de la vida leida como engaño, el mito gnóstico, la máscara, la contraposición entre luz y oscuridad, y las que Peinado Elliot enumera de este modo: “símbolos nictomorfos (sombras), terimorfos (animales de la noche), catamorfos (caída, desceso)...” (48).

Bécquer consideraba que las problemáticas sociales y políticas habían de permanecer al margen de la poesía. Ruiz Amezcua entiende justo lo contrario: que en la poesía ha de caber la experiencia vivida, con sus luces y sombras, sus injusticias y dramas, de ahí que el tipo de poética que más rechaza es la diletante, y ocurre que desde los setenta esta clase de decantación literaria se ha prodigado e incluso ha tomado el poder, si pudiera decirse así, en la poesía española. Lo que esta poesía podría decir y no dice, es precisamente lo que no calla el poeta jiennense, denunciando así indirectamente los silencios cómplices de la opresión, y las injusticias sistémicas: social, política y literaria.

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El poeta toledano Juan Antonio Villacañas (1922-2001) podría ser encuadrado, por su año de nacimiento, en la llamada primera generación poética española de posguerra. Sin embargo, atendiendo a las fechas de sus siete primeros libros de poesía, todos comprendidos entre 1952 y 1958, también pudiera considerársele dentro de la generación
segunda, denominación que no ha tenido fortuna y sí, en cambio, la de generación, o grupo o simplemente poetas, de los cincuenta. Si uno considera las fechas de esos conjuntos, cabría decir que fue un poeta de la primera generación, pero de comparecencia pública un tanto tardía, al hacer su entrega inicial con treinta años. Si se le incluye entre los del medio siglo, entonces sucede que su poesía no se ajusta a los patrones de lectura que la crítica decidió imponer como representativos de los autores de los cincuenta.

Es posible que esas dudas con respecto a su ubicación literaria no hayan beneficiado al poeta de Toledo en lo que concierne a la atención que su obra demandaba. Pero lo de veras importante es que cuestiones como éstas no afectaron a su creación poética. Debió entenderlas como un imponderable más que, unido al las deficiencias del mundo de la crítica de poesía en España, denunciadas por él mismo en su libro de 1989 Versómanos, le invitaban a seguir confiando en que sus conjuntos líricos iban a abrirse camino tarde o temprano en el reconocimiento que merecen.

A la recuperación de Juan Antonio Villacañas como poeta han contribuido varias aportaciones en el presente siglo. El que en todas haya intervenido su hija, la poeta Beatriz Villacañas, profesora de la Universidad Complutense, no desdice para nada la importancia de esos aportes, más bien al contrario, porque en la difusión de no pocos poetas muy señalados del siglo XX han sido de gran eficacia familiares directos que no solo han gestionado los derechos de los autores, sino que han tenido acceso de privilegio a sus proyectos y a sus papeles, y han podido estar al frente de ediciones tan útiles como la que comentamos.

Me parece oportuno recordar que en 2003 Beatriz Villacañas publicó el libro titulado La poesía de Juan Antonio Villacañas: argumento de una biografía. Contenía un estudio de la obra del poeta, y una selección anotada de composiciones. Seis años después, la misma filóloga, junto a Michael Smith, llevó a cabo una edición bilingüe, en español e inglés, de la obra del escritor toledano, libro al que pusieron el título de Selected Poems. A este par de aportaciones se ha sumado ahora la que puede convertirse en más relevante, la edición de la poesía completa.

Con el título de La llegada permanente, la totalidad de la obra poética de Juan Antonio Villacañas se ha reunido en dos volúmenes, y ha sido publicada por la madrileña editorial Vitrubio en 2016. Beatriz Villacañas se ha responsabilizado de la edición y le ha puesto prólogo. El resultado son dos tomos que en total suman más de mil doscientas
páginas. Una producción tan considerable ha podido incomodar, por su extensión, a más de un crítico y estudioso, en cuyo supuesto sería otra causa más que explicaría el que este poeta, al que se deben dieciocho libros de poesía dados a conocer entre 1952 y 1991, no haya sido analizado como debiera. Tan solo un par de salvedades presenta esta edición respecto a sus libros. La obra Conjugación poética del Greco no va acompañada, a diferencia de la edición original, de las imágenes de los cuadros a los que hacen referencia los textos poéticos correspondientes. Por lo que hace a Testamento del Carnaval, se trata del único libro del autor que no se reproduce, por el imponderable de que consta de liriformas en las que dibujo y poema se unen.

Tanto si situamos a Juan Antonio Villacañas en la primera de las promociones de posguerra, como si se le ubica entre los poetas del medio siglo, lo que destaca en su obra es la gran singularidad de la misma. El toledano fue ante todo un poeta fecundo, un poeta vario, y un poeta independiente y distinto, muy distinto. En verdad no es el único poeta que en ambas promociones se caracteriza por la fecundidad y la variedad, pero sí es el más independiente de adscripciones grupales, el menos sujeto a tendencias que pueden durar unos pocos lustros, y el que se despegó más de las temáticas socorridas en diferentes coyunturas, y por tanto el que plasma más aspectos inesperados capaces de sacudir a los lectores, llamando la atención precisamente por eso, por apartarse de pautas consabidas, tanto en el estilo como en la fijación insistente y cansina en determinados pretextos. Y además ofrece una perspectiva en la que lo local y lo universal se dan la mano, como en su referido conjunto sobre El Greco, publicado en 1958, un verdadero homenaje lírico que es el más importante de los tributados nunca al pintor a lo largo de la historia de la poesía española. Otra obra cuyo referente es la ciudad imperial la dio a conocer en 1980 con el título de El Dante, en Toledo.

Hace varios años, comentando la aparición de Selected Poems, puse de relieve esa gran cualidad literaria de no parecerse a nadie que es tan propia de Juan Antonio Villacañas. Al respecto, señalaba cuan suí generis fue el prisma con el que poetizaba el sentimiento de la soledad, y cuan originales resultan sus enfoques teológicos, en los que la poesía asume reflexiones problemáticas muy osadas, algunas veces tamizadas por la ironía. Una obra ilustrativa al respecto fue la que lleva un título tan sorprendente como Rebelión de un recién nacido, aparecida en 1973. Hay en este libro también una composición cuyo contenido y cuyo prisma resultan muy rompedores. Me refiero a “Breve historia de
una cacería”, en cuyos versos se plantea un posicionamiento animalista radical sobre una cuestión tan controvertida actualmente como lo es la de la caza. El ángulo desde el que el dicente plasma el asunto es el de quien coequipara al hombre con los animales no humanos.

Tocante a la palabra poética y sus cauces, Juan Antonio Villacañas supo plasmar excelentemente composiciones de verso escueto, o de contorno no prefijado, así como excelentes sonetos, como los que jalonan su libro de 1960 Marcha destriunfal, y que leemos en otras obras, entre ellas Los vagos pensamientos, que salió en 1962, pero lo más propio de este poeta en materia de métrica reglada ha sido la reivindicación del empleo de la lira, a la que incluso dedicó uno de sus libros, en concreto el de 1993 Homenaje a la lira en larga sobremesa con Luciano. En otros cuatro conjuntos de los noventa se valdría de esta fórmula, convirtiéndose en uno de los más persistentes y representativos poetas españoles en el uso de ese ritmo con el que se sintió tan identificado y al que supo dotar de matices inexplorados y muy modernos.

Voz coloquial a veces, neosurrealista en otras, dotada de campesinía y gragejo en ocasiones, desmitificadora, crítica y de hondo calado cuando los pretextos lo exigían, Llegada permanente es una aportación que ha llegado al público para quedarse, para ser leída y para ser analizada, a fin de situar a su autor en el aprecio de los lectores de poesía y en el puesto histórico a que tiene derecho en la poesía española del pasado siglo.

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