

Viñas, Ángel (Ed.)

*En el combate por la historia: la República,
la guerra civil, el franquismo*

(In the fight for history: *the Republic,
the Civil War, and Francoism*)

Jaime Valim Mansan*

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In the middle of 2011 there appeared in Spain the first 25 volumes of *Diccionario Biográfico Español*, a project intended to have fifty volumes, each with 850 pages. Until the present day 36 volumes have been completed. According to the site of *Real Academia de la Historia* (RAH), the organizer of the work, included in the work will be more than 40,000 “important persons in all aspects of human development and in all epochs of Spanish history.” To enable its publication, the Spanish public treasury has already paid 6.4 million de Euros (*El país*, 27 May 2011). By way of comparison, the cost of the construction of a public housing estate with one hundred homes is estimated to be three million Euros, aimed at the residents made homeless at the beginning of October 2012 in *El Gallinero*, the poorest part of the one of the biggest *poblados chabolistas* in Spain, on the periphery of Madrid (*20 minutos*, 9 Oct. 2012).

The *Diccionario* thus has a very high cost, especially taking into account the economic scenario which the country has been undergoing in recent years. At the very least it should have had a content of the uttermost quality. However, the work has been the target of severe criticisms from various social segments. A little after the launch one of the principal questions referred to in the press was the absence of references to the Francoist repression (*Público*, 28 May 2011). This and the description of the civil war as a *crusade* or *war of liberation*, amongst other aspects, are strong aspects of the relevance of the criticisms of the dictionary (*Público*, 2 June 2011).

* Doctoral Candidate in History with a grant from CAPES. Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio Grande do Sul (PUCRS). Av. Ipiranga, 6681, Partenon. 90619-900 Porto Alegre – RS – Brasil. jaimemansan@gmail.com

In the middle of 2011 the Senate asked RAH to halt distribution while Congress debated the freezing of the funds for the academy until the dictionary was corrected, a situation later reversed by the government (*El País*, 12 July 2011). Since then there has been considerable discussion of the polemical work, which counts on the total support of the Spanish prime minister Mariano Rajoy and his party, the conservative *Partido Popular*.

In academia the most notable reaction was the publication of *En el combate por la historia* at the beginning of 2012. Organized by Ángel Viñas, a renowned Spanish historian specialized in studies of the Civil War and Francoism, this book was prepared with the assumed intention of being a *counter-dictionary*. It is this, but it adopts another narrative form and restricts its analysis to the period 1931-1975, while the *Diccionario* ambitiously sought to cover the third century BC to the current day. In the opinion of the authors of *En el combate*, the majority of the biographies most *disfigured* by the RAH work were connected with the period between the emergence of the Second Republic and the death of Franco, thus the choice of the temporal focus.

A collective work, *En el combate por la historia* counts on the participation of various specialists in the study of those periods of Spanish history. As Viñas writes in the presentation, using the well-known Spanish phrase, “*si bien no están todos los que son, sí son todos los que están*” (although not all are here, they are all that are). Internationally known names, such as Josep Fontana, Julio Aróstegui, Paul Preston, Julián Casanova and Viñas himself, amongst others, as well as young researchers who works have already achieved recognition among European researchers from the area. This is the case, for example, of Gutmaro Gómez Bravo and Jorge Marco. Some of their books, such as *El exilio interior* by Gómez Bravo, and *Hijos de una Guerra* by Marco are now obligatory references about Francoism.¹

With a title which makes a clear reference to Lucien Febvre’s classic, *En el combate por la historia* starts with a presentation by Viñas explaining the meaning of the work and the conditions of its production. Following this there is a text by José-Carlos Mainer, a historian specialized in “*edad de plata de la literatura española*”. Concerned with a long duration, he offers a reflection about ruptures and continuities in the relations between culture and politics in twentieth century Spain.

The book was organized in four parts. Three of these are indicated in the subtitle: Republic, civil war, and Francoism.

The first text about the Republic is the key to understanding it. In this Preston looks at the transformation in the relations of force established in that period. The following chapters deepen the analysis of the principal groups involved in those conflict relations: Popular Front, rights, socialists and anarchists. Robledo deals with agrarian reform, “one of the keys to the identity of the new regime.”

The second part of the work, concerned with the civil war, has the largest number of chapters (twenty). It covers themes such as the 1936 military uprising, the actions of the International Brigades and the Catholic Church, and the Republican exiles, amongst others. The summaries of the activities of the Franciost army and the Popular Army by Losada and Rojo respectively stand out. Aróstegui and Casanova return to the analysis of socialism and anarchism, themes dealt with in the first part of the book, while Hernández Sánchez produces similar reflections about the communists.

The third set of texts analyzes Francoism. Sánchez Recio’s discussion is fundamentally based on the regime’s institutionalization process. Various other questions are looked at: national-Catholicism, the Falange, repressive policies, foreign policy, support for the *Blue Division* and the Nazi struggle against the Soviets, armed resistance to Francoism, economic transformations, and *desarrollismo*. Isàs’ reflections on late-Francoism (*tardofranquismo*) shed valuable light on the history of the transition.

The fourth part, “*Los grandes actores*,” is the point in which the proposal of being a *counter-dictionary* is most evident. “A counterpoint to the Spanish Dictionary of Biography,” in the words of Viñas. Once again the organizer refers to the previously cited Spanish proverb, this time to clarify the criteria for the selection of thirteen *important actors*: José Antonio Aguirre Lekube, the legendary Basque leader; Manuel Azaña, Republican leader, president of the Republic from 1936 to 1939; Ramón Serrano Suñer, Falangist, Franco’s brother-in-law, a leading figure on the right from the Republic to the first form of Francoism and the principal interlocutor with Hitler and Mussolini until 1942; Lluís Companys i Jover, an important Catalan leader; Dolores Ibárruri (*Pasionaria*) and Santiago Carrillo, two of the greatest names in Spanish communism; Francisco Largo Caballero, a socialist leader linked to

the UGT union organization (*Unión General de Trabajadores*) and the *Partido Obrero* (afterwards PSOE, *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* – *Spanish Socialist Workers' Party*) since the end of the nineteenth century; Emilio Morál, a military conspirator who, according to Losada, was “the great weaver, creator and organizer” of the failed 1936 coup; Juan Negrín, an important socialist leader, head of the government of the Republic during most of the civil war and an extremely controversial figure, expelled from the PSOE in 1946 under the unjust accusation of having been “the instrument of Stalin in Spain”; Indalecio Prieto, another weighty name in Spanish socialism; Vicente Rojo Lluç, a republican soldier who led the defense of Madrid during the Civil War; José Antonio Primo de Rivera, one of the founders of *Falange Española*, son of the general who had been dictator between 1923 and 1930; and, of course, Francisco Franco, whose trajectory is expertly summarized by Preston.

The chapter about Rojo, written by a grandson of the general, the sociologist and journalist José Andrés Rojo, is an exception among the texts in the book, not because of the author's profession, but because of his family connection. The choice of José Rojo was probably due not to their relationship, but because he had published several studies on the question since 1974, particularly *Vicente Rojo: retrato de um general republicano* (Barcelona: Tusquets, 2006). This can be questioned to the extent that writing about his own grandfather could lead to a lessening of criticism and an emphasis on praise. The reading of the biographic notes made about General Rojo show that his grandson managed to avoid these traps.

Closing the book is an epilogue consisting of one text by Reig Tapia and another by him and Viñas, both concerned with the permanencies, for the ‘residues’ and ‘derivations’ of Francismo.

As Viñas notes, the book privileges “political, institutional, cultural and military aspects.” It involves the building of a counter-dictionary and, for the authors, in these aspects “public controversies are much intense and many of the entries in the RAH dictionaries are erroneous or biased.”

Among historians, defining a work as ‘revisionist’ is a form of disqualifying it. While there are abuses in the use of the term, this does not mean that it should be abandoned. It can be argued that since revision is inherent to the trade of the historian, all history is revisionist. The error here is defining

revisionism by revision, pure and simples. Revisionism is a *type* of revision, that which is done without consistent documentary foundations, without taking into account basic historiographical principles, choosing studies and sources convenient for an argument and disconsidering all others. Revisionism is a falsifier of history. Faurisson is one of its best known representatives and the RAH, from what it seems, is the most recent example of this literature.

En el combate por la historia emerges as a demonstration of how it is possible to confront revisionisms in a consistent manner, with solid arguments and ample documentation. Its authors are examples of what Bedáridá defined as ‘expert historians,’ a type of professional as rare as necessary these days.

NOTES

¹ The complete list of the authors is: ARÓSTEGUI, Julio; BARCIELA, Carlos; CASANOVA, Julián; COLLADO SEIDEL, Carlos; EIROA, Matilde; ELORZA, Antonio; ESPINOSA, Francisco; FONTANA LÁZARO, Josep; GALLEGO, Ferran; GÓMES BRAVO, Gutmato; GONZÁLEZ CALLEJA, Eduardo; HERNÁNDEZ SÁNCHEZ, Fernando; LEDESMA, José Luis; LOSADA MALVARÉZ, Juan Carlos; MAINER, José-Carlos; MARCO, Jorge; MARTÍN, José Luis; MEES, Ludger; MIRALLES, Ricardo; MORADIELLOS, Enrique; MORENO JULIÀ, Xavier; PEREIRA, Juan Carlos; PRESTON, Paul; PUELL DE LA VILLA, Fernando; PUIGSECH FARRÀS, Josep; RAGUER I SUÑER, Hilari; REIG TAPIA, Alberto; ROBLEDO, Ricardo; ROJO, José Andrés; SÁNCHEZ CERVELLÓ, Josep; SÁNCHEZ RECIO, Glicerio; THOMÀS, Joan Maria; VIÑAS, Ángel, and YSÀS, Pere.

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