

Navigating Ambiguity: Narratives of Spanish Exile in Mexico by Simón Otaola and Max Aub

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Abstract: The exile of Republicans after the Civil War of 1936-1939 represented the largest migration of Spaniards since the Conquest. Contemporaneous with other mass refugee movements, these émigrés initially posited Spanish national identity as an ideal that was not only transplantable abroad through their literary and cultural productions but also their exclusive purview. In contrast, Spain was seen as a cultural wasteland and therefore no longer truly “Spanish.” However, quickly this ideal of national identity as definable through exile works faced significant obstacles. My paper examines how the de facto acceptance of the Franco regime and the exiles’ isolation from both Spanish and Mexican audiences challenged these discourses of defending an authentic version of Spanish national identity from abroad. I explore these ideas through close readings of *La librería de Arana* by Simón Otaola and several short stories by Max Aub in *La verdadera historia de la muerte de Francisco Franco* and *Cuentos mexicanos (con pilón)*.

Keywords: Spanish Civil War – Exile – México – Max Aub – Simón Otaola – National Identity.

In a speech delivered at the Colegio de México commemorating the 80th anniversary of the arrival of Spanish exiles to Mexico in 1939, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez twice emphasized the importance of not romanticizing a phenomenon that he referred to as “abominable siempre.” Even so, Sánchez could not avoid evoking an old and romanticized trope of Spanish exile discourse: the idea that Spaniards arriving to Mexico had little or no difficulty adapting to life there.

To underscore his point, Sánchez quoted the impressions of exiled poet Luis Cernuda who arrived to Mexico in 1952:

El sentimiento de ser un extraño, que durante tiempo atrás te perseguía por los lugares donde viviste, allí —aquí, en México— callaba, al fin dormido. Estabas en tu sitio, o en un sitio que podía ser tuyo; con todo o con casi todo concordabas, y las cosas, aire, luz, paisaje, criaturas, te eran

amigas. Igual que si una losa te hubieras quitado de encima, vivías como un resucitado.

Cernuda, who had spent the first years of exile living in the United Kingdom and later the United States, clearly felt a stronger connection to Mexico than he did to the English-speaking world, where he suffered “un aislamiento intelectual muy grande” (Valender 1058-1059). As Prime Minister Sánchez wished to convey, Mexico for Cernuda was a place where the Spanish exile could feel at home again.

In fact, Cernuda’s optimistic vision of Mexican exile as an opportunity for rebirth and a place where émigrés could belong had long defined the expectations of Spanish exiles arriving to this American nation. Discourses of Panhispanic similarities had become popularized in Spanish exile writings since before the first organized expedition of Spanish exiles aboard the *Sinaia* ever arrived at the port of Veracruz in 1939. These ideas were also echoed by Mexican politicians such as President Lázaro Cárdenas, who reportedly told PSOE Secretary General Juan Simeón Vidarte in a 1937 interview that “los republicanos españoles encontrarán en México una segunda patria” (Alted Vigil 224).

Despite Prime Minister Sánchez’s admonitions against sentimentalizing exile, it is evident from his 2019 speech that these romanticized images of Mexico persist to this day. However, such celebratory rhetoric at best only characterized life during the first few years of Mexican exile and only for the most privileged of Spanish émigrés. For many of the 20,000-24,000 exiles who arrived to Mexico between 1939 and 1950 (Alted Vigil 248) life was far more complex than these idealized representations would allow. As we shall see, though, any nuanced representation of exile life in Mexico would first need to contend with these powerful stereotypes.

Exile Discourse and the Representation of Spanish National Identity in Mexico

Early literary representations of Spanish exile in Mexico regularly portrayed a highly optimistic vision of life there. More than temporary asylum from the persecutions of the Francisco Franco dictatorship or escape from the indignities of French concentration camps, many Spanish exiles saw Mexico as a location where they could transplant important aspects of their earlier lives and continue the fight to reconquer their lost home. Mexico, more than anything else, was imagined as a place where the exiled Spaniard could feel at home again and continue being “Spanish.”

Perhaps the most striking aspect of this idealization of Mexican exile was the common expectation that the Spanish expatriate community would embody and preserve authentic Spanish national identity against the perceived inauthenticity of Francoist Spain. Indeed, many exiles believed that they had taken with them the core of Spanish national identity and straightaway transferred it to Mexico. Specifically, the labors and cultural productions of the exiles in Mexico were viewed as the true expression of the Spanish nation and a direct challenge to the political hegemony of the Francisco Franco

dictatorship. As Sebastiaan Faber has written, this rhetorical positioning of Spanish national identity as being represented through exile works led to the unique phenomenon of culture as ideology. Faber defines this as “culturalism” or the “kind of idealism which identifies the being or essence of the nation with the ‘spiritual’ –that is, learned and artistic-- activities and products of its intellectuals” (5). In contrast, the Spain represented by the Franco dictatorship was interpreted as a cultural wasteland and therefore no longer even truly “Spanish.” As León Felipe famously wrote in his 1939 poem “Reparto”:

Sin el poeta no podrá existir España. Que lo oigan las harcas victoriosas,
que lo oiga Franco:
Tuya es la hacienda
la casa,
el caballo
y la pistola.
Mía es la voz antigua de la tierra.
Tú te quedas con todo y me dejas desnudo
y errante por el mundo...
Mas yo te dejo mudo..., ¡mudo!,
y ¿cómo vas a recoger el trigo
y a alimentar el fuego
si yo me llevo la canción? (25-26).

According to Felipe, the song of the Spanish nation had crossed the Atlantic to Mexico and with it the essence of Spanish nationality itself. Moreover, there is a direct connection between the culturalist ideology of Felipe’s poem and the idealization of the Mexican host nation. Indeed, as Francie Cate-Arries has demonstrated: “the exiled writers portray Mexico as the perfect reflection of their own defeated Republic, imbued with their own progressive ideals of liberty and justice for all” (227). For exile to be productive and for exilic works to be meaningful, their host nation needed to be represented as more than a location of transit or limbo; Mexico had to be a place where the true song of the Spanish people could be sung and recognized as such.

However, this sanguine image of Mexico did not mean that the exiled Spaniard necessarily always felt at home there. Nor did it mean that Mexico was always an ideal location for them to contest the legitimacy of the Franco dictatorship. Despite the previously mentioned quote by Luis Cernuda, or modern proclamations celebrating Mexico’s generosity towards the defeated of the Spanish Civil War like that of Prime Minister Sánchez, later literary representations of life in Mexico began to seriously challenge this optimistic discourse of an unproblematic integration of Spanish exiles and their claims to a monopoly on authentic Spanish national identity.

Edward Said has argued that the interplay between exile and nationalism “is like Hegel’s dialectic of servant and master: opposites informing and constituting each other”

(228). However, in the case of the exiles, such mutual recognition—even when negatively constituted as the anti-Spain—was far from a given. Silenced by Francoist propaganda and overshadowed by the outbreak of World War II, the exiles looked for a way to maintain relevance despite consistent threats of erasure. Nevertheless, by 1958 in a prologue to the book *Belleza cruel* (1958) by Peninsular writer Ángela Figuera Aymerich, León Felipe felt obligated to rectify his earlier stance: “Nosotros —dijo— no nos llevamos la canción, la canción de la tierra, la canción que nace con la tierra... Vosotros os quedasteis con todo, con la tierra y la canción” (González 203). Clearly during the nineteen years separating the publication of “Reparto” and the prologue to Figuera Aymerich’s book Felipe, like many others, had become disillusioned with his original idealistic vision of Republican exile in Mexico.

In the first years of exile, and especially before the end of the Second World War, most exiles were convinced that they would quickly return home, believing that the Allied powers would overthrow Spain’s fascist government or that internal opposition to the Franco government would lead to the dictator’s removal. However, despite such initial enthusiasm for a quick Reconquest of Spain and the exiles’ belief in the transcendent importance of their activities abroad, when World War II ended leaving the Franco regime intact, many within the Republican exile community began to reassess their expectations. The triumphal rhetoric of an Allied victory over fascism had conveniently overlooked the fact that the erstwhile ally of Hitler and Mussolini, and fellow fascist dictator, Francisco Franco remained in power in Spain. As had happened during the Non-Intervention Pact during the Civil War, the “Spanish case” after World War II was characterized as an inscrutable domestic affair. Although certain half-measures were taken, such as the “implicit condemnation” of the Franco regime at the 1945 San Francisco Conference of the United Nations, the formal recognition of the Republican government in exile by a number of American nations, and notably Mexico, and the official denunciation of the fascist Spanish government at the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1946, western powers were simply unwilling to commit themselves to intervene militarily against the Franco dictatorship (Rubio 93). The later 1953 bilateral agreements signed with the Vatican and the United States, and Spain’s 1955 entrance into the United Nations, all but ensured the political continuity of the Francoist State.

Another famous exile, the German philosopher Theodor Adorno, believed that writing was the only home still available when “it is part of morality not to be at home in one’s home” (30). However, in the case of the Spanish Republican exiles, this ideal of the nation as a textually constructed home (or more generally as a “culturalist” nation defined through the products of its intellectuals) was continually measured against the longevity of the Franco dictatorship and the exiles’ diminishing political importance during the Cold War. Even so, Spanish exiles living in Mexico continued to write about the nation as a challenge to Francoism. They did so, however, as an activity that was increasingly isolated from a Mexican host nation that had grown tired of their lamentations and with the bitter realization that their words had little resonance within Spain. As Francisco Ayala asked in

his 1949 essay “¿Para quién escribimos nosotros?”: just who were the writers and readers of exile literature? More importantly, if both parties were only the same small circles of exiles, what consequence could such writings have?

The Playful Irreverence of Exile in Simón Otaola's *La librería de Arana*

These reevaluations of the exilic national project in post-WWII Mexico come to the fore in the partially biographical, partially satirical text entitled *La librería de Arana: historia y fantasía* by Simón de Otaola (1907-1980). A political commissar during the Civil War, Otaola arrived to Mexico aboard the *Mexique* on July 27, 1939 (Ascunce 2767), where he became an important figure in the exile literary scene. He was a founding member of the *Tertulia Aquelarre* that would later lead to the formation of *Editorial Aquelarre*, and he collaborated with the influential literary magazines *Las Españas* and *Umbral*. As José Ángel Ascunce has written, in Otaola's works: “se encuentran unidos las aspiraciones y la vida del propio autor con la existencia y los ensueños de los exiliados españoles, sin olvidar las gentes y las circunstancias sociales e históricas del México de la época” (2767). In *La librería*, though, any fantasies of an easy and productive stay in Mexico for Spanish exiles have long since disappeared. In their place are Otaola's representations of the difficulties of navigating a perpetual exile and the frustrations of so many dreams left unfulfilled.

Published in 1952, Otaola's most celebrated work (*Ibid.* 2782) concentrates on the day-to-day lives of exiled intellectuals living in Mexico City a little over a decade after the end of the Spanish Civil War. Described by Michael Ugarte as “an inquiry into the nature of autobiography of Spanish Republican exiles” (83), Otaola's text is a lighthearted and irreverent work that submerges the reader in a world of literary circles and Spanish cultural centers. It is structured around the enigmatic figure of exiled Spanish author José Ramón Arana (pseudonym of José Ruiz Borau), who in Otaola's text is presented as the ragged bearer of the Spanish literary patrimony forever in search of a buyer. In the wake of post-World War II cynicism, *La librería* is a stark contrast to the optimistic discourse of writers such as Paulino Masip, whose 1939 *Cartas a un español emigrado* presented Mexico as a land of new beginnings, or Juan Larrea who wrote about Mexico as a mystical land of destiny in his 1943 *Rendición de espíritu (Introducción a un mundo nuevo)*. In Otaola's text, life in Mexico for the Republican exile is a sort of tragicomedy, where the stubborn insistence to write and be read, as part-and-parcel of the exile political agenda, competes with an encroaching sense of disillusion and impotence.

Prologist and fellow exile José de la Colina writes that “*La librería de Arana*, libro de anécdotas y semblanzas, no se propuso sino ser una ‘crónica menor’ y humorística de un sector del exilio; nunca un tratado histórico del Exilio de mármol” (21). Indeed, Otaola's book often adopts a tone of humorous irreverence about Spanish exile in Mexico, and de la Colina tells us that the author was regularly criticized for his perceived sacrilege. In the cafés and *tertulias* of Mexico City Otaola was lambasted as “¡Un irresponsable que en ninguna de las 470 páginas honraba a nuestra lucha y nuestro éxodo,

y que no manifestaba su conciencia política acerca de la España vencida pero con la frente en alto!” (22). However, this irreverence is also symptomatic of the changing rhetoric of Spanish exile literature in the years after WWII: having lost hope for an expedient (and triumphal) return to Spain, the exiles were caught in a liminal state that was now seemingly indefinite, straddling full incorporation in Mexican society and longing for pre-exilic life. The use of humor in Otaola’s text, therefore, appears to be a sort of coping mechanism set against the melancholy of an increasingly uncertain and precarious Mexican exile.

In *La librería* Otaola does not miss any opportunity to poke-fun at the Republican exile community. For example, the text begins with the image of Arana determined to realize his goal of “conquering Mexico.” Here, though, the verb “to conquer” has a particular meaning, namely “conseguir el pan, sólo el pan concreto, el pan-pan y con ese pan sopar en sus sueños” (29). Arana’s precarious economic position does not lessen his idealistic pursuit, but he is often portrayed by the narrator as a someone who is both deserving of our adulation and of our pity. He, like the books he peddles each day, is the living embodiment of a nostalgic sorrow for the lost homeland that cannot be surmounted. Describing how the indefatigable Arana drags his mobile bookstore through the streets of Mexico City, Otaola writes: “Se le veía por esos ‘andenes’ de la emigración clamorosos de gritos españoles, refugios de impacientes viajeros que ya esperaban desde el primer día al tren del retorno que venía por la Vía Láctea, por esa cordillera de las nubes” (29). The illusion of a quick return to Spain has been replaced by the sarcastic representation of an idle people forever awaiting a miracle. The entrepreneurial Arana is presented as no less idealistic, a “conductor de vendavales literarios mezclados con vendavales ideológicos” (32).

This perpetual longing to return to the lost homeland that stifles productivity and prevents meaningful assimilation in the host nation is a common trope in exile literature and nearly all the characters who populate *La librería* suffer from this malaise. As Caren Kaplan has written, the “malady of homesickness that can never be cured without a return home is akin to melancholia. Freud’s distinction between mourning and melancholia, between a ‘normal’ period of grieving and a continuing, debilitating fixation on loss” (33). The exiles in Otaola’s text are caught in this melancholic cycle they must relive each day the Franco dictatorship endures. However, Otaola’s narration tends to be more lighthearted and jocular than bitter. The image of Arana “sufriendo y soñando,” “casi asesinado por el recuerdo” causes one to feel “algo parecido a una punzadura, a una punción nostálgica” (34). Yet perhaps it is through Otaola’s blithe representation of these sacred cows of Spanish exile that the process of mourning, of recovery from this melancholic past, can truly begin to take hold.

One comic example is the narrator’s description of the important literary magazine *Romance*¹ written and published by Spanish exiles in Mexico. The narrator, who

¹ *Romance* was one of the first literary magazines published by the exile community in Mexico (López García 3314). Publishing 24 volumes between 1940 and 1941, it counted among its contributors such luminaries as Enrique Díez-Canedo, Alfonso Reyes, José Herrera Petere, Benjamín Jarnés, Adolfo

does not have enough money to purchase the coveted complete set on sale in Arana's bookstore (which by now has moved to its permanent physical location) describes his encounter with the sacred object as an ecstatic, even sexual, experience.

Me atrae, y entre los dos, como dirán los publicistas de cine (yo entre ellos), ha nacido un *romance*. Ella se me muestra lúbrica, dócil a mostrarme la flor de su sexo. Yo me entrego apasionadamente y a hurtadillas trato de cazarle su estremecida intimidad. ¡Qué bien estaría en mi casa, cuidada, defendida contra la manaza soez! Temo, empero, que Arana me pida un Potosí por ella ¡y soy tan pobre! (69)

Nonetheless, the object of the narrator's desire and symbol of the exilic determination to preserve and disseminate Hispanic culture, is unceremoniously gifted to the Catalan journalist Juan Tomás who had only to ask Arana its price. "Llévesela. Se la regalo" he tells Tomás, much to the narrator's chagrin. Confessing that he had wanted to buy the magazine collection for three months, the narrator is surprised to learn Arana would have happily gifted him the edition, had he known. The aura of the exilic writings seems to have been washed away through Arana's reflexive gifting of the collection. Yet, its diminished value may simply be due to the lack of readers.

At the beginning of *La librería* the narrator reveals that Arana's "mejor cliente era casi siempre el milagro" (29). Indeed, in Otaola's book one of the principle causes of anguish for the characters (almost all of whom are writers) is this lack of a market for their literary productions. As Michael Ugarte has demonstrated: "buyers are ironically (and pathetically) the producers. The incestuous nature of the situation, its cultural isolation, the absence of an intellectually nourishing community outside the bookstore is the sad tale that the bookstore seems to be telling about itself through its owner" (84).

Despite this absence of a literary market, for the characters in Otaola's text the need to write is still represented as a vitally important task. With its extensive lists of the participants in the *tertulias*, the speeches in the Ateneo de México, and the members of Aquelarre, Ugarte has argued that *La librería* has a clear documentary function related to the activities of Spanish exile authors living in Mexico City. Yet conceivably this need to meticulously document their cultural activities for posterity is further evidence of the exiles' awareness of their sociocultural isolation within Mexico and their psychic distance from those compatriots still in Spain.

The exiled writers in Otaola's text are continuously and progressively limited by the shrinking horizons of their already narrow readership, a factor that Benedict Anderson has argued is fundamental to constructing an imagined national community. Even so, these publications seem to hold the key to understanding the exiles' alternative model of

Sánchez Vázquez, Juan Rejano, Pablo Neruda, Mariano Azuela, Luis Cernuda, María Zambrano, Octavio Paz, etc.

Spanish national identity set against Francoism. The narrator tells us that “[l]a Librería está impregnada de la sabiduría que se derrama de los libros que nunca se venden. Los inmortales vigilan de día y de noche ponen en orden la divina locura de los españoles desterrados” (42). It is the books themselves who are presented as the stewards of a Spanish nation in exile. However, given the irony of Otaola’s work, the reader is left to question how seriously such an enterprise is to be taken. Humor, once again, appears to be symptomatic of the changing relationship of the Spanish exile to the Mexican host nation. The stereotypes of the exiles’ easy integration in Mexico and their supposed monopoly over the right to define Spanish nationhood have given way to the frustrating realities of an uncertain return and the equally questionable importance of their activities so many years after defeat.

The Frustrated Exilic Project: Mexico according to Max Aub

Another development we see in Spanish exile literature is the writers’ changing relationship with the Mexican host nation. In the case of Max Aub Mohrenwitz (1903-1972), although he personally maintained a close bond with Mexican political and cultural elites (and became a Mexican citizen in 1955), many of his short stories from the 1950s and 60s portray Mexican and Spanish characters who do not understand each other very well or who have become frustrated by their cultural differences.

Aub was arguably the most prolific author of Spanish exile. Comically, in Otaola’s book, when Aub passes by Arana’s bookstore the narrator describes him as someone who “[e]scribe sin cesar, a chorro suelto, como el que mea” (46). Another character jokingly claimed that “Yo recibo todas las mañanas el diario 'Excelsior' y el nuevo libro de Max Aub” (49). Aub wrote tirelessly for and about Spain, and the Civil War and the exiles’ longing to return are constant themes in his texts. Yet, for all his productivity, Aub too was always in search of a wider audience or, as he pondered in the “Páginas azules” of his 1968 *Campo de los almendros*, perhaps even any reader at all.

Indeed, like the characters in *La librería*, this lack of readership deeply troubled Aub throughout his exile. His personal diaries and fiction regularly lament his isolation from both peninsular and Mexican readers, whether due to censure in Francoist Spain or general disinterest in Mexico where his works –always centered on Spain and the Civil War– were deemed too esoteric to appeal to a Mexican audience (Faber 219-220). When Aub did finally visit Spain in 1969 under the pretext of conducting an investigation for his commissioned work on filmmaker Luis Buñuel, his disappointment to learn that he was virtually unknown in Spain (despite the publication of several of his works there) could hardly have been greater. As Aub remarked in his September 29, 1969 diary entry posthumously published in *La gallina ciega*: “Lloras sobre ti mismo. Sobre tu propio entierro, sobre la ignorancia en que están todos de tu obra mostrenca, que no tiene casa ni hogar ni señor ni amo conocido, ignorante y torpe... Vete” (311).

Although Aub had already anticipated such disappointment in his fictional works, such as the three plays he entitled *La vuelta* (1948, 1960, and 1964), the confirmation of his erasure in Francoist Spain was devastating for the exiled author. As Manuel Aznar Soler comments:

Para el escritor exiliado una de las revelaciones más dolorosas de aquellos días y noches españoles fue, sin duda, la constatación del desconocimiento y del olvido no sólo de la literatura exiliada en general, sino también de su propia obra en particular. Por ejemplo, al hablar con unos poetas jóvenes anota que «jamás oyeron el santo de mi apellido» y ese olvido, esa desmemoria, significan, tras la de 1939, la segunda Victoria de la dictadura franquista sobre el exilio republicano, acaso aún más dura y dolorosa (13).

Iker González-Allende likewise argues convincingly that Aub's descriptions of his return to Spain, both in his fictional texts and as described in *La gallina ciega*, are ultimately unsuccessful attempts to recover "la masculinidad perdida en el exilio y completar su sentido de indentidad" (122). Indeed, for González-Allende the erasure of exile writers such as Max Aub and Francisco Ayala from the Spanish literary scene, coupled with the inability of these writers to accurately recognize the lost homeland when they do return, means that this lost masculinity is effectively unrecoverable. "En definitiva, el regreso a España resulta imposible para los exiliados, que vagan como fantasmas" (148). Aub, who like so many had been obsessed with returning to Spain since his 1939 exile, would never recover from this perceived failure of the Spanish exile project that had always hinged on the exiles' ability to provide meaningful alternatives to Francoist historiography and its representations of Spanish national identity.

When Aub crossed the border from Spain into France in 1939 he believed that authentic Spain had left the Iberian Peninsula with the exiles. In a 1942 poem composed in the Djelfa concentration camp in Algeria, for example, Aub wrote "¡Extranjeros, vosotros / que dormís en nuestras camas! / ¡Españoles nosotros, / polvo y tierra de España, / extranjeros en las arenas del Sahara!" (18). His monumental *Laberinto mágico*, and indeed much of his literary output in general, would again and again retrace this double-sided loss: the exiles' loss of home, and Spain's loss of its compass and authenticity through the exiles. Even so, in the short stories that deal directly with Mexico as location of exile, Aub's fading hopes to challenge Francoism from the Americas is evident.

In his 1959 collection of short stories entitled *Cuentos mexicanos (con Pilon)* we see how the aura of the Mexican Revolution that had been so instrumental in representing the continuity and productivity of Spanish exile has weakened dramatically since the exiles' arrival in 1939 (or, in Aub's case, 1942). Two short stories, "Homenaje a Próspero Merimée" set in Zacatecas during the Porfirio Díaz dictatorship, and "Memo Tel," set during the 1910-1920 Mexican Revolution, are realistic portraits of class-conflict between Mexican *hacendados* and *colonos* where, more than idealistic rhetoric, they are moved by

human passions and emotions. For example, in “Homenaje” Luz Elena Zamudio sustains:

Los protagonistas rechazan el gobierno de Díaz y se enrolan en la bola como una salida desesperada a su situación económica y política inaguantables; sin embargo, esto tampoco va a solucionarles su problemática. No se consigue el mejoramiento social y económico esperado, entre otras causas por el abuso de los dirigentes revolucionarios y por la ignorancia e inconsciencia de los que participan del movimiento. Aub confirma que “la ligazón entre los hombres –la política ante todo— es hija exclusiva del interés” (371).

Here the fetishized representation of Mexico as the perfect embodiment of the (no less idealized) ideologies of the Spanish Second Republic has been displaced by a more nuanced understanding of Mexican society. As Juan Carlos Hernández Cuevas demonstrates, these stories are remarkable because they reveal Aub’s intimate knowledge of Mexican literature and history. Similarly, Javier Sánchez Zapatero sustains that “Aub fue uno de los pocos autores desplazados capaz de trascender los límites de la nueva sociedad en la que se vio obligado a vivir para poder escribir sobre ella” (4). However, in a narrative universe where characters are moved by self-interest and passion, the providential vision of Mexico that had nourished exile texts in the first years after the Civil War was clearly no longer possible.

In Aub’s 1960 collection *La verdadera historia de la muerte de Francisco Franco y otros cuentos*, the titular story is about a Mexican waiter who grows so tired of hearing the same old story of Spain and the Civil War told by his Spanish exile customers that he decides to kill Franco himself, just to change the subject (and the clients). Here we are certainly a long way from the Panhispanic solidarity and the transplanted integration of the exiles envisioned by writers such as Pedro Garfias, León Felipe, and Juan Rejano, all of whom appear as characters in Aub’s story. Likewise, in “La verdadera historia” the goal of Spanish Republican unity in Mexico has clearly failed in the face of the indefinite exile.

Los españoles --como de costumbre, decía don Medardo-- lo revolvieron todo con sus partidos y subdivisiones sutiles que sólo el tiempo se encargó de aclarar en la mente nada obtusa, para estos matices, del mesero sonoreño; por ejemplo: de cómo un socialista partidario de Negrín no podía hablar sino mal de otro socialista, si era largocaballerista o «de Prieto», ni dirigirle la palabra, a menos que fuesen de la misma provincia; de cómo un anarquista de cierta fracción podía tomar café con un federal, pero no con un anarquista de otro grupo y jamás --desde luego-- con un socialista, fuera partidario de quién fuera, de la región que fuese (414).

In fact, in Aub's story the one thing that the Spaniards could agree on was "hablar sólo del pasado, con un acento duro, hiriente, que trastornaba" (414). There had been no continuation of Spanish enterprise in Mexico, only the bitter nostalgia of perpetual waiting.

In another story, "Homenaje a Lázaro Valdés," Aub further undermines the discourse of the special relationship between Mexico and Spain that purportedly allowed the exiled Spaniard to maintain a close connection to his former identity. For the protagonist Lázaro Valdés, a Spanish geography teacher exiled in Veracruz, Mexico, Spanish nationality is not reducible to cultural artifacts or ideology. Rather, for him the development of national identity is related to presence and one's physical contact with the land, and is therefore impossible to recreate in a place where the immutable voices of the stones, rivers, and mountains of Spain cannot be heard.

This idea is illustrated in a letter that Valdés writes for his student and godson Marcos on his twenty-first birthday in 1947. Valdés accuses Marcos and the younger generation of exiles, the so-called "cachorros," of speaking "de España, de reconquistarla, y no [...] [tener] ni idea de cómo es" (442). For Valdés, neither literature ("[l]os libros no son más que un reflejo de las piedras") nor memory ("espejismo y falsedad") can reconstruct the lost home (444). He urges Marcos, who left Spain as a child, to replace those photographs and hazy memories with the firsthand knowledge of the country he and others left behind because "sin las piedras los hombres no tienen patria. Son las piedras y los ríos los auténticos padres de los hombres, sus progenitores" (443) and, Valdés cautions: "aunque tarden más que los hombres [...] olvidan más hondo, cuando se quedan solas. Y si las destierran al cabo de los siglos, ya no sabemos lo que quieren decir" (443).

For the geography teacher, Spanish identity is telluric and therefore defined by the relationship of its people to the land, and the rituals and traditions developed there. His is an organic model of national identity,² defined by Anthony Smith as "the oldest paradigm of nations and nationalisms" (146). An ideology first expressed by German Romantics, organic nationalism views nations as the natural expressions of inherent and easily distinguishable cultural attributes. These cultural idiosyncrasies are seen to be of a timeless nature, mythically consolidated in prehistory, and continually reproduced in the traditions and lifestyles of the common people.³ In Aub's story, Valdés believes that such transmission of values and culture was only fully possible when rooted in the Spanish soil;

² This idea has been much criticized since the early 1960s with the popularization of Modernist theories of national development that, in my opinion correctly, views the nation as a recent and contingent phenomenon arising from the needs and convulsions of modernization. See Gellner, Hobsbawm, and Anderson.

³ These "common people" are often referred to as *volk* in German or *pueblo* in Spanish. In the context of Spain, this cultural continuity was perhaps best defined by Miguel de Unamuno through his concept of *intrahistoria*. Unamuno argues that a certain traditional way of life forms the permanent background of a people and that this is the basis of a national identity that persists throughout the *longue durée*, regardless of historical fluctuations.

from abroad, it could only ever be imperfectly replicated through photographs and nostalgic remembrance. For Valdés, the authenticity of Spanish nationality in Mexico is at best incomplete. At worst, it may be a farcical parody wherein the post-memory assertions of Spain's exiled children compete with or even supplant the truth.

Even so, there appears to be a certain hypocrisy in Valdés's assertion that is revealed by the letter he penned to Alfonso Reyes a few years later. Entitled "Ejercicio retórico contra la juventud" (445), Valdés's letter extolls the virtues of maturity and sober reflection over youthful vigor. Maturity is the "enemiga de la violencia" (446), and "la cordura y la prudencia" (447). Mexico, for Valdés, had always been nothing more than "estación de paso" (441), and, repeating the typical mantra of the exiles --"[c]uando Franco se muera" (441)--, Valdés dreamed of one day returning home. However, Valdés has no interest in reconquering Spain by force and has resigned himself to a comfortable retirement in Mexico, where he recognizes that he enjoys certain comforts that he did not have in Spain. The reference point of Spain and the life Valdés had lived there, his political ideology as a "republicano, no mucho, pero republicano" (440), has become displaced in his Mexican exile. The hope for a speedy return to the Iberian Peninsula too has disappeared in the realpolitik context of the Cold War. Whereas Valdés attacks the naiveté of the younger generation whose only reference to Spain was the post-memory reconstructions they had digested at home at school,⁴ his own position is based on the acceptance of perpetual exile.

Like his biblical homonym, Lázaro Valdés has perhaps escaped death through exile, however his rebirth in the relatively comfortable environment of Mexico has led to a depoliticized nostalgia for his birth county. Seeing Spain with "ojos nuevos, no con aquellos que dejaste allí" (444), Valdés values tolerance and patience in his old age, reconciled to live out his days in Veracruz. When he dies at 71 years old Valdés becomes forever part of his new landscape, his position there defined simply but exactly by the coordinates of "cementerio nuevo de Veracruz, lote H, tercera fila, número 24" (448). He, like so many of the exiles who left in 1939, had been outlived by the fascist regime.

Lastly, the story "De cómo Julián Calvo se arruinó por segunda vez" from *Cuentos mexicanos* addresses themes of colonialist arrogance and economic exploitation by the Republican exile community in Mexico, worries frequently cited by opponents of the Cárdenas immigration policy. Indeed, Spanish exiles were often criticized by Mexicans from both sides of the political spectrum: for conservatives they were the Red horde whose political beliefs would have a harmful effect on Mexican society; for progressives, though, who had begun to revalue the contributions of the indigenous population as part of a new nationalist discourse, the exiles were indelibly linked to the exploitative past of colonialism. In Aub's 1959 short story, these stereotypes have displaced the idealized

⁴ Indeed, we can surmise from the list of schools Valdés had worked at ("the "Liceo Mexicano Español," the "Liceo Español Mexico," the "Colegio Hispano Mexicano," the "Escuela Mexicana Española," and the "Hispano Azteca") that Marcos and other students had been steeped in Spanish culture and lore of the Civil War.

myth of the beneficial (or, at the very least, benign) political refugee who had come to Mexico seeking temporary asylum. Moreover, Aub shows how cultural differences, rather than Panhispanic similarities, define the relationship of the exile to Mexican society.

The story centers on the acquisition of a new printing press for protagonist Julián Calvo's publishing house. Significantly, it is made clear that the loan "sin fiador" for this new machinery was only acquired from the Wright Paper Co. "porque era español" (47). The implication being, of course, that a Mexican entrepreneur would not have been able to find an investor. Furthermore, Calvo has little respect for his Mexican employees or their traditions. When a fellow Spaniard accuses Calvo during a *tertulia* of wanting to "arrear en contra de su voluntad" his employees, Calvo responds that it is "la única manera" (47). Calvo cannot understand how religion and the local customs of his Mexican subordinates can be reconciled with their membership in the trade union, and much less why he should allow the local priest to bless the new machinery, a rite that his employees adamantly want because "it's tradition." Indeed, Calvo is presented as so intransigent that an exiled compatriot asks him "¿qué diferencia con Franco?" (49).⁵

In earlier texts written by exiles coming to Mexico there was a concerted effort to distance themselves from the exploitative *gachupín* colony that arrived "para hacer las Américas": namely, to strike it rich and then return to Spain. For example, in an article entitled "Cataluña en el exilio" published in the onboard diary of the *Sinaia*, a ship financed by the Republican government to transport exiles from France to Mexico in 1939, we read:

Pero ¡cuidado! nos acecha a todos un peligro. En México hallaremos muchos individuos a los que en modo alguno debemos considerar como compatriotas. Son los "gachupines", los insaciables explotadores de los trabajadores indígenas, los que mejor representan en el país la tiranía fascista que hoy domina en nuestra tierra. Esos hombres serán, desde el momento mismo de nuestra llegada, unos enemigos peligrosos y tenaces. Conviene prevenirse contra ellos. El pueblo laborioso de México, que los odia, sabe que no existe la menor afinidad entre nosotros y esos miserables que hace ya muchos años perdieron su nacionalidad (111).

Interestingly, here the *gachupín* is not even considered to be Spanish by the Republican exile. Their separation from the cultural ideology of the émigrés (and oftentimes their overt sympathies for Francoism), and their exploitation of Mexican labor and resources that caused suspicions about the arrival of the refugees, motivated Republican exiles to view this expatriate colony as the anti-patria, and their enemy.⁶ However, despite this

⁵ Curiously, this part was omitted from the collection *Enero sin nombre*.

⁶ For example, Paulino Masip in *Cartas a un español emigrado* remarked: "Eres emigrado, pero no te pareces en nada a los muchos compatriotas que te han precedido. Llevas encima un adjetivo que te da color y significación singulares. Eres emigrado político" (8).

warning in the *Sinaia* diary, it should be noted that arriving Spanish exiles often did receive some support from the Spanish colony in Mexico. As Alted Vigil describes: “aunque conservadores, les tendieron la mano por el hecho de ser compatriotas: hubo también aquellos que manifestaron sus simpatías y apoyo por afinidad ideológica con la causa de la República” (240).

Here, though, Julián Calvo appears to closely fit that description of the *gachupín* that the writers above had cautioned the exiles to avoid. He cares little for his workers, and though his printing business is clearly related to the exile preoccupation of defending and disseminating Spanish culture, his motivations are above all financial. As his Anarchist compatriot explains “yo vivo con mis trabajadores y tú sólo los ves en el taller a la hora de la raya y echas rayos y centellas si faltan los lunes [...] Al fin y al cabo lo que te importa es que trabajen para que puedas cumplir y ganar dinero” (51). When the narrator refers to the jobs that Calvo had scheduled, there is no reference to the titles or content of the works, but rather the number of copies his clients ordered and the profit that this would entail. At the end of the story, too, we learn that Calvo has dedicated himself to selling patent medicines, an industry long associated with exploitation and deception. This career suits Calvo quite well, though: “Le va bastante bien. Tiene coche, piensa comprar una casa en Cuernavaca” (53).

Although Calvo had spent more than 15 years living in Mexico the narrator informs us that he was still “valenciano y comunista,” refusing to adapt to Mexican habits or cuisine. Indeed, he is quite critical of the food, chastising his friend: “Tú comes tortillas y chile, y frijoles y esa porquería que llaman barbacoa y bebes pulque, que ya es el colmo. Pero yo no” (50). He has little understanding of Mexican culture, and even less desire to do so. However, Calvo’s refusals to adapt to the idiosyncrasies of his host nation ultimately lead to his downfall. By rejecting the wishes of his employees to have the local priest bless the new machinery and to place an altar to the Virgen de Guadalupe, Calvo reveals a scornful arrogance that illustrates the limitations of a facile Panhispanic unity. Calvo admonishes his employees, scornfully asking “¿No les da a ustedes vergüenza o pena, como dicen, de creer todavía en esas cosas?” (48). However, after this, Calvo’s employees and even the machinery refuse to work for him any longer, ruining him for a second time. The first time, of course—as the narrator states matter-of-factly at the end of the story—happened when Calvo fled Spain after Franco’s victory.

While there are other characters in Aub’s short story who have embraced life in Mexico—the Anarchist, for example, who lives with his Mexican workers and who tells Calvo that Mexico “es un país estupedo” (51)—Calvo still clings to his pre-exilic identity and political ideology. That is why he cannot conceive of a world where the Church has a more cultural than political importance, nor can he understand the ways in which his workers relate Catholicism to indigenous beliefs and customs. For Calvo the Church is synonymous with Francoism and the 1936 insurrection. Calvo’s arrogance, moreover, is closely connected to the imperialist discourses of civilization and barbarism made popular in nineteenth century writings about the Americas. He is confident in the moral and

technological superiority of Europe, and quickly dismisses any part of Mexican life that conflicts with his own closed worldview. Whereas earlier writers such as Paulino Masip wrote about the commonalities between the Spaniard and the Mexican that would allow for the continuity of Republican Spain in exile,⁷ in Aub's 1959 story there are only differences and separation.

Conclusions

As we have seen, shortly after World War II ended leaving the Franco dictatorship intact Spanish exiles were forced to come to terms with some difficult truths about their place and roles within Mexican society. Simón Otaola's representations of life in 1950s Mexico City in *La librería*, show how earlier claims to represent the only authentic version of Spanish nationality were limited by dwindling readership and the exiles' isolation from both their Mexican counterparts and peninsular Spaniards. In *Cuentos mexicanos* and *La verdadera historia* Max Aub interrogates certain foundational myths of Spanish exile in Mexico, such as the representation of Mexico as a political utopia or the belief that the exiled Spaniard could easily incorporate himself into Mexican society while maintaining a strong connection to his Spanish roots. In both cases, the optimism and solemnity of the exilic project that characterized the tone of early exile texts have been replaced by the cynical humor of writers questioning their roles as public intellectuals.

A central motif in Republican exile texts has always been fear of erasure from Spanish memory, and the exiles' frenetic literary activity –apart from the goal of preserving and continuing the Spanish cultural patrimony from abroad– served as testimonial against this willful forgetfulness. Spain, the technological and ideological antechamber of World War II that had captivated the attention of the world leaders, artists, and intellectuals, quickly became marginalized following the Republican defeat of 1939. While exiled authors and artists enjoying relative freedom of expression beyond the sanitizing reach of Francoist censorship produced an extraordinary body of work far outpacing their peninsular compatriots, these texts ultimately had little resonance outside the circles of exile communities. As Francisco Caudet describes this paradoxical situation:

si bien los escritores exiliados pretendían dirigirse a su base social y a la de los países que les dieron albergue, y a la vez mantenían la ilusión de estar

⁷ Masip writes: “no somos, como los emigrados de otras razas, árboles trasplantados que solo vivirán el tiempo que les dure la savia que traen en las venas porque no podrán arraigar jamás y, si lo consiguen, será a costa de una acomodación tan lenta, difícil e insuficiente que no darán sino frutos agrios, toscos, miserables. Nosotros no; nosotros, árboles trasplantados también, traemos nuestras ramas pobladas de flor y nuestras raíces íntegras ávidas de jugos americanos por la seguridad maravillosa de que las flores nacidas en España no padecerán, antes acaso ganen, con el cambio de clima y suelo, y de que sus frutos serán perfectos” (68).

haciendo una obra de creación que en un futuro inmediato habría de integrarse en el legado cultural de España, lo cierto es que esa base social no era culturalmente la más idónea: los países donde estaban desterrados, incluso cuando se hablaba el mismo idioma, pronto hicieron oídos sordos a la cantinela de la patria perdida. Mientras, España, cerrada a cal y canto hasta mediados de la década de los cincuenta, solamente vio a los exiliados como un punto de referencia, nunca decisivo ni en el campo de la cultura ni en el de la política. Y, sin embargo, la producción literaria de los exiliados llegó a alcanzar un nivel altísimo (38).

In the context of the Cold War, western powers had, perhaps a bit begrudgingly, accepted Francoism as an ally in the fight against Communism. Mexico as host nation had grown weary of the exiles' lamentations and, as Aub himself had occasion to confirm, Spain had not been left a hollow shell: it had moved on, and these alternative constructions of Spanish identity put forth by the exile community had long since fallen on deaf ears, both in the Americas and in Spain. And yet, despite all this, so much of what the exiles wrote was directly related to defending their ideas of the authentic Spanish nation. The question remains, however: if one writes the nation and no one reads it, is it really a nation?

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