

Book Review

A SPANISH HISTORY OF CONCEPTSErik Tängerstad
Gotland University, Sweden

Javier Fernández Sebastián and Juan Francisco Fuentes, eds.
2002. *Diccionario Político y Social del Siglo XIX Español*. Madrid:
Alianza Editorial. pp. 772.

“We are living in times of crises.”¹ With this proposition, the editors Javier Fernández Sebastián and Juan Francisco Fuentes open the *Diccionario Político y Social del Siglo XIX Español* (2002). The crises they refer to is defined by the modern condition of being in an ambiguous world that tends, paradoxically, to be at one and the same time both more globalized and more fragmented. To conceptualize and make intelligible these times of crises we have to critically revise the overall notion of modernity, as well as the modern concepts that were once conceived in order to make this modern world intelligible. When trying to understand today’s world, say the two editors, we ought to take a closer look at the concepts of the nineteenth century.

Viewed against this background, the Spanish case appears to be a good point of reference when discussing modern history at large. Nevertheless, when speaking of modern history, generally, few references are made to Spain. This is both unfortunate and understandable, given the fact that Spain during the twentieth century trailed a path that differed significantly from the one taken by the rest of today’s “developed world.” For example, while for most Western European countries the post-war era started with the end of Second World War, in Spain it coincides with the end of the Spanish Civil War in 1939. Furthermore, the long-lasting Franco dictatorship and the following transition to democracy during a time period when parliamentary democracy was already a well established principle in most Western European countries create a particular space of experience and horizon of expectations. On the other hand, Spaniards shared with other twentieth-century Western Europeans

experiences such as the construction of the modern welfare state. In sum, the uniqueness of the Spanish case provides an interesting complement to other Western spaces of experiences and horizons of expectations.

The relevance of the Spanish case when discussing modern history could be claimed with perhaps even more emphasis when regarding the nineteenth century. The development of the modern Spanish nation-state could very well be taken as an alternative point of reference when studying the making of modern Europe in general. For instance, the fact that the modern usage of the term “liberalism” can be traced back to the Spanish resistance against the Napoleonic Empire demonstrates that the Spanish case plays an important, although not always fully recognized, role in the history of modern Europe.

Moreover, in the context of European integration, the task to fill this gap between Spanish and European modern history acquires a renewed importance. It is therefore with high hopes and expectations that one opens the above mentioned, newly published dictionary of nineteenth-century Spanish political and social concepts. And this well researched volume is not to let its readers down. It should be said immediately that this book contains all the qualities needed to become a long-lasting reference for those dealing not only with Spanish history in general but also with modern history in general and conceptual history in particular.

Precisely because of the competent scholarship put in the making of this volume, it ought to be given a closer look. Hopefully it will be able to inspire other projects and volumes of this same nature. A second volume covering twentieth-century Spanish social and political concepts is about to be published. After having stated that the Spanish case should be placed closer to the center of interest when reflecting modern history, one ought to ask what the Spanish case is. What is here meant by “Spanish” when nineteenth-century political and social concepts are examined?

Spain was a highly contested notion throughout the nineteenth century, and remained so during the twentieth century. Exactly what is meant by “Spain” in this conceptual history of nineteenth-century Spanish concepts? Under the entry *España* the editors of the volume, Fernández and Fuentes, have co-written a crucial eleven-page article. They place the nineteenth-century notion *España* in a semantic field of tension structured according to three main dichotomies: “citizenship vs. essentialism”; “unity vs. diversity or centralization vs. decentralization”; and “emphasis on the

weight of the past vs. conceptions of Spain tilting towards the future.” The modern notions of Spain, they claim, were shaped in these fields of tension; “modern notions,” it must be said, since no consensus about the meaning of the term *España* was established.

Fernández and Fuentes mention that the expression *las Españas*, i.e. “the Spains” was used in the early nineteenth century both in the pro-Napoleonic *Estatuto de Bayona*, of 1808, as well as in the anti-Napoleonic *Constitución de Cádiz*, of 1812. In both cases, this meant that Spain was thought of as a multinational and global empire, not a locally restricted nation-state. Nevertheless, the first paragraph of the Cádiz constitution defined the concept *la nación española*, or “the Spanish nation,” which was understood as “the union of all Spaniards of both hemispheres” (*España*, 285). Through this constitution, the modern project of replacing the old imperial regime with a new national one became an issue. However, this modern constitution at Cádiz was soon overruled in 1814, when the returning king Fernando VII reinstalled the old regime and tried, among other things, to re-establish imperial hegemony over the rebellious colonies overseas. As a result, a profound conflict arose in Spain, not least around the meaning of the concept “Spain” itself.

What was Spain in the nineteenth century? The implicit answer given in this dictionary is that Spain was the battleground for a modern conflict between notions of old empire and new nation-state. Under the entry *Castilla*, Benoît Pellistrandi writes, for example, that the bulk of nineteenth-century historians in conflict-ridden Spain saw medieval Castile as the ideal-type forerunner of the Spain to-be, although there “was no doubt that for them, *España* was a union of different kingdoms.” He then states that early nineteenth-century liberals actively brought about “a preliminary discourse that was to synthesize the history of *España*” in order to bring all the medieval roots together, forming a united Spain (*Castilla*).

According to Pellistrandi, during the second half of the nineteenth century, the notion of a *Castilla* became a symbol for decadence to some, while others took it up as the very essence of *España*. Previously during that century, and especially to commentators outside of the Pyrenean peninsula, *Andalucía* had incorporated the essence of *España* (*Castilla*, 127). At this point it could be mentioned that the dictionary does not contain the entry *Andalucía*, nor does that term appear in the volume’s otherwise highly useful index. Anyhow, under the entry *Cataluña*, Albert Ghaniame discusses nineteenth-century notions of Catalan identity connected to ideas about a unified history of a Catalan

patria. Crucial to these notions, he writes, was the idea of a distinction between Catalonia and Spain. To nineteenth-century Catalan nationalists the term *provincialismo* (provincialism) was seen as a dual affirmation of this perceived conflict between Catalonia and Spain. On the one hand, this term was taken to signify the relationship between Catalonia and the Bourbon monarchy, the old regime, while on the other hand it was understood to actively integrate Catalonia into the new Spanish nation-state, the new regime (*Cataluña*, 129). So both the opposing sides in crisis-ridden nineteenth-century Spain, reactionary monarchists and modern liberals, were amalgamated in Catalonia into the one single force called *España*, which, in turn, was viewed as a menace to Catalan identity. Ghaniame also mentions that when O'Donnell formed a government in 1858, the newspaper *Diario de Barcelona* wrote “Catalonia is no longer a Spanish colony” (*Cataluña*, 132).

Through the multitude of nineteenth-century meanings ascribed to the term *España*, Spain appears to have been more a country to-be than a well-cemented and existing nation-state. Hence, as already mentioned, the Spanish case proves to be a good example of a modern nation-building process, a case to be studied closely by those interested in how modern nationalists have conceived the notion of original nations. In the face of turmoil and civil war, the liberal politician Alcalá Galiano in 1835 said that one had “to make a nation out of the Spanish nation” (*España*, 287).

How is “Spanish” delimited in this dictionary of nineteenth-century Spanish political and social concepts? Non-Spanish readers should be reminded that, during that period, Spain was more than the European peninsular Spain and that the Spanish language was more than Castilian. Overseas colonies such as Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Philippines, Guam, and the Canary Islands were part of Spain. In addition, during the first quarter of the nineteenth century, large extensions of South and Central America were at least formally still Spanish possessions. Though Castilian was (and is), beyond dispute, the dominant Spanish language, it was not the only language used in nineteenth-century Spain.

The dictionary’s introductory chapter does not provide a clear-cut answer to the question above. Moreover, the implicit answer seems to differ slightly from contributor to contributor. When looking at the sources used, one can state that debates in European Spain were almost exclusively researched from sources in the Castilian language. This source material can be subdivided according to three categories. First, there are individual contemporary

contributors, mainly active politicians or political theorists, who produced books or articles, and who left transcribed interventions in debates such as parliamentary sessions. Second, there is the public sphere of the printing press outside elected parliaments. And the third, there are contemporary nineteenth-century dictionaries, first and foremost the *Diccionario de la Real Academia de la Lengua* (DRAE), which was frequently updated and went through numerous editions throughout the century.

In this dictionary “Spanish” means principally the Castilian discourses on political and social matters that took place in peninsular Spain during the nineteenth century. However, discourses in the colonies are sometimes referred to, as in the entry *Ultramar*, in which one can find discourses articulated both in European Spain and in the provinces. Or, to take another example, in the entry *Vascongadas*, Castilian discourses on Basque identity are discussed together with Basque discourses on the same topic. A more explicit discussion in the introductory chapter about how to delimit the Spanish case in this dictionary on Spanish political and social concepts would have been clarifying.

Given the extreme tension in nineteenth-century Spain concerning the very notion of *España*, the issue of how to delimit the scope of the study must have been, admittedly, a hard nut to crack. In fact, several entries of the volume demonstrate how tensions between different nineteenth-century meanings ascribed to the term *España* caused numerous conflicts, wars, and civil wars throughout that century, up until the Spanish-American war in 1898. Since that war resulted, among other things, in the loss of Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and Guam the question of to what extent nineteenth-century Spain was a global empire and to what extent it was a European nation-state was raised once again.

According to Fernández and Fuentes, Spanish contemporaries saw the lost war of 1898 as the culmination of a crisis-ridden century. The two editors co-wrote the entry *Crisis*, which they conclude with the following remark:

To sum up, if the anti-Napoleonic reaction of 1808 had served to elevate the depressed national self-esteem, the disaster of 1898 fed a strange narcissism in the defeat. In any case, between the those two crisis we notice a fundamental difference: the former started a project aiming at nationalizing Spain while the latter almost brought this project to a halt (*Crisis*, 205).

From this point of view, crisis seems to be the term that encapsulates Spanish nineteenth-century experiences and it appears logical that a six-page entry in this volume was dedicated to it.

When first approaching this dictionary one would be prone to expect nineteenth-century Spain to be a fairly well delimited object. But after having worked with it for a while one learns that nineteenth-century Spain was what has already been described as a “battleground for modernity;” a set of colliding nation-building processes that resisted unification, for no consensus about the meaning of “Spain” was ever reached during that period.

The dictionary achieves at least two important goals. While it manages to bring relevant knowledge of the Spanish case to non-Spanish researchers dealing with conceptual history, it also helps to consolidate conceptual history in the Spanish academic milieu. The editors behind this substantial work are both prominent historians. Javier Fernández Sebastian is a professor of the history of ideas and of social and political movements at the University of the Basque Country and Juan Francisco Fuentes is a professor of contemporary history at Universidad Complutense de Madrid. Twenty-seven researchers from different parts of the Spanish academic world were involved in the project. Twelve of them have direct links to the University of the Basque Country, thus making the institution a strong bridgehead for conceptual history within Spanish academia.

It must be recognized that the editors here had to face a dilemma between a handy volume with few explicit references and accessible to readers outside the field of conceptual history, and a vast work with detailed footnotes that would please field experts. In regard to this dilemma, the editors take the following stance:

This *Diccionario Político y Social del Siglo XIX Español* aspires to be a useful guide when searching the origins of our contemporary social and political vocabulary, and a whole group of concepts, institutions, and values that, to a large extent, continue to be valid. It does so without renouncing a historical perspective that restores the specificity of nineteenth-century Spain, that is, intending as far as possible not to adjust this past according to our own present references (Crisis, 14).

A non-Spanish reader should bear in mind that although this is a study in the field of conceptual history, it is primarily intended as a reading for a broad contemporary Spanish audience, that is, a lexicon that provides useful information for interpreting Spain's contemporary society through a perspective handed down by the approach of conceptual history.

The present volume contains 104 entries in 772 pages, including introduction, bibliography, and index. Entries, which are between two and fourteen pages long, are easy to read and well researched. Not all the words listed in the table of contents are actual entries. Some of them are only leads to other entries. For example, when looking up the entry *prensa* (press), which is listed in the table of contents, one will find the following line: *prensa*: ver *periodismo* (press: see journalism). Furthermore, a list of thematically related entries is attached to every entry. This dual structuring system, alphabetic and thematic, facilitates cross-referencing, which the editors emphasize explicitly through the use of the English term *cluster-concepts* (Introducción, 58). The volume contains a very valuable subject index too, which makes it both handy and easy to work with. Unfortunately, however, it does not contain a name index.

In contrast to the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, which the editors acknowledge as a major reference for their work, the dictionary's system of references does not include long and detailed footnotes but only references in brackets placed directly in the text. The problem is, however, that this system of references is not consistently carried out throughout the volume. Some of the contributions include full references, and also page numbers, while others merely cite sources without providing detailed bibliographical references, not to mention entries that lack references altogether.

For example, in the entry *Soberanía* (Sovereignty), by José María Portillo Valdés, one will find a brilliant five-page article about the complex semantic changes undergone by that concept in nineteenth-century Spain. Portillo Valdés writes that the republican federalists, who during the mid-nineteenth century wanted to see a modernized Spain, got stuck in between "their extended conception of sovereignty and the difficult articulation of nations and State, and states and Nation" within Spain. Portillo Valdés concludes that whatever nationalist perspective used at the end of the nineteenth century — whether for example Spanish, Catalan or Basque — the general view was that the state, and not the nation, was sovereign (*Soberanía*). However, this otherwise thoughtful article has no explicit references backing up the information

provided. For instance, one can read a quotation like: “‘Sovereignty’, we read in a constitutional dictionary from 1820, ‘is the same as supreme power, or power over all powers’” (*Soberanía*, 650). But no bibliographical information is provided about the particular constitutional dictionary from which the quote is extracted.

On the other hand, the entries written by the editors Fernández and Fuentes are impeccable concerning both system of references and the methodological use of conceptual history. It should also be mentioned that they have contributed with more than half of the volume’s entire collection of entries.

As it has been already stated, the main goal of the dictionary is to make sense of the transformations undergone by the political language used when the groundwork of present-day Spain was laid out. Presented in the volume’s thirty-nine-page introduction, its methodological framework purportedly fulfils three basic tasks. First, the entry should draw up the history of the term in question, thus demonstrating its actual usage over time. Second, it should also outline the history of the concept, connecting the term with its contextual social reality. And third it should, against the background of ideological and discursive systems, sketch the different networks and polemical confrontations in which the concept was used and given meaning (*Introducción*, 56).

However, some entries do not strictly follow this methodological framework, something that is understandable in a multi-authored work such as this. Nonetheless, their overall quality undermines the occasional lack of methodological strictness. This is case with Jordi Canal’s entry *Carlismo*, which opens with the following phrase: “*Carlismo* is a socio-political movement with an anti-liberal and anti-revolutionary character, which appeared in Spain at the end of the Old Regime and, although marginalized, has survived to this day” (*Carlismo*, 119). He then uses almost a page to establish this definition before he turns to the history of the concept in question — a procedure that is somewhat unusual to the method of conceptual history, which assumes from the outset the polysemy of key concepts.

After having defined *Carlismo*, however, Canal manages to make the remaining three pages of the entry a highly interesting history of the concept. As is well known, the younger brother of King Fernando VII, Carlos, was devoted to the reactionary cause. When Fernando VII died in 1833 a conflict concerning his succession emerged in Spain. The liberals wanted to see Fernando’s infant daughter Isabella enthroned, while the reactionary claimed

that Carlos should become crowned King Charles V. This conflict led to a series of civil wars, the Carlist Wars, which lasted the rest of the century. Already before the death of Fernando, the supporters of Carlos were called, and called themselves, *carlistas*. Although Canal gives an uncertain date for the emerging concept (between 1823 and 1833), Fernández and Fuentes claim that the concept *carlista* was first documented in 1825 (Introducción, 42). This can have some significance, since, like Fernando VII, the reactionary French king Louis XVIII had a younger brother that was even more devoted to the reactionary cause than his brother. Furthermore, his name was Charles and in Spain he was known as Carlos. In 1824 he became King Charles X of France. Canal mentions that the French concept *carliste* precedes the Spanish *carlista* and that the reactionary side in Spain took both inspiration and concept from the reactionary party in France (*Carlismo*, 120). This sheds light on the relationship and exchange between reactionary groups in France and Spain, an interesting topic for further research in comparative conceptual history.

Even if the *Diccionario Político y Social del Siglo XIX Español* does not have the primary ambition of being a transnational or trans-lingual work, it does raise important questions concerning nation-building processes and theoretical as well as methodological aspects of conceptual history. After having worked with this highly inspiring volume, one waits eagerly for the announced dictionary of Spanish twentieth-century political and social concepts.

NOTES

¹ All quotations translated by the author.