

Historical Palimpsests: Revisiting the Spanish Civil War Through the Bicentennial of the Peninsular War

Luis Álvarez-Castro

On July 25th, 2011 RTVE (Spanish Public Television) aired in prime time the first episode of the series *Plaza de España*, a sitcom about daily life in a small village during the Spanish Civil War.¹ Judging from the light-hearted, conciliatory, and sometimes surreal humor that colors the scripts, it would seem that the series's writers and producers might have thought that Spanish audiences were already able—perhaps even eager—to laugh at the social and ideological causes of this war that took hundreds of thousands of lives and plunged the country into four decades of military dictatorship. After all, General Franco's coup had happened seventy-five years and one week prior to the date the series premiered. Moreover, this was not the first attempt to turn the Spanish Civil War into a source of popular entertainment by means of a comical representation; the classic routines of standing comedian Gila, a ubiquitous figure in Spanish television throughout the 1980s, or the 1985 film *La Vaquilla*, written by Luis Azcona and directed by Luis García Berlanga, are among the best examples.²

When the last of the twelve episodes was broadcast, RTVE proudly announced that *Plaza de España* had become one of the most popular series of the season, with an average of 1.9 million viewers per episode and a share of 13.6 percent (“‘Plaza de España’: Una de las series”). What this official statement failed to admit is that the series's ratings had decreased by half since the airing of the first episode, prompting RTVE to put plans for a second season on hold (“Fernando”). According to these results, the question as to whether Spaniards had finally overcome the most traumatic event of their recent past still remains unanswered. And yet, browsing contemporary Spanish media, one can find startling evidence that the wound of the Civil War is far from healed in the national imagination.

Let us fast forward to September 28, 2011. On this day, the online edition of *El País*—one of Spain’s major newspapers—ran a story by Natalia Junquera entitled, “Un rastro de balas permite hallar una gran fosa en Jerez” (A Trail of Bullets Leads to Mass Grave in Jerez). This news relates to ongoing campaigns by left-oriented organizations such as Asociación para la Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica (Association for Restoring Historical Memory) or Federación Estatal de Foros por la Memoria (National Federation of Forums for Memory) to locate mass graves from the time of the Civil War in order to provide a proper burial to those victims and a sense of closure to their relatives. While the 2007 “Ley de Memoria Histórica” (Law of Historical Memory) acknowledges the dignity of all victims of the Spanish Civil War, it does not provide a legal framework nor set aside any public funding to carry out mass grave exhumations. Consequently private efforts like the aforementioned are trying to compensate for this loophole in the political discourse, and by doing so they are stirring up a great deal of controversy within the most conservative sectors of the nation. In fact, it is not the actual journalistic piece that matters here, but the reception it triggered. In this age of instant communication and interactive user-media relations, comments posted online by news consumers may pose a greater interest to the cultural critic than the news itself. In this particular case, nearly three hundred comments about the mass grave article were posted in the three days following its publication. This is what an online reader with the username “Aristóteles1” had to say:

Aunque se descubrieran también los fusilados y crímenes del Frente Popular, anarquistas y comunistas, no entiendo para qué gastarse el dinero del contribuyente en abrir fosas comunes de hace casi 80 años. En vez de crear unión este Gobierno sigue con la Guerra civil y Franco, una cosa que la izquierda más rancia de este país sigue sin superar. Ahora se han fijado en el Valle de los Caídos. (Junquera)

(Even if crimes and executions committed by the Popular Front, anarchists, and communists were discovered as well, I do not see the point of spending taxpayer money to open mass graves dating from almost eighty years ago. Instead of creating unity, this Administration is obsessed with the Civil War and Franco; something which the ossified left in this country has not gotten over yet. Now they are targeting the Valley of the Fallen [Franco’s burial site].)

As particular opinions like the one expressed by “Aristóteles1” show, interpretations of the Civil War have experienced an ideological escalation in Spanish public discourse during the last decade. The sheer number of such interpretations—be they political, historical or artistic (in novels, films, etc.)—is a revealing symptom that this war still constitutes unfinished

business for many intellectuals and private citizens alike. In sum, despite the effort by Spanish Public Television to bring a comic, neutral war memorial to the public, the polarized climate surrounding this large-scale rewrite of the 1936–1939 conflict and its aftermath attests to the reader’s claim that the Spanish left—as well as the Spanish right, I would add—has not gotten over the war just yet.

The claim that I am trying to lay out in this prologue is that the bicentennial celebration of the Peninsular War (1808–1814) cannot be extricated from the ongoing polemic on the historical memory of the Spanish Civil War. Two reasons can be argued to support this assertion. First, the Peninsular War has a rich history of ideological interpretations throughout the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century. However, with General Franco’s victory in 1939 and the beginning of the dictatorship, the causes and consequences of the older war were rewritten in accordance with the principles of the Francoist regime. Although this official discourse is to a large degree still hardwired into the national consciousness, current generations of Spaniards now feel compelled to uncover the “truths” of the 1808 conflict as they do with regards to that of 1936. Secondly, the War of Independence—as the Peninsular War is usually known in Spanish—has been related to the concept of civil war since the first outbursts of public upheaval against the French occupation forces. Such understanding of the war reached a decisive point in July of 1936, when both loyalists to the Republic and rebel troops defined their struggle as a second War of Independence, thus turning the Peninsular War into the first Spanish Civil War.

The commemoration of the Peninsular War bicentennial is still in progress. In fact, one of the busiest years in terms of celebrations was 2012, marking the two-hundredth anniversary of the proclamation of Spain’s first Constitution. Nonetheless, the publishing activity inspired by the bicentennial is copious enough at this time as to allow for a systematic study. My goal is to assess to what extent current debates on the historical memory of the 1936–1939 Spanish Civil War have left an ideological imprint on the most recent scholarship on the 1808–1814 conflict. To this end, I will review a large body of historiographical works on the Peninsular War that have appeared in Spain in the last decade. In the recent years, mostly from 2008 onwards, the bibliography on this subject has reached such vast proportions that it precludes any attempt at a comprehensive study within the limits of this article. Nonetheless, I believe that my selection of eighteen sole-authored books and eleven collective volumes constitutes an illustrative sample.

Many translations of foreign historical works—mainly French and British—have been published in Spain during the last years. Although I will refer to them in some instances when a useful comparison is needed, I decided not to include them in this study in order to focus on works

conceived by Spanish historians with a specifically Spanish audience in mind. Likewise, for the sake of consistency, I am leaving aside an abundant body of historical novels prompted by the bicentennial (see Sanz Villanueva and Dorca). Combining the analysis of fictional and historical works would certainly surpass the confines of this essay. Nonetheless, I would like to point out that with the exception of Arturo Pérez Reverte's 2007 *Un día de cólera* and 2010 *El asedio*, none of these historical novels set in the Peninsular War has enjoyed nearly the success of recent fictions on the Civil War such as Javier Cercas's 2001 *Soldados de Salamina* or Alberto Méndez's 2004 *Los girasoles ciegos*, both of them best-selling books that were later adapted into films. Perhaps the Spanish public is still more drawn to the drama of 1936 than to the distant one of 1808, a diachronic perspective that brings us to the image of historical palimpsests.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, a palimpsest is "a parchment or other writing surface on which the original text has been effaced or partially erased, and then overwritten by another; a manuscript in which later writing has been superimposed on earlier (effaced) writing." In his 1982 classic *Palimpsests*, Gérard Genette infused this term with a metaphorical sense in order to describe the workings of "transtextuality, or the textual transcendence of the text," that he further defined as "all that sets the text in a relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts" (1). In this essay, I am using the image of the palimpsest to describe historical discourses about a specific past that bear an interpretive relation to another past. What I am depicting here is a fundamentally ironic discourse that expresses its object only obliquely, through the designation of another, surrogate object. More importantly, none of these objects becomes "effaced or partially erased" by virtue of their superposition on the symbolic surface of the palimpsest; far from that, the analogy between the two leads to semiotic enrichment as the perception of both objects is mutually transformed.³ With regards to our topic at hand, the current historiographical revision of the Peninsular War has been overwritten in some instances by ideological disputes over the historical memory of the Spanish Civil War. Such an anachronistic palimpsest—for it shows the older "text" on the surface while the newer one remains hidden underneath—can be exposed by tracing all references to 1936 within the histories of the 1808 conflict as well as within descriptions of the Peninsular War as an internal, civil-like struggle in a more abstract sense.

Let us consider first the analogies between the Peninsular War and generic civil wars (independently from that of 1936). Defining the Peninsular War is not an easy task, as demonstrated by the many names used by historians to refer to it. Aside from the broader perspective that the English term suggests—the Peninsular War as one of the many chapters comprising the Napoleonic Wars—Spanish authors have coined numerous labels in an effort to aptly convey the causes and ultimate meaning of both

the 1808 uprisings and the ensuing war. The Count of Toreno, one of the many Spaniards who fought for Ferdinand VII only to be forced into exile upon the monarch's return, published in 1835 an account of the events of 1808–1814 whose title reflects their complexity: *Historia del levantamiento, guerra y revolución de España* (History of the Uprising, War, and Revolution in Spain). Until the Liberal Period of 1820–1823, Álvarez Junco points out, “revolution” was the preferred term to describe the war, before it became better known as the War of Independence (125–28).⁴ The interpretive differences behind this choice of words is rather significant, for “revolution” refers to an internal process while the idea of “independence” necessitates an external form of oppression. As these terms became more ideologically loaded over time, the title of Vicente Blasco Ibáñez's 1891 *Historia de la revolución española* (History of the Spanish Revolution) could be read as an explicit declaration of republican principles depicting the 1808 conflict as an intra-national, democratic struggle against the Monarchy. “Revolution,” on the other hand, was a close synonym of “civil war” throughout the eighteenth century, with a general meaning of “alteración del orden político-social” (Sánchez León 272) (disruption of the socio-political order). In this regard, Cayuela Fernández and Gallego Palomares argue that “más que *revolución o contrarrevolución* lo que percibimos en la resistencia popular hispana es sobre todo *crisis social*” (28) (rather than revolution or counter-revolution, what we detect in the Spanish popular resistance is above all a social crisis). As some historians have noted, the socio-political disruption that began in May of 1808—with a prologue in the Aranjuez Riots two months earlier—allowed for transformative changes including an expansion of women's roles in the public sphere (Fernández 20) or the redistribution of wealth among social classes, usually through violence (Martínez Laínez 259).⁵ More importantly, the vacuum of power that the Bourbons's abdications left behind eventually led to a most radical political project—the proclamation of a Constitution on the basis of the people's (not the King's) national sovereignty, which abolished the Inquisition and established the right for a free press among other changes.⁶ Some present-day historians admit the revolutionary nature of the 1812 Constitution, either because of its similarities with the 1791 French Constitution (Varela Suanzes-Carpegna 420) or as a result of its eroding of the very foundations of absolutism (Martínez Ruiz 237). In sum, it was in this sense of a collapse of the Ancient Regime that statesman and thinker Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos declared in a letter dated June 11, 1808: “La guerra civil, el mayor de todos los males, es ya inevitable” (qtd. in Capmany 53) (civil war, the worst of all evils, is now unavoidable).

Despite Jovellanos's fears or Antonio de Capmany's dismissal of those who warned against the incoming revolution—mere ploys by the French in order to better subjugate the population, in his opinion (Capmany 52–53)—“revolution” is invoked by García Cárcel as an alternative to the Peninsular

War that could have happened but never did. Specifically, this historian points to debates over the prioritization of war against the French or revolution of the Spanish socio-political system, as the cause for the inefficiency of the interim government as well as for an ideological fracture between the Spanish military and the liberal society (279, 356). This interpretation is particularly relevant to our study for it evokes a similar conflict among Communists, Socialists and Anarchists during the Spanish Civil War—i.e., disputes over the need for a social revolution before defeating the Fascists, or vice versa.⁷ Later on we will discuss more explicit references to 1936 within recent histories of the Peninsular War.

The concept of civil war also carried with it fratricidal implications in early descriptions of the conflict. In his 1808 *Centinela contra franceses*, Antonio de Capmany openly declared: “Con esta guerra nos libraremos de la molestia y del asco de dar oídos a la fastidiosa turba de sabihondos, ideólogos-filósofos-humanistas y politécnicos, todo en una pieza” (92) (With this war we will get rid of the nuisance and disgust of listening to the irksome mob of know-it-alls, ideologues-philosophers-humanists and polytechnics, all in one piece). As much as those enlightened thinkers were influenced by French ideas, the fact that Capmany despises these fellow Spaniards so blatantly and even hopes for their physical elimination is revealing of the multiple sides of the Peninsular War—a conflict that involved a clash of nations, but also of ideas on how nations are built. This ideological divide did not care for national borders, which explains why so many Spanish intellectuals and politicians allied themselves with the French occupation government, or why so many of them left Spain in exile after the war ended.⁸

Several historians have discussed whether the existence of the so-called “afrancesados” (literally: Frenchified) is sufficient grounds for partly considering the Peninsular War as a confrontation among Spaniards.⁹ It appears that those who answer such a question affirmatively are in the majority. Castell, Espigado, and Romeo explain that, “en España hubo, además de una guerra total, un doble conflicto civil; por un lado, entre quienes colaboraron y los que resistieron, y, por otro, entre absolutistas, conservadores y liberales, unidos sólo por un enemigo común, Napoleón y sus seguidores” (19) (in addition to a total war, there was a two-fold civil conflict in Spain—on the one hand, between those who collaborated and those who fought; on the other hand, between Absolutists, Conservatives, and Liberals, united only by their common enemy Napoleon and his followers). Viguera Ruiz refers to “los enfrentamientos entre patriotas y afrancesados” (24) (clashes between patriots and Frenchified) as supporting evidence of a civil war within the Peninsular War.¹⁰ Similarly, Álvarez Junco (120), Diego (23), Moliner Prada (“Introducción” 8), Sánchez Fernández (23), and Toledano González (547) do not hesitate to recognize distinctive features of a civil war in the events of 1808–1814, an

interpretation that Sanz Villanueva has repeatedly noticed in historical novels of the past years (498–99). Moreover, Vaca de Osma (19) and Canales Torres (301) locate the birth of “the two Spains” in the proclamation of the 1812 Constitution and its repeal by Ferdinand VII, respectively.

No author argues the civil nature of the Peninsular War as adamantly as Rafael Torres, though. His take on the subject is clearly stated in the title of his book—*1808–1814. España contra España: Claves y horrores de la primera guerra civil* (1808–1814. Spain against Spain: Keys and Horrors of the First Civil War). Torres is not a trained historian but a journalist, better known by the Spanish public for his contributions to the newspaper *El Mundo* and his television appearances as socio-political commentator. His essay is probably the best example of an ideologically-driven, left-oriented interpretation of the Peninsular War among recent bibliography. In fact, the author unapologetically declares himself “un republicano que habría sido entonces, con seguridad, godoyista y josefino” (12) (a Republican who would have certainly been a follower of Godoy and Joseph I back then). Because of the controversial tone of the book and its deliberate disregard for objectivity, Sanz Villanueva classifies it between history and fiction (499). Nonetheless, in the context of this study it will be particularly productive in the forthcoming analysis of contemporary analogies between the 1808 war and that of 1936.

We turn our attention now to those histories of the Peninsular War that contest or outright deny the characterization of this conflict as a civil war. García Cárcel does not offer a clear opinion on this matter in his 2007 book *El sueño de la nación indomable: Los mitos de la Guerra de la Independencia* (The Dream of the Indomitable Nation: Myths of the Peninsular War), although he includes the following assertion in a contribution to a volume of conference proceedings: “En ningún caso puede hablarse de guerra civil en la Guerra de la Independencia. No fueron españoles contra españoles los enfrentados” (“Cuestión” 39) (By no means can we talk about a civil war within the Peninsular War. The contending sides were not Spaniards against Spaniards). Not every historian would agree with this characterization. Indeed, it is the recognition that the Peninsular War involved a certain degree of internal confrontation that made it possible to compare it with the Spanish Civil War of 1936, as we will see shortly. Well aware of the insistence by some authors to point out elements of civil strife in the 1808–1814 conflict, Cayuela Fernández and Gallego Palomares make a preemptive refutation of two possible claims. First, while acknowledging political and even geographical differences in the response of the Spanish people to the French occupation, they assure that “el caos que se desencadenó no fue fruto de una *guerra civil*, sino de una invasión exterior en toda regla” (202) (the ensuing chaos was not the result of a civil war, but that of an external invasion). Secondly, they reject the revolutionary nature of the popular revolts against the authorities or the rich that frequently

occurred during the war by saying that, “en aquella conflictividad social, con toda su trascendencia, tampoco hay dimensiones de *guerra civil* (en este caso como *guerra social*)” (203) (despite its significance, this climate of social conflict also lacks the dimension of a *civil war* [understood in this case as a social war]).

As Torres’s book represents a politicized view of the Peninsular War from the Left, Martínez Laínez’s work on Spanish guerrillas may be regarded as an equivalent attempt from the Right. Throughout the last two centuries, the historical analysis of the meaning and impact of the guerrilla warfare during the Peninsular War has been as contentious as that of the *afrancesados*. Idealized as “la nación en armas” (the nation in arms) by both Liberals and Absolutists in their effort to underscore the people’s leading role in the uprising against the French, the guerrillas became so essential to the definition of a national identity that they nearly obscured any participation of the Spanish regular army in the final victory over Napoleon’s forces. While some military historians are still trying to break with this long-standing misconception, it seems that Martínez Laínez’s goal is to reinforce it.¹¹ Moreover, it is worth noting how this author frames his study in the context of present-day ideological disputes:

Creo que este libro llega en un momento poco propicio. Corren malos tiempos para la reafirmación de España como nación indiscutible de todos los españoles. Hemos entrado en una fase de piqueta y derribo de la idea nacional colectiva. La desmoralización social y los secesionismos provincianos están desvirtuando cualquier visión solidaria de la Historia de España, hasta el punto de hacerla incomprensible a las futuras generaciones. (25–26)

(I believe that this book arrives at a bad juncture in time. These are bad times for the reaffirmation of Spain as the unarguable nation for all the Spanish people. We have entered a phase of attacks on the collective, national ideal. Social demoralization and provincial secessionism are distorting any unifying view of Spanish history, to the extent that they are making it incomprehensible to future generations.)

Martínez Laínez makes several references to violent acts perpetrated by guerrillas against fellow Spaniards, including killings of civil and military authorities and countless score settlings against Godoy loyalists or French collaborationists (31, 170, 255). In order to justify such actions, he explains that “ningún alzamiento guerrillero, en ninguna circunstancia, cuenta con el cien por ciento de apoyos, pero calificar ese desajuste de ‘guerra civil’ en el caso español resulta torpe y exagerado, a no ser que se añada que todas las guerras de resistencia son también guerras civiles” (210) (no guerrilla uprising, under any circumstances, has the support of the entire population;

but in Spain's case, branding that disparity as a 'civil war' is a clumsy overstatement unless we add that every war of resistance is a civil war as well).¹² Finally, a passage in his essay clearly echoes the concept of historical palimpsest described earlier—that is, the fluid ideological transferring between contemporary interpretations of the past and constructions of the current national discourse. Commenting on Napoleon's thoughts about the Spanish insurrection, he goes on to say: "A Napoleón ni siquiera se le ocurre sugerir . . . que la guerra de España fuera una especie de 'guerra civil,' como algunos comentarios de los nuevos afrancesados apuntan ahora, en un intento de resaltar que una parte de España estaba con los franceses contra la otra, prácticamente igual, que los apoyaba" (110) (Napoleon never goes so far as to say that the war in Spain was some kind of 'civil war,' as some remarks by the new Frenchified seem to suggest now in an attempt to highlight that one part of Spain was with the French against the other part that supported them). Martínez Laínez's claim is somewhat confusing due to the syntax of the sentence. Nevertheless, my reading of his words is that some Spanish intellectuals (e.g., himself) are embarking on a mission to safeguard the integrity of the national identity while others (such as Torres, who declared himself an *afrancesado*) strive to create division in the present society by invoking the specter of civil war. And we are no longer referring to a generic civil war in the abstract, but to the Spanish Civil War of 1936.

Not far from Martínez Laínez's ideological stance, Aguilar Merlo devotes his 2008 book *La Guerra de la Independencia en doce rectificaciones* (Twelve Rectifications about the Peninsular War) to reverse what he sees as an appropriation of the nation's past by the Spanish Left. More specifically, in the book's preface he expresses that his motivation to write about the war came from his opposition to recent interpretations of the conflict: "He leído algunos artículos y libros, escuchado diversas radios y televisiones con relatos muy criticables. He asistido a conferencias de algún miembro de la 'Asociación Napoleónica,' alabando a José I y denigrando a los guerrilleros españoles. Es como si en Israel existiera una 'Asociación Hitleriana' ensalzando el exterminio de judíos" (15–16) (I have read certain articles and books, and heard several radio and television stations circulating highly questionable accounts. I have attended talks by certain members of the 'Napoleonic Association' who praised Joseph I while denigrating Spanish guerrillas. This situation could be equivalent to an Israelite 'Hitlerian Association' celebrating the Holocaust).¹³

The "questionable accounts" of the war that Aguilar Merlo criticizes are basically those by "the new Frenchified" to which Martínez Laínez referred. And yet, what strategy is really at work in such statements? Contesting historical myths of the Peninsular War, as declared on the back cover of Aguilar Merlo's book, or challenging competing views of Spanish national identity in its present meaning?¹⁴ Throughout the twelve rectifications

comprising his book, the reader can infer that the latter is true. As an example, this is Aguilar Merlo's position on the widespread assumption that the Peninsular War entails the birth of Spain as a modern nation: "España es una de las naciones más antiguas de Europa y sus habitantes sí habían asimilado ese concepto unitario desde hacía milenios" (153) (Spain is one of the oldest nations in Europe and its inhabitants were indeed aware of this idea of unity millennia ago).

Up to this point we have reviewed a number of recent historical essays where the Peninsular War is somehow related to the notion of a civil war—whether to establish an analogy between them or to deny such a comparison. While this correlation is sometimes made from a historical perspective that only attends to the context of nineteenth-century Spanish politics, in some instances it is firmly rooted in present-day ideological debates whose basis can be traced back to the 1936 Civil War. I am not going to elaborate on the discursive manipulation of the Peninsular War that took place at the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War as a means to legitimate the cause of both Republican loyalists and rebels (Cruz Martínez and García have published useful studies of these processes of historical tampering). Instead, I want to focus now on the explicit references to the Spanish Civil War that can be found in current historiography on the Peninsular War.

In most cases, such references appear within a larger context of historical revision. Cuenca Toribio, for instance, makes the following case as to the circumstances in which his book was published: "Escrito cuando una nueva y quizás algo artificial revisión del drama de 1936—¿desembocadura postrera del de 1808?—se erige en el centro de la vida cultural del país, su autor . . . nada desearía menos que avivar los rescoldos del bien probado cainismo ibérico, siempre surgido en el ámbito del pensamiento" (10) (Written while a new and perhaps artificial revision of the 1936 tragedy—a late byproduct of that of 1808?—has a central position in the nation's cultural scene, its author does not desire to incite the well-proven Iberian fratricidal violence, which has always arisen from the realm of thought). Aside from subtly accusing Spanish intellectuals of provoking the Spanish Civil War, Cuenca Toribio refers to the Liberals who took part in the drafting of the 1812 Constitution as "*intelligentsia* progresista, *avant la lettre*" (208) (precursors of a progressive intelligentsia). Moreover, later on in the book he draws certain conclusions about the failure of the Liberal cause during the Peninsular War and its aftermath that can be read as understated judgments on the short-lived Spanish Second Republic.¹⁵

César Vidal, co-author of a *History of Spain* with controversial, right-wing radio host Federico Jiménez Losantos, states in the introduction to his book on 1808 that he intends to stay away from two idealized perspectives on the Peninsular War—unqualified glorification of the popular resistance, and equation of the French invaders with culture and progress (11). In order to refute the latter interpretation, Vidal highlights acts of savagery

perpetrated by the French troops and stresses Napoleon's perfidy and cruelty, which he even compares to Hitler's (158). However, the most interesting parallels are the ones he draws between the events of 1808 and the Spanish Civil War. For instance, he compares the mass executions of May 3—immortalized by Goya—to the Paracuellos's massacre that took place in the fall of 1936 (129).¹⁶ Furthermore, after explaining that Napoleon's hostility against the Church fueled the people's resistance against the occupation, Vidal detects similar mistakes in the Liberal policies during the nineteenth century and the reforms by the "Frente Popular" (People's Front) prior to the Civil War (160). As for involvement of the Church in Napoleon's defeat and the religious nature of the Peninsular War, Vidal concludes: "Como sucedería en 1937, la Iglesia católica había tomado al final partido en contra de los que la perseguían desde hacía tiempo. La lucha ya no iba a ser sólo por España, sino también por Dios, y los caídos en el combate contra Francia serían—como los que combatirían en la Guerra Civil española de 1936–1939—caídos por Dios y por España" (165) (As it would happen in 1937, the Catholic Church finally decided to act against those persecuting it since long before. The fight would be not only for Spain but also for God, and the fallen in combat against the French—like those who fought the Spanish Civil War in 1936–1939—would fall for God and Spain). Interestingly, Vidal only mentions half of the victims of the Spanish Civil War: those whose names are still painted or engraved in churches' walls and memorials now targeted by the 2007 Law of Historical Memory. It could be inferred, then, that the other half were somehow heirs of those Spaniards who chose to fight with or against the French for reasons other than God and country—that is, not just the so-called "afrancesados."

Continuing with the theme of historical revisionism, it is worth noting some authors' reservations about the demystifying enterprise characterizing much of the recent historiography on the Peninsular War. In the introduction to a collective volume, Moliner Prada asserts in his capacity as editor that the book "huye en todo momento del revisionismo a ultranza tan de moda en los últimos tiempos" ("Introducción" 9) (avoids by all means the extreme revisionism in vogue as of late). García Cárcel, who calls for a revision of historical revisionism ("Mitos" 45), detects a perversity in the theoretical framework that questions the role of the 1808 uprising and the 1812 Constitution for the formation of Spanish national identity at the cost of negating the very idea of national identity (*Sueño* 16).¹⁷ Furthermore, he explains the deconstruction of Spanish-centralist nationalism as a byproduct of the ongoing process of myth-construction by so-called peripheral nationalisms such as the Catalan or Basque (22).

Finally, a revealing analogy between the wars of 1808 and 1936 can be found in the title of Diego and Sánchez-Arcilla's 2005 book: *¡España se alza! La Guerra de la Independencia contada a los españoles de hoy* (Spain is Rising! An Account of the Peninsular War for Present-Day Spaniards).

The authors emphasize two basic tenets of the traditional interpretation of the war—first, the idea of national unity against the invaders (15); and secondly, the decisive role of pro-Catholic and pro-monarchic sentiments in the mobilization of the popular insurgency (17).¹⁸ This conservative approach allows for a symbolic reading of the book's title in which three different historical moments are fused together; that is, the 1808 war, the contemporary reality of the reader, and the 1936 military coup evoked by the battle cry “¡España se alza!” (Spain is Rising!).¹⁹

At the risk of oversimplification, the underlying political agenda in the previously mentioned accounts of the Peninsular War could be labeled as conservative if not decidedly right-winged. However, more progressive perspectives equally reveal a sense of historical responsibility that may come across as either revenge or vindication. In either case, the aim is to denounce certain positions on the past that are perceived as dangerously close to Francoist propaganda, and therefore ideologically disruptive for the present and, more importantly, the future of the nation. Stressing the persistence of such propaganda, Moral Ituarte and Páez-Camino Arias remind readers that “al menos hasta los años sesenta, en los libros escolares básicos, el *dos de mayo* era un antecedente del *dieciocho de julio*” (21) (in elementary-school textbooks at least until the 1960s, May the Second [of 1808] was a precedent for July the Eighteenth [of 1936]).²⁰

As for the specifics of the Francoist appropriation of the Peninsular War, García Cárcel explains that it exclusively focused on 1808, never on 1812, so the myth of the popular uprising against the French obscured any indication of a socio-political revolution (346). Peiro Martín summarizes: “Significó la negación de cualquier interpretación que vinculara las consecuencias de la Guerra de la Independencia (siempre, ruinosas e inconmensurables), con Europa y los afrancesados, la Constitución de 1812 y el liberalismo político del siglo XIX” (16) (It meant the negation of any interpretation that linked the results of the Peninsular War—always disastrous and immense—to Europe and the Frenchified, to the 1812 Constitution, or to nineteenth-century political liberalism). Later on in his study of the historical construction of the Peninsular War through its centennial, one hundred and fiftieth anniversary, and current bicentennial, Peiro Martín warns against the revival of such a propaganda in the midst of “el ‘espectáculo de la historia’ que nos deparará la inminente conmemoración de 2008” (19) (the ‘spectacle of history’ that the forthcoming commemoration of 2008 will bring). Sharing similar fears about official commemorations, Sánchez León blames public institutions for fabricating myths around the Peninsular War which “proyectan sobre los ciudadanos del presente arquetipos morales como mínimo discutibles” (296) (cast over current citizens moral archetypes that are questionable at best).

Within the left-oriented historiography, the point of contact that enables the analogy between the time of the Peninsular War and that of the Civil

War is usually the understanding that both periods epitomize a missed opportunity for the progressive cause in the history of Spain. This is particularly noticeable in the assessment of the policies introduced by Joseph I and his supporters, the “afrancesados.” Martínez Ruiz makes the case that “si Carlos III ha sido considerado el mejor alcalde de Madrid, José I puede ser muy bien el segundo” (193) (if Charles III has been considered the best mayor of Madrid, Joseph I could very well be the second best). Other historians regard the reforms implemented by the French king as the paradigm of an enlightened government, years if not decades ahead of the advances of liberalism in Spain (García Cárcel, *Sueño* 294; López Tabar 345–48).²¹

The comparison between both wars can also be a source of historical ironies. Duarte begins his essay with the remembrance of a group of Spanish Republicans in exile commemorating the “Dos de Mayo” (2nd of May) in Buenos Aires, in 1952 (169). In a similar fashion, Fernández Vargas reflects on how songs inspired by the 1812 siege of Cádiz were adapted by the popular militia during the Madrid blockade in 1936 (147).²² Irony aside, the outcome of these associations is a mutual redefinition of the tragedies behind each conflict, as shown in Torres’s book. There he writes about “aquella Granada de ecos represivos que se reproducirían multiplicados y espantosos, también con el concurso del clero, ciento veintiocho años después” (145) (that Granada with signs of repression that one hundred and twenty eight years later would resurface, amplified and horrifying, with the Church’s involvement). The criticism of the Spanish Church’s role in the Peninsular War as well as the Civil War appears repeatedly in the book, contesting arguments on the religious nature of both conflicts (Vidal 165–66). Furthermore, the reference to Granada is likely to evoke current reports about the location of Federico García Lorca’s remains, one of the most publicized episodes of the historical-memory campaign discussed in the beginning of this essay. In this context, the following quote by the Count of Montarco denouncing the killing of sixteen pro-Joseph I Spanish officers in Cádiz in 1812 sounds like an anachronistic condemnation of the atrocities perpetrated during the Civil War: “Ya es tiempo de que cese esa odiosa y detestable persecución de los españoles fanáticos, necios y malvados contra los moderados, instruidos y virtuosos” (qtd. in Torres 192) (It is high time that the hateful, despicable persecution of moderate, educated, and virtuous Spaniards by the fanatical, ignorant, and evil ones ceases).²³

It is now time to recapitulate. The Peninsular War, Martínez Ruiz explains, concluded with an indisputable victory for Spain (278). This is certainly the traditional evaluation of the war, not only during the Franco dictatorship but also throughout the nineteenth century. Indeed, Napoleon’s army was forced out of the country in 1814, although other facts may suggest the need to qualify the victory over the French. No other war—including the Civil War of 1936—has ever caused a higher mortality in

relation to Spain's population (Canales Torres 303). Moreover, allied British forces were equally concerned with defeating Napoleon and devastating Spanish agricultural and industrial sectors (Vidal 168), not to forget the cultural plundering inflicted by both armies. To make things worse, Ferdinand VII destroyed all liberal reforms upon his return, bringing the country back to pre-1789 absolutism (García Cárcel, *Sueño* 310). From an international perspective, the war had no better consequences. Despite its role in the Continental defeat of Napoleon, Spain was relegated to a subordinate status in the 1814–1815 Congress of Vienna (Moliner Prada, "Retorno" 589). As a result of all this, "sólo cuando terminó victoriosamente la guerra" (only when the war ended victoriously), Díaz-Plaja wrote in a 1994 history of the Peninsular War, "la mitad de los españoles se dio cuenta que la había perdido" (11) (half of the Spanish people realized that they had lost it).

Throughout the sole-authored books, collective works, and volumes of conference proceedings included in this study a number of shared beliefs can be detected. First and foremost, the Peninsular War is a crucial event in the modern history of Spain, which by itself justifies the editorial avalanche prompted by the bicentennial. Secondly, the historical construct commonly known as "la Guerra de la Independencia" (the War of Independence) results from the accumulation of interpretive layers over two centuries; hence the need for a revision of the conflict's causes, consequences, and ultimate significance. As Canales Torres puts it, "la historiografía tradicional, tanto española como francesa o británica, está cargada de errores y juicios de valor gratuitos que, al menos en España, están siendo puestos en cuestión mediante la única forma posible, con documentos, datos y hechos" (14) (Spanish traditional historiography, as much as the French or British, is full of mistakes and ungrounded judgments which, at least in Spain, are being questioned by means of the only appropriate method: documents, figures, and facts). Thirdly, and closely related to the previous argument, the most decisive of those interpretive layers for the contemporary understanding of the war corresponds to the period of the Civil War and the Francoist dictatorship. Finally, historical views on the Peninsular War can be extrapolated to larger conceptions of Spain's national identity, both in the early nineteenth century and nowadays.

There is general agreement among historians on the pertinence of these four propositions. However, their response to each premise reveals wide ideological differences, as demonstrated before. The vitality of the debates on the historical memory of the Civil War at the time of the commemoration of the bicentennial of the Peninsular War has caused many scholars to look back at 1808 with borrowed lenses from 1936. The result is a series of reversed palimpsests that hide enduring disputes on the Civil War behind revisionary accounts of the Peninsular War. In a Freudian condensation of sorts, winners and losers of each of these wars have been assimilated by

contemporary observers who regard themselves as their ideological—if not actual—descendants. Ultimately, historical appropriations are essential to the very notion of history; only then can the past be truly relevant to our present. Álvarez Junco explains: “Quienes recurren a la historia no suelen estar movidos por el mero espíritu científico, sino por el deseo de utilizar lo que están leyendo, de sacarle una rentabilidad inmediata” (24) (Those who resort to history are rarely inspired by sheer scientific curiosity; rather, they wish to utilize what they read, to obtain an immediate benefit from it). As cultural critics, the recent historiography on the Peninsular War presents us with a snapshot of the debates on national identity and historical memory shaping the public discourse in Spain in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Only time will tell the benefit that Spaniards can obtain from it.

Notes

1. María Cereceda and Rafa Parbus direct the series, with scripts by Pepón Montero and Juan Maidagán based on the original idea by David Troncoso and Abraham Sastre. Flipy and David Troncoso are executive producers. All twelve chapters of the first season are available online at rtve.es.
2. The team of scriptwriters for *Plaza de España* acknowledges their debt to Berlanga, as well as to comic writer Miguel Miura and cartoonist Tono (“‘Plaza de España’: Cómo escaquearse”).
3. As an indicative example of the symbolic condensation that I am labeling as historical palimpsest, Martínez Cebolla has authored an essay that simultaneously analyzes three events in the history of Zaragoza: the 1808 Siege, the 1908 Spanish-French Exhibition, and the 2008 International Water Expo (17).
4. García Cárcel, following Antonio Elorza, questions Álvarez Junco’s assertion based on the existence of early references to the war as a struggle for independence (*Sueño* 224).
5. In a more specific instance, Vidal refers to Daoíz’s decision to arm the civilians during the May 2nd uprising in Madrid as a somewhat revolutionary act (115).
6. This political radicalism, Álvarez Junco explains, would in turn stimulate another facet of the Peninsular War: “Su carácter de cruzada contra el ateísmo ilustrado-jacobino moderno; es decir, su componente contrarrevolucionario” (123) (Its crusade-like nature against modern, enlightened-Jacobin atheism; that is, its counterrevolutionary dimension).
7. The tactical differences between the Republican government and other leftist forces have been thoroughly examined in the historiography of the Spanish Civil War. In the creative arena, those discrepancies are the basis for the plot of Ken Loach’s 1995 film *Land and Freedom*.
8. Half a century after its publication, Miguel Artola’s *Los afrancesados* is still the major reference on this subject. This book has been recently reprinted.
9. In the introduction to a collective volume that includes contributions by French and Spanish historians, Michonneau explains that “el mito de la Guerra de la Independencia sirve tanto para recordar como para borrar y olvidar ciertas realidades de la guerra civil que desgarró España entre 1808 y 1814” (xvii) (the myth of the Peninsular War can be used for remembering as well as for erasing and

forgetting certain realities of the civil war that tore Spain apart between 1808 and 1814).

10. With regards to this terminology, an anonymous, non-venal opusculum intended for the students of a high school in Andorra also defines this conflict as a true civil war, while reminding readers that both sides considered themselves patriotic, and that so-called Frenchified are no longer deemed anti-Spanish (*10 preguntas* 3, 37). Along the same lines, López Tabar concludes: “Hoy, la dialéctica simplista entre patriotas y traidores esgrimida hace más de un siglo por Menéndez y Pelayo, entre otros, hace mucho que ha sido superada” (327) (Nowadays, the simplistic opposition between patriots and traitors embraced by Menéndez Pelayo and others more than a century ago, has been long abandoned).
11. Ortega Martín—a General who happens to hold a PhD in History—considers the exclusion of the Spanish army in traditional accounts of the Peninsular War as “un auténtico sinsentido histórico” (71) (a true historical absurdity).
12. Elsewhere in his book, Martínez Láinez assesses unqualified claims that the Peninsular War was a civil war as “una falsedad retorcida” (31) (a twisted falsehood).
13. We will discuss the significance of this admiration of Joseph I later on. As examples of the demystification of guerrillas, Cuenca Toribio (50) and Diego García (45) denounce their excesses, while Díaz Torrejón concludes: “Sobran argumentos para aseverar que el oportunismo define la conducta de numerosas guerrillas irregulares y que la alternancia de actuaciones, ora frente al francés ora frente al español, las sitúa a mitad de camino entre el patriotismo y la delincuencia” (124) (There is ample evidence that opportunism defined the behavior of many guerrillas, and that their alternative actions against the French or the Spaniards place them half way between patriotism and delinquency).
14. The back cover reads: “Miguel de Aguilar Merlo presenta con todo rigor, nuevas visiones históricas sobre la Guerra de la Independencia, rebatiendo y deshaciendo leyendas y mitos que aún perduran” (Miguel de Aguilar Merlo offers new, rigorous historical views on the Peninsular War that challenge enduring legends and myths).
15. In his criticism of the Liberals who took part in the drafting of the Constitution, Cuenca Toribio writes: “[Una] minoría tan lúcida como audaz invirtió las prioridades populares, peraltando sobremanera el programa renovador, transmutado en sus manos en revolucionario” (400) (A minority as lucid as it was audacious inverted the people’s priorities, leaning so much toward the progressive agenda that it became revolutionary in their hands).
16. During the siege of Madrid by rebel forces, several thousand prisoners who were suspected of supporting the coup against the Republic were executed and buried in mass graves.
17. In a broad sense, this theoretical framework stems from Benedict Anderson’s paradigm of “imagined communities.” García Cárcel does not specifically mention this theory, while Álvarez Junco does so extensively in his essay on “the idea of Spain in the nineteenth century.”
18. In response to the first of these ideas, García Cárcel believes that the major misconception surrounding the interpretation of the Peninsular War is not the myth of independence, but that of national unanimity in the war effort (*Sueño* 226).
19. Military rebellions were a customary phenomenon in nineteenth-century Spanish politics. They were not proper coups, because the commanding officers did not necessarily pursue power for themselves, hence the term “pronunciamiento” (pronouncement) as opposed to “golpe de estado militar” (military coup). On the other hand, the rebellion of the Spanish army stationed in Africa that led to the Civil

War was frequently labeled as an “alzamiento” (uprising) by the rebel forces and their followers. With time, the term “alzamiento” became synonymous with the events of July 18th, 1936.

20. Castells, Espigado, and Romeo further explain: “En los discursos franquistas iniciales, la guerra de 1936–1939 significaba la auténtica culminación de los objetivos de 1808, frustrados entonces por las Cortes de Cádiz y el liberalismo” (49) (In early Francoist discourses, the war of 1936–1939 signified the true culmination of the 1808 goals, which, at that point, had been prevented by the Legislative Assembly in Cádiz and Liberalism).
21. García Cárcel also warns against “la sublimación de los afrancesados como la presunta España ideal frustrada” (“La cuestión” 39) (idealizing the Frenchified as the unfulfilled, allegedly ideal Spain). Cuenca Toribio’s position on this issue is rather unusual: he praises the moderate reforms of Joseph I while criticizing the Spanish liberals’ radicalism (302).
22. García Cárcel raises an analogous case of historical recurrence: Cervantes’s tragedy *Numancia* was staged during the 1808 siege of Zaragoza and then in Madrid during the Civil War (*Sueño* 241).
23. Among non-Spanish historians of the Peninsular War, Esdaile makes striking parallels between that conflict and the Spanish Civil War: “So strong was the military’s hatred for the concept of the people in arms that it is not going too far to say that the victims of the firing squads of 1936 were in some respects paying for the sins of the *partidas* of 1808–1814” (203).

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