

JOSÉ ÁLVAREZ JUNCO: *Dioses útiles. Naciones y nacionalismos*, Barcelona, Galaxia Gutenberg, 2016, 316 págs.

«I am not tribal,» remarks José Álvarez Junco in the introduction to his new book *Dioses útiles* (xviii). Just as Eric Hobsbawm decried primordialism in *Nations and Nationalism*, Álvarez Junco emphasizes that he is not a nationalist; he wouldn't shed a tear if Spain and Portugal dissolved into an Iberian union or a European federation. Yet he has devoted decades to studying the phenomenon of nationalization, beginning at a time when it was not a popular subject to broach in newly democratic Spain. Francisco Franco and his legacy of National Catholicism had supplanted a liberal Spanish tradition with roots in nineteenth-century constitutionalism and radical working class movements. The resurgence of Basque and Catalan identities and cultures, repressed under the Franco regime, had sparked a great deal of scholarly interest both within and outside of Spain, effectively marginalizing the study of Spanishness, associated with a retrograde religiosity and the history of European fascism. Therefore, Álvarez Junco makes it clear from the outset that he wants to desacralize the very concept of the nation in order to understand the way in which it was socially constructed. By taking a dispassionate stance and embracing a comparative perspective, he situates Spanish identity on a spectrum of belief and affiliation rather than arguing on behalf of fundamental Spanish difference.

Álvarez Junco offers a series of provocative counterfactuals to highlight the contingent aspects of the process of identity formation. For example, had the son of King Ferdinand's second wife Germana de Foix lived, Aragón might have separated from Castile in the early sixteenth century, effectively breaking up the nascent Spanish state. Álvarez Junco then provocatively suggests that had Comunero demands included a religious dimension, or even a template for a reformed Catholicism, sixteenth-century rebels might have been able to build a larger base of support across the monarchy, anticipating modern revolts against tyranny and despotism. In fact, a movement to curb the powers and abuses of absolutists, and by the eighteenth century to establish popular sovereignty as a normative basis for government, undergirded the creation of the modern nation-state. To nationalists, the nation itself—as an ancient, semi-mythical entity—always played a role, personified as the embodiment of the collective aspirations of a people. In this telling, nations appear as natural bodies that bind together homogenous ethnic and cultural groups. The profession of history is

implicated in the construction of national identities as well, with nineteenth-century Romantics and positivists linking liberty with national independence and offering scant criticism of the artifice of the nation-state. Instrumentalism serves as the antidote to a nationalist version of the past; in other words, the best histories provide an accurate narrative accounting based firmly in the documentary record.

Álvarez Junco begins with clear and concise definitions of terms, noting the significance of the linguistic turn and the idea that language creates and frames reality. Drawing on concepts put forward by Ernest Renan, Max Weber, and Benedict Anderson, he describes the nation as a people conscious of possessing common cultural traits who aspire to political rights and autonomy within specific territorial boundaries delineated over a long period of time. Siding, in general, with modernists, he clearly distinguishes early modern states and composite monarchies from the nation-states that emerged during the age of revolution and the radical reframing of the terms *people* and *nation* that took shape at the time. In line with contemporary theories regarding the mutability and fluidity of identities and nationalities, Álvarez Junco questions why a nation must correspond to a state or aspire to create its own institutional apparatus. The relatively recent notion that nation and state are coterminous has created an incentive to reinforce homogeneity in a given territory, a process that effectively belies claims that distinctive groups maintain their primordial ties for hundreds if not thousands of years within historical boundaries. Of course, different peoples, different faiths, and different cultures continue to coexist side by side in all parts of the world, and the drive to establish cultural and linguistic purity within a state has been accelerated in the modern age. The nation always had to be made, a fact recognized by nationalists across Europe in the nineteenth century. Álvarez Junco concedes that questions concerning the origins of nationalism won't be decided solely by rational debate; to the contrary, emotion and sentimentality still play a central role in the story.

The contention that Europe is the font of the nation and its ideology, a model that was then copied and exported around the world, certainly echoes some of the most important and controversial claims made by Hobsbawm and Anderson, respectively. The comparative structure of the book situates England as primogenitor, with its roots in Anglo-Saxon lore, the Norman conquest, and noble rights and privilege dating back to the Magna Carta. Accordingly, the connection between identification and Parliamentary control over government became cemented during and after the English Civil War, with the rights and liberties of «freeborn Englishmen» secured by 1689. This represented a clear departure from medieval identities grounded in religion and dynastic rule, culminating with the anti-monarchical and anti-aristocratic fury of the French Revolution. While Álvarez Junco quickly moves to the late nineteenth century and the work of Eugen Weber, Caroline Ford and David Bell have found that campaigns to eradicate *patois* across French regions began in the 1790s,

auguring what Mona Ozouf has called the «homogenization of mankind». Arguably, a universalizing impulse began with the French Revolution and came to a kind of fruition with the antirational Romanticism of nineteenth-century German nationalists. An exclusionary logic soon superseded the earlier discourse premised upon universal values and natural rights. A wide-ranging study, the book moves quickly to a number of disparate cases of nationalization, from Russia and Greece to Israel and anti-imperial movements in the modern Middle East. The final chapter assesses the panoply of Iberian identities, including Portugal, Galicia, Catalonia, and the Basque Country. Each is covered by way of comparisons to Spain, with little emphasis placed on historiographical debates or extensive footnotes.

Renan famously wrote that forgetting and historical error are «essential» factors in the creation, or invention, of the nation. This is true for Spain just as it is for France, referenced in the original quote from his 1882 essay. No one can avoid anachronism in saying that the ancient warrior Viriato fought to liberate Portugal (Lusitania) and Spain (Hispania) from the Roman Empire. But when did Spain begin to exist as a collectivity, and when did it enter into the pantheon of nations? Álvarez Junco retraces some of the material from his prize-winning opus *Mater dolorosa* in discussing the nineteenth-century canonization of the Visigothic kings as the founders of a distinctively Spanish national conscience, with Reccared's conversion to Christianity symbolizing the epoch. Well before the modern age, Don Pelayo had been mythologized as a hero fighting for the restoration of Spain against the Muslims, albeit in the eighth century. St. James aided the crusading Christians in their struggle against Islam, recognized with the great shrine built in his honor in Galicia. Finally, according to nationalist interpretations, the Catholic Kings established a kind of national unity by 1492 in the aftermath of the Reconquest; Álvarez Junco is quick to disabuse his readers of their claim. While one vision of Spain may have crystallized at the time—an idea subsequently coopted by twentieth-century leaders like Franco—national identities predicated on horizontal solidarities had yet to fully develop. Anti-Jewish legislation, even violence, and the subsequent expulsion orders provided the pretext for a uniformly Catholic Counter-Reformation state to emerge. Along with inquisitorial notoriety and global conquests came the sense that Spain was a breeding ground of religious zealotry, cruelty, and brutality. European rivals were quick to use the so-called Black Legend to undermine Spanish claims of imperial legitimacy.

Yet for many observers, Spain was synonymous with the grandeur of empire and was epitomized by a Golden Age of art and literature. The Jesuit Juan de Mariana took pride in the greatness of the monarchy, and his 1592 *General History of Spain* represents an artifact of early modern patriotic sentiment. Spain's supposed national character consisted of religious constancy and bravery in battle, among other admirable traits. As Spanish power waned in the course of the eighteenth century, however, the Habsburgs began to be presented

in a different light—as emblematic of the decadence of a foreign power. Enlightened intellectuals contrasted the freedom-loving Comunero rebels with the intransigent absolutists who had suppressed their uprising in the heart of Castile. The French invasion of 1808 had the unintended consequence of ushering in a modern, representative national government to Spain and its first constitution that limited royal prerogative. According to Álvarez Junco, modern Spain was born in the process. But tensions continued to simmer between differing interpretations of the essence of the nation. Modesto Lafuente's 30-volume *General History of Spain* spoke of the indomitable character of the Spaniard, of their divine origins and providential destiny, a legacy that continued to be relevant well into the mid-nineteenth century. With the beginnings of National Catholicism evident by the end of the century, Álvarez Junco shows that Spanish nationalism had become by and large backward looking, making appeals to past glories rather than to a future promise. This tendency was exacerbated by the great disaster of 1898 in which Spain ceded Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines to the United States. Although Franco's Nationalists fully embraced the legend and lore of the crusading Catholic Spaniard, by the later twentieth century, even Spanish scholars had dismissed the mythology of distinctive national characters.

In spite of encyclopedic case studies and a magisterial grasp of Spanish cultural and political heritage, more attention might have been paid to historiographical debates over empire, race, and gender. Spanish America, for example, receives less than ten pages in the second chapter, and the questions of slavery and race are not highlighted in regard to the formative French or Spanish revolutionary experiences. These issues are front and center within a growing literature on imperial studies. In his two-volume work *La nación imperial*, Josep Fradera focuses on the development of rights and citizenship in French and British Caribbean colonies as a comparison to practices in the Spanish monarchy. He finds that the political revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries did not lead to open, tolerant societies but to the creation of new forms of imperial control through the use of specialized, particular laws and codes. In *The Conquest of History: Spanish Colonialism and National Histories in the Nineteenth Century*, Christopher Schmidt-Nowara argues that empire and the history of colonial rule were integral to the very idea of Spain. He maintains that the Spanish national project had colonialism at its core throughout the period between decolonizations. By way of contrast, Álvarez Junco says that Spaniards were not able to match the «enthusiasm» and ardor of their contemporaries in the nineteenth century «in constructing a nation-state» and devotes much less ink to the relationship between empire and metropole prior to the Spanish-American War (80). In the end, this book effectively places Spain within the broader contours of European history but downplays the lasting significance of its imperial engagements and cross-pollination. By shedding light on comparisons between seemingly incongruous polities, Álvarez Junco shows that all

nationalists utilize «cultural ingredients» to construct an essentialist mythology (213). This idealized past is used to justify contemporary political struggles; but for Álvarez Junco, «the future is not written» (282).

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FERNANDO MOLINA y JOSÉ A. PÉREZ (eds.): *El peso de la identidad. Mitos y ritos de la historia vasca*, Madrid, Marcial Pons Historia e Instituto de Historia Social Valentín de Foronda, 2015, 343 págs.

Fernando Molina y José Antonio Pérez editan una obra que es simultáneamente muy vasca y universal. La primera afirmación está sobrada de argumentos. La totalidad de los autores están vinculados a la UPV, a excepción de Ángel García-Sanz que pertenece a la Universidad Pública de Navarra y se encarga del capítulo que analiza el papel de Navarra en el imaginario nacionalista vasco. La introducción y los nueve capítulos se enfrentan a temáticas específicamente relacionadas con el País Vasco y el libro es el resultado de un proyecto autonómico liderado por Luis Castells. Y sin embargo paradójicamente la impresión que deja su lectura es que dejando a un lado los matices propios de cada caso y centrándonos en lo esencial, podría estar dedicado a cualquier otro nacionalismo sin estado o, con las necesarias adaptaciones, estatal.

*El peso de la identidad* se abre con una combativa introducción de los dos editores que dejan claros sus posicionamientos de partida, críticos con el paradigma nacionalista predominante en la interpretación del pasado, subordinada siempre a las necesidades del sujeto colectivo construido por sus ideólogos y divulgadores y difundida desde las instituciones autonómicas y sectores afines. Molina y Pérez señalan las deficiencias de dicho relato histórico: la intencionada confusión entre memoria e historia, la omnipresencia de la nación (o el «pueblo») como sujeto histórico principal desde el principio de los tiempos, el anacronismo en el traslado de conceptos actuales a épocas en las cuales carecen de sentido, la marginación de periodos o temas incómodos que no encajan con la narrativa nacionalista (la Dictadura de Primo, los apoyos sociales del franquismo, la derecha no nacionalista en la Transición...) o la insuficiente contextualización en los marcos español y europeo reforzada, por la carencia de diálogo con historiografías foráneas. Esto último responde a la lógica de que la historia de los vascos sería única como lo es su identidad como pueblo por lo que poco beneficio se extraería del contraste con otras realidades, cuando precisamente en los últimos años el enfoque comparativo se está revelando uno de los más fructíferos en la historiografía internacional hasta convertirse casi en inexcusable.