

Martin Krämer

## **Open Trenches – revisiting the internationalist legacy of Republican Spain and related struggles for emancipation in Europe and Latin America: recent publications**

Sixty years may appear to be a large gap in time considering the individual human memory. We could assume that such a gap might allow access to history from many perspectives. One possible perspective, alternative to neoliberal positivism, is a line of thinking which maintains that another world has been possible, one quite different from the modern dominance of capitalist states. This paper will examine in how far it can provide an instructive view of history for the case of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Spanish Republic, 1931-1939, and the continuation of its major commitments in Europe and Latin America: popular education, women's liberation and workers' emancipation.

Just consider that it took 60 years for the prosperous heirs of German industry, after taking over affairs from their fascist founding fathers, to finally account for their role in World War II in the specific question of paying overdue wages to their forced migrant workers. Unfortunately, not even such hegemonic "reconciliation" can be observed in Spain. The curious reluctance of the Spanish debate to show considerable signs of ageing motivates a deeper look. For as both Karl Marx and Oscar Wilde argued convincingly, it is the exposure of ideas on the tightrope, a result of polarisation and contradiction, which might bring about what the capitalist order has come to fundamentally deny everyone of us: qualitative progress.

### **I**

Let us start from the current Spanish conflicts (M. Raquena Gallego and R. M. Sepúlveda Losa (eds.), *Las Brigadas* 2003). Undoubtedly, when the centre left neoliberal party PSOE was still in power in the 1990s, they showed some good will towards foreign opponents of the Spanish monarchy in a couple of media events. In 1996, veterans of the Republican side from all over the world came to Spain to celebrate the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of the International Brigades. Some of them attended an international history workshop in Alicante, the Brigades' former headquarters. Making false compromise the order of the day, foreign survivors of the Republican army were granted honorary citizenship by the monarchy on this occasion (p. 211). When the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary and thus a 2<sup>nd</sup> international workshop was due, the monarchical government had

changed back to the postfascist PP-nomenclature and political polarisation once again took centre stage. The Second International Workshop of Alicante is now minutely documented in the edition cited above.

Its organisers explicitly asked all Spanish political parties for a contribution. The responses were hardly a highlight for the publication. Nevertheless, they have an unquestionable documentary value. More than one full-flight politician seems to be reverently adept at historiographic and historicist works. Or, to be more cautious, at least their ghostwriters seem to spend their scarce spare time devouring cheap reading about how it all truly happened so representatively. Take for example Joaquín Leguina representing PSOE, a member of the “Socialist International”. Not that he cared to appear personally on the conference stage. But he did care to proliferate a pamphlet among the veterans and historians present where he lengthily explains the historical importance of the battle of the Ebro, just in case someone present at the expert workshop might not yet have heard about it (pp. 200-208).

His partner to the left in the Spanish parliament, Gaspar Llamazares (IU), did appear in person. However, and in contrast to the absent main opposition representative, he did not care to “undress his white gloves”. Instead, with the professional boredom of a maître-de-plaisir, he reported to the audience about different discourses and supposed master narratives. Preparing his sermon, he – or his ghostwriter – must have got hold of a compilation by one of those idle discourse historians among the crisis profiteers of the 90s. For this brand of post-modern historians, a so-called “change in paradigms” was a sufficient pretext to exclusively handling discourses about discourses, keeping a safe distance from any historical sources, which might mar their feeling of superiority. However, the ultimate achievement in cavalier approaches to history can be credited to the Basque Nationalist Anasagasti (PNV), who had somehow stumbled over the idea to declare Guernica a mere preparation for September 11<sup>th</sup>. Lacking knowledge and respect for the victims, he desperately tried to suck political capital out of this latest invention of his, confounding an empire and its victims with professional incompetence. Just in case we took heed to Plato and left politics to philosophers, I would sincerely urge all readers to consider whether politicians possess the requisite talents in writing our history.

However, the strongest contribution of political professionalism in the conference reader is definitely the one from the then ruling PP. For, to be precise, there is none. A foreign reader might marvel at such circumstances. However, the scenario is all too familiar in Spain. In December 2003, on the eve of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the constitution, republican veterans who had been invited to assist a commemorative session in parliament saw the ruling fraction walk out just as the Republican guests were finally allowed to walk in. PP thus proves faithful to its tradition. Already in 1978 its institutional predecessor had voted against the constitutional end to Francist dictatorship. The point was finally driven home in the Australian tennis championship in Melbourne that very month. After the Spanish representation lost the tournament, the organisers – safely down-under the protection of the British Queen – dared to play the hymn of the Spanish republic instead of the monarchy, adding insult to injury. The double humiliation was enough to produce a veritable crisis in international relations with the 5<sup>th</sup> continent.

The editors of the conference reader seem to be well aware of the political tensions arising out of their work with memory and testimony of the Spanish Civil War. Subsequently, they did not refrain from re-accentuating this very aspect in the aftermath of the conference itself.

The written proceedings are dedicated to the memory of Harry Fisher (1911-2003), a US-citizen of the Abraham-Lincoln brigade originating from a deprived Polish-Jewish background. His biography (p. 209-214) and especially the testimony on his second socialisation in a family of Spanish agricultural workers during the Civil War (p. 186f) thus became the gravitation centre of the whole book. Throughout his life, Harry Fisher was, as he liked to put it himself, a communist with a small “c”. Though never joining the party, he worked in the New York Soviet TASS-dependency for 40 years of his life. He rejected Stalinist practices as well as a rather late recognition of his personal achievements by the Gorbachov administration: neither represented the kind of Socialism he had risked his life for in the Spanish slaughterhouse. In spring 2003, he died in a demonstration against the Bush assault on Iraq.

The Spanish editors, in contrast to the then governing party, reveal their consciousness of living in a country where 85% of the population openly reject the latest attack on Iraq. Thus, the conference organisers sensibly put the emphasis of their documentation on personal testimony of veterans. This includes woman veterans as a matter of course. Thus with the contribution of women like Lise London (pp. 174-183) they managed to rebalance an old gender bias in the objective representation of military history. Equally, they tackled a rising problem linked to elapsing biological contingency. The number of the surviving international protagonists of Republican Spain is decreasing every year and the days of the collective living memory are numbered.

Remarkably though, thanks to the methodological and stylistic brilliance radiating from the contribution of Tony L. Geist the reader can see a pattern of testimonial literature of the second generation. In his contribution, called “The North American Brigadists and the Experience of Seattle” (pp. 133-142), he has employed the refined practice of Anglo-Saxon scientific precision and modesty to combine structural social analysis and personal testimony to a piece of uniquely thick, concerned description. This methodological clarity shows up unflinchingly, when Geist asks, for instance why a significant segment of US-brigadists originates from families without a father, including Harry Fisher himself. His proposed answer avoids any psychological speculation. Clearly, the fatherless family is a structural phenomenon of the US working class of the period. The missing father thus can tell us more about the predominant class background of US volunteers for the Spanish Republic rather than facilitating sweeping short-cut psychological explanations. Nonetheless, Geist does approach questions of a delicate personal nature. But his thoroughly structural understanding of social history as a material process proves convincingly familiar with the uniqueness of each protagonist. Such historians have definitely left behind the white gloves of academic mannerism. Why is it not this quality of text, which gets the major space of the book? Why are editors of conference proceedings, in this age of the Internet, still not sincere enough to put the lighter fraction of the inbox in some politically correct cemetery, meaning e.g., a decent website? Outsourcing the professionals of political show biz was clearly not the intention of the amateur memory politicians in the editing board.

Noting with satisfaction how Tony Geist’s line of reasoning resists cheap Freudianism, we cannot help but remark on the way his best quality is treated by the publishers, suggesting the occurrence of what can be termed a Freudian error in itself. On summarising every single contribution mechanically in the introduction (pp. 9-13) the publishing board forgot precisely one: our only favourite, Geist’s. The irritation is not curbed, but

substantiated by further reading. In the end, the rest of the book, frankly speaking, is a rather cheap show.

Drawing from post-Soviet archives remains a preoccupation with occasional historical workers, based on episodes and newspaper formats (Antonio Elorza and Marta Bizcarrondo: “La Komintern y España”, pp. 21-36). Curious that hardly anyone seriously starts to work in those archives, despite all declarations, especially by right-wing entrepreneurs on the historiography market-place.

The most topical source cited in the pretentious hand-book article by Gabriel Cardona dates back almost a quarter of a century (“El Ejército Popular y las Brigadas Internacionales ¿Cuál fue la importancia de las Brigadas?”, pp. 37-46). Most of the literature presented as basic reading on the topic of International Brigades turns out to be Franco textbooks. I cannot conceal the fact that such practice by established Spanish scientists in front of an international audience has shed some more light on what PSOE functionaries meant by transition in 1978, to say the least.

In this context, the preoccupation with different media (film, literature) in further contributions seems rather as an awkward way out. Take the pale report by Ana Pérez (pp. 159-165) on German literature on the Spanish Civil War. Her listless enumeration is neither comprehensive in any way nor can it offer substantial help to come to terms with the kind of sources (mainly texts written to support a communist world movement during an all-time peak of self-destructiveness epitomised by the Moscow trials). Pérez provides neither aid for understanding the highly problematic conditions of literary production in such circumstances, nor does she attempt to propose an understanding of different periods; she is talking about let alone some clarification on the political and social context. The author seems actually quite complacent in communicating her finding that hardly anything about Spain written in German has been translated into Spanish. Knowing only the tiresome relation of Pérez, we cannot help asking ourselves “Why should it be translated?” My own reading really does not allow me to leave this question unanswered. Yes, there are as many reasons to hate Germany as there are reasons to devour German literature. Simply speaking, the science on the topic voiced in this volume slightly contradicts my own reading experience. Why has Peter Weiss, with his compulsory account of a generation of social revolutionaries living and dying for Republican Spain been let aside? To be precise, Weiss has been translated into Spanish lately (Spanish translation under the title “La estética de la Resistencia” by José Luis Sagüés, Arturo Parada, Luis A. Acosta. Guipúzcoa (Hondarribia) 1999, 1087 p.). Whoever with any dimension of political consciousness has made the voyage from the Rhine to Barcelona in the last 30 years without feverishly reading Hans Magnus Enzensberger “The short summer of Anarchy” before (*Der kurze Sommer der Anarchie. Buenaventura Durrutis Leben und Tod*, Frankfurt Main (Suhrkamp) 1972)? Pérez does not let us know anything about it. She equally manages to go around the rare masterpiece of Egon Erwin Kisch on an Austrian milk farmer in Benicassim, which was found by Franco forces on dead bodies of Republican fighters, thus being forwarded to the central fascist intelligence unit in Salamanca (registered as A-06226 in the ANGCE). Maybe for Pérez the homeless Prague born citizen of the world Kisch was too much of a Czech to allow him to figure under the heading “La literatura Alemana”. Consequently, we should ask who on earth could define himself as “German” in the genuinely bloodstained sense of the word? There were some 80 million in the late 1930s, indeed, and fortunately Pérez at least got around their type of “literature” on the Spanish challenge.

Undoubtedly, the photo series in the edition do add a lot of what is missing in the main scientific texts of the book: aspects of life history in context, microhistories, and the history of everyday-live. All with only one exception are reproduced without revealing author and source. I would like to see the faces of authors contributing texts being treated like those contributing images in this edition.

But we encounter a more general phenomenon in the occasional recurrence to images. Photo exhibitions really seem to be the strongest point in the historical reconstruction of what is felt to be lost with the International Brigades. Since 2003, Spanish cities saw a new generation of a historically concerned public literally overrun by the exhibition under the Catalan title “Brigades Internationals Imatges Recuperadas” by Michel Lefebvre and Rémi Skoutelsky (e.g. in Barcelona, Institut de cultura, 7.XI.2003-11.I.2004). And it is not by accident that the young masses of all possible languages patiently queuing up for this event minutely resemble the crowds in the streets of Seattle 1999, Prague 2000 and Genoa 2001. Their lively interest in their predecessors on the barricades and the communication interest of professional guides receiving them with historiographic sophistication and routine come together in the light medium of press photography, at least for the time being. Working with textual sources seems to have hit an all-time low, and the edition reviewed here makes no exception.

On page 111 George Orwell himself is posing with five British comrades, who attract attention as being much smaller as the writer, but also decisively better-dressed in their smart uniforms. The following pictures (p. 112 and 113) feature Cuban Brigadists on the cultural front, on page 155 as they sail back to their island. What on earth did they do with their newly acquired knowledge of social combat over there at home? Passionate photos, thinned with weak captions, however, fall short of being an “alternative approach to history”. That is precisely the formula with which right-wing revisionists flood Spanish bookstores on a monthly basis. We also cannot help but address a concluding remark to the publishers of the 2<sup>nd</sup> conference proceedings: political partiality as such is no guarantee to shield off the great unifying force of our age: the pre-eminent void of cultural industry is rattling.

Yet, we are anxiously waiting for the 3<sup>rd</sup> conference edition due after the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2006. Anyway, we have reason to guess that this will not remain the last international encounter on the International Brigades. The initiative of Santa Cruz de Moya (Teruel) has already decided to prepare its 5<sup>th</sup> yearly meeting on an enlarged, international basis.

Such plans are indeed promising, for it was the southern Aragon forum, which initiated major research on the Maquis, the Civil War following 1939. Who would be surprised that this occulted part of the Revolution had its international brigadists as well?

## II

Editing censored versions of the world’s most prominent critic of censorship in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, George Orwell, will have a slightly more difficult point of departure from now on (P. Davison, *Orwell* 2001). Notwithstanding, until recently, Orwell’s *Homage to Catalonia* has customarily been presented to the public in a mutilated form, with no regard for the author’s very explicit dispositions. Even the Penguin edition of 1989 ignores them bluntly, leaving out important passages. A series of central documents writ-

ten by Orwell around his Spanish months have indeed not come into print until recent years. So the “virus memoria” editors, who will interest us later on in this review article, have a point in claiming that Orwell was subject to censorship and manipulative instrumentation as long as the Cold War was to be at the top of the agenda. Has it ever ended, we could ask with this new edition?

Such concerns, brought forward by the leading censor for the Western hemisphere itself, Penguin Ltd., have supplied sufficient pretext for the 1998 editor of the 20 volume *Complete Works of George Orwell*, Peter Davison, to compile a new collection under the title *Orwell in Spain*. This new paperback succeeds turning the past vices of the publishing house into commercial virtues once again. Re-commercialising Orwell is a highly profitable venture. The once untameable Socialist and volunteer for Spanish Trotskyism, Eric Blair alias George O., who died from a Fascist bullet thirteen years later in 1950 has thus probably been successfully boiled down to one more “classic writer”, an absolute “must” of unflinching classical sterility? Everything he has ever noted or remarked on involving the topic of Spain is now catalogued and ready to become a standard citation. Has commodity book production finally succeeded in neutralising the one who cared to be partial as long as he could live?

From the monstrous encyclopaedia of Orwellianism, the key word “Spain” has been thrown onto the market place. Already in 2003 the Spanish translation of this latest product has been commercialised. Is it worth its 9,99 £.

First of all, the vast army of youngsters swarming out to Spain in the coming seasons under pretext of study or leisure will not do wrong to shove the new brick into their backpacks. (Equally true: better leave the old editions of the *Homenaje* in your parent’s bookshelf; there are key pages missing, not only because of past decades’ travel necessities.)

Where and how much value is there for the price? I have taken pains in studying every new footnote down to the very bottom; every letter reproduced in the new edition, though many of them have just only happened to be directed to Orwell, or some even only to his brother-in-law. Editors sell pages, their employees fill them. I have patiently gone through every editorial detail and the countless coquetries with which the priests writing around the balsam body of fame want to confer a bit of the luring fragrance onto themselves. I invariably swallowed all that just to answer the above question.

My impression is uncompromising. It proves Davison to have done the right thing: Orwell robs you of your sleep; no choice! Yet we cannot possibly put him aside. He is just too good. And when we have finished with the last page, we will invariably turn to the beginning to start anew. What could be retained from such a lengthy period of feverish reading? Orwell was no pacifist (p. 67). He was eager to kill at least one fascist and once again only his measureless modesty makes him confess that he failed to do so. When it came to fighting the revolution, he was no fool; he knew what artillery was good for in street-fighting and how to aim well with what he could get hold of. We might very well assume that he killed quite a few fascists. If his determination showed up under today’s masters of war and destruction, they would give him a Carlo Giuliani sentence, no doubt. (Carlo Giuliani was one of a third of a million of protestors against the G8 meeting in Genoa 2001. He was killed by Italian security forces during the summit.)

Orwell, so attentively ironic about his unpractical manners, was indeed deadly pragmatic when nothing else seemed to help. The new edition contains a memorandum,

which ingeniously complements the *Homage to Catalonia*: a summary of his Spanish lessons to be applied to anti-fascist militias by the allied strategists of World War II (pp. 277-289). This is by no means the work of an idealist or a revolutionary romantic, but the conscious compromise of an experienced political and military activist. And at the same time he is a radical, a rascal, and an anti-capitalist of an impressively stout and nervous constitution. “One even had time to think a little.” He remarks about a trench warfare offensive, and continues: “I remember wondering whether I was frightened, and deciding that I was not.” (p. 84) Actually, he returns to the miserable death of trench fighting against the hated No-Intervention-League even after the shock of May 1937. “The whole Comintern policy is now subordinated (excusably, considering the world situation) to the defence of the USSR, which depends upon a system of military alliances” (p. 177), he notes at that time. In those days he saw the beloved Social Revolution betrayed and finally decapitated. Under the point of his own gun he saw the historically baffling alliance in action, combining the right-wing Social Democrats, Moscow party soldiers. It was visibly supported – not to forget – by the British navy present in the port of Barcelona during all the absurdity of the supposed street fighting – a fighting that in actuality never really happened. Orwell precisely records: “A British cruiser and two British destroyers had closed in upon the harbour, and no doubt there were other warships not far away. The English newspapers gave it out that these ships were proceeding to Barcelona ‘to protect British interests’, but in fact they made no move to do so; that is, they did not land any men or take off any refugees. There can be no certainty about this, but it was at least inherently likely that the British Government, which had not raised a finger to save the Spanish Government from Franco, would intervene quickly enough to save it from its own working class.” (p. 193)

Following this deafening defeat, right until his premature death in 1950, Orwell could not come to peace with the manipulation that both East and West undertook jointly to obscure the 1937 Barcelona Maydays. “This kind of thing is frightening to me” he confessed in 1948, “because it often gives me the feeling that the very concept of truth is fading out of the world” (p. XI). Has any notion of truth been retained in our state-of-the-art vision of a becoming deconstructed history? Sometimes, there remains just a set of differing representations of the truth, representations within which we are eager to detect and delete any essentialist notions. Such cleansed historiographic landscapes could thus with some legitimacy be called Orwellian. The truth, the discourse history is so busy to sell off, was Orwell’s primary preoccupation. And he had to pay dearly for it.

To the contrary, the author of the foreword to the present edition, Christopher Hitchens from New York’s New School, proves to be a petty retailer of truth, carefully deduced for mainstream consumption. He took up the challenge of introducing the Anglo-Saxon virtues of eloquence and brevity to those already well-introduced with it. His is the only unpublished bit in the whole volume. However, many annotations have been improved in comparison to previous editions in different instances. The author of the foreword celebrates Orwell’s “Anti-imperialism, Anti-fascism and Anti-stalinism” (p. IX), elegantly omitting that Blair was anti-capitalist in the first place. It is enough to turn over to page 251 to be able to read “After what I have seen in Spain I have come to the conclusion that it is futile to be ‘anti-Fascist’ while attempting to preserve capitalism. [...] I do not see how one can oppose Fascism except by working for the overthrow of capitalism, starting, of course, in one’s own country”. On page X Hitchens reveals his

belief in a new *Dolchstoßlegende*, a conspiracy theory linking the failure of the Republic to a single masterplan: the one of Stalin. He again, eloquently omits the fact, that Orwell himself strongly rejected such a reading (p. 289), though his seemingly supportive evidence (in contrast to Hitchens') is breathtaking to say the least (pp. 187, 288). What really upset me about this commentator is his unreflected arrogance from the realms of a fast food culture directed towards a central female character, Eileen Blair. While rightly pointing at her husband's bias against homosexual colleagues, Orwell's wife is subjected to outright ridicule in the opening lines dated Mayday 2000. There seem to be protagonists of the formerly leftist New School who indeed do not know anything better to do on 1<sup>st</sup> of May than to accumulate on their personal computer. In his Mayday piece of sunny Californian writing, Hitchens underlines that standing before the court of historical significance (adjudicated by the Californian himself), Eileen Blair has little more to report than her weakness for old English marmalade as documented in her letters home. Indeed, there was a considerable difference between the "working model of the classless society" (p. 50) in Catalonia and the bourgeois family background of both Blairs back in England. It is also true, that Eileen was the only one to take up the task of transmitting between the two conflicting environments, besides doing essential co-ordination work at the POUM headquarters. While her husband rather concentrated on fighting body parasites and infant irresponsibility in his trench line (Eric Blair: "She did a great job"). Hitchens does not shed the effort of contextualisation or recognition on this tricky task. Yet, whoever reads the documents carefully, keeping the focus not on what is said but implied cannot fail to notice that it was this seemingly traditional female task of making two ends meet which saved their lives. The lone warrior in the trenches, restless to kill a fascist, would have stood in front of a full-fledged anti-Trotskyist trial – together with his wife by the way – if Eileen had not arranged preparations by months in advance. And her ability to obtain from her bourgeois English family members what was necessary to survive-money, not marmalade-at the right time and with the right lines at home. It is so easy to be a family rascal. But then who does the cleaning-up when the proletarian upheaval has moved on? Hitches is fascinated by big literature, for him the housework behind it is worth a smile (see footnote 2 on page 6; footnote 1 on page 15 or page 151).

But let the editors move about in borrowed pride. They can continue to decline all footnotes with their narrow-minded ready-to-use categories, and they can mess about in the book with countless promotion banners for Penguin, its shop and memory fetishes. Let them heed to their commercial mission, it is enough that they let us read Eric's lines, more and ever more. This gracious historian at work in his own time can make us forget the advertisement hype raised around his ground of work.

### III

Since bourgeois positivism has hit and devastated what once had been a restlessly creative class striving for (its own) emancipation, profiteers of the backlash try to sell us "History as it really happened". Discourse analyses is dry stuff for the delectation of highbrows. The people are fed on essentialist product formats. They get the truth in the easily absorbable form of a commodity, akin to all the assets bourgeois reproduction needs: provocation, scandal, thrill, celebrating the change of everything to assure that there is no qualitative change possible, another hype of consummation to prevent another



er world emerging. In June 2003 “*The true history of Balius and the friends of Durruti*” (M. Amorós, *La Revolución* 2003) joint the stall. But having dived through a couple of pages into the Spanish-Catalonian ultra fat volume, we become acutely aware that this is a novelty of another nature. The author consciously rejects any positivist reading, including such from a supposedly anarchist side of the barricade. To be precise, his perception is fascinatingly close to anarchist positions but what else would you expect from a passionate biographer? This book is a nuisance in the true meaning of the word. Its minuscule typography hides an ocean of some 1.5 million letters. Just by the mere size of documentary material that is more than two Oxford standard dissertations. But can revolutionary historic work be brief when there are a thousand customary short cuts of the ruling liars to be undone? Miquel Amorós is well acquainted with most various sorts of archives and oral history resources in the vast cosmopolitan periphery of Barcelona, he knows what the collections outside have in stall for his topic, Madrid, Salamanca – no question. He has intensively consulted the major collections of the republican exile in Stanford, Amsterdam and Paris (just Moscow is missing as usual). Some chapters into the reading we realise that this is a work of such quality and scope the bourgeois academic machinery is all too anxious to prevent to happen.

What is it all about? Three thesis voiced by the above cited George Orwell can introduce us swiftly to the circle of concern. There is the eminent question of how to assess possible alternative courses of history. As far as Voltaire was concerned, an earthquake in Lisbon was sufficient to reject the absolutist nightmare of pretending we lived in the best world possible, just mind the echo by the later autocrat Margaret Thatcher: “There is no alternative!” Especially so, the defeat of Republican Spain is apt to stir up refusal of letting our imagination be colonised by the victorious (compare Serge Latouche, *La Pensée créative contre l'économie de l'absurde*, Paris (Paragon) 2003). Orwell's realism has contributed to ferments of such a rebellious discipline of alternative history from the very start. An armed eye witness himself, he judged firstly: “If the Anarchists, the POUM and the Left wing of the Socialists had had the sense to combine at the start and press a realistic policy, the history of the war might have been different” (II. p. 182). The possible subject of such a change has emerged as the ultimate provocateur in the street fighting of Barcelona in May 1937. Subsequent repression by the establishment in East and West has unjustly conferred this role to the paratrotskyist militia POUM. Though Eric Blair would have loved to see his very unit as the agent of change, he could never come to peace with this ascription, secondly: “The only people who even *talked* in a revolutionary strain were the Friends of Durruti, a small extremist group within the FAI.” (II. p. 193) And it is a superb expression of dialectical delicacy to recognise, thirdly, that “No resolute revolutionary leadership existed.” (II. p. 235) Thus, the so-called “friends of Durruti” represent the missing link in the process of loosing the initiative on the streets after the popular uprising of July 1936. At the same time they represent a possible element to reverse the situation when it was ripe, i.e. on 4th of Mai 1937 (compare the fabricated accusations in AGCE PS Barcelona 860, pp. 56-59). With the help of this dialectical circle, we are now able to grasp what “revolutionary leadership” could have meant in the understanding of e.g. George Orwell. Note, that he himself was intuitively adverse to all kind of submission whatsoever (Jennie Lee, 1950: “He hated regimentation wherever he found it, even in the socialist ranks”, II. p. 5). This might be a reason why he noted retrospectively that, given a more complete understanding of the struggle, he

would have joined the anarchosindicalist militias of the CNT, which is precisely the spectrum where the “Friends of Durruti” operated (II. p. 278).

Miquel Amorós employs a biographical narrative for his ambitious project of reconstruction. The life cycle of the social revolutionary Santiago Marà Balius (1904-1980) serves as a constructivist rainbow, visibly breaking the spectrum of social contingency around the Barcelona of the 1920s and 1930s. The author is a distanced narrator who conveys closeness of impression not by means of positivist empathy but by means of highly effective avant-gardist montage. Balius lived the concept of a collective revolutionary vanguard. His biography is a collective whirl of action and failure. A rainbow evolves: what vulgar historicism portrays as white light ends up to be a whole spectrum of colours when passing through the collage by Amorós, a complex dialectical cluster, historical materialism at its current peak. Already his 20 chapter titles are as slim and virulent as the book itself is ridden by obesity. The author is making sly use of the cosmopolitical potential in fusing Spanish and Catalanian. No trace of the backward tendencies advocated by regional nationalisms common to the Iberian left. Twenty slim words grasp the rising and the falling line of the book and even a translation into English is hardly able to reproduce their precision and rhythm: submerged – Paris – uprising – October – rebirth – July – government – militias – backwaters – crisis – May – betrayal – prisoners – Aragón – FAI – alarm – defeat – escape – paria – Hyères. Miquel Amorós can sometimes be observed operating with a quality of synthesis linking him to Mayakovsky. If they wanted, both could get revolution to enter the stage in the form of a sonnet. That is linguistic acrobacy above the sky of the circus tent. Even reading this takes your breath. Especially those who are used to perceive the movements of dialectical materialism in its historical native tongue of the preference for baroque narration by Karl Marx, such reading means a new dimension of listening experience, a step from Bach to Brecht. You know, a little step for a man, but a giant step for mankind. Though, I do not guarantee that it does not turn out to be a step backwards once again.

“Berlin had once been a cultural focus of European avant-garde, but now this has definitely shifted to Barcelona.” It did not need Manu Chao to make this fashionable insight a hit. Just try some pages of historiographical prose by the current Berlin based president of the International Committee of Historical Science, Juergen Kocka. Sit back, try to swallow the professional boredom which is so complacently becoming for those feeling themselves to be in the best of all possible worlds. After this tiresome preparation of your senses, take off some two weeks for a passionate journey with Miquel Amorós!

#### IV

An unprecedented novelty (B. Potthast, *Von Müttern* 2003) – a tour de force through six centuries of women’s history, sweeping through 20 different countries. The author, a well-established historian in Germany’s federal Academia, is frank enough to praise herself in a short bibliographical sketch at the end of the volume, that her achievement is indeed unprecedented. Asking why the world premiere of a *Women’s history of Latin America* had to come from a provincial and otherwise rather sleepy German Latin America Studies department (Cologne), we are tempted to take to the memorable story of how the European Union initiated research on Elephants for explanation.

As the rumour goes, researchers from three different countries went to do so-called elephant related fieldwork together. Shared observations however let to somewhat diffe-

rent results. Already after some months, the French mission edited a slim purple brochure with the suggestive title “L’éléphant et l’amour”. Some years later, the British delegation retaliated with a stout manual in suspicious leather “A Practical Guide To Elephant Hunting”. The German participants of the mission needed some decades to come to terms with their ambition. Their 15 volume encyclopaedic compilation bears the somehow cautious but nevertheless all-inclusive title “Overview on some possible elements of an introduction into Elephant studies”.

“Do whatever you want in this fast food mass university”, a German colleague warned me, “but never call your seminars ‘introduction’, they will storm your audience and ask you to step outside making space for students waiting outside.” Barbara Potthast has sincerely merited full seminars.

Her satisfaction to teach introductory courses is eloquently present in almost all chapters of her nicely readable compilation. This is true until she trunks into the 20<sup>th</sup> century but we will come to that later. When she writes about colonial family patterns, private or public honour, or – her favourite – upper class biographies, we sort of hear her students politely ask more or less ingenious questions and her answering with an experienced authoritative and patient voice. So, this book is a lecture script within the outfit of a paperback? Yes, and why not? Barbara Potthast has adorned her collected standard lectures with a catchy central thesis: Latin American *machismo* is viable only in connection with its unequal counterpart *marianismo*. Only the right mother makes a real *macho*. As a main thesis, this does seem neither too demanding nor too original for a decent book, does it? My very own and only mother actually grasped the idea without reading a line. For the volume cover is enriched with a photograph punching home the point of the book at a single strike. What a luck for us readers that even highly sophisticated heavyweights of our discipline sometimes leave their computer screens to visit something as banal as a photo exhibition.

And it is indeed a scandal of historical dimension what Potthast thus succeeds in portraying: a well-placed scandal. Even mainstream neoliberalism accepts gender issues to be one of those few domains where some things are not as good as they might be. Let the market fix it, then. The introduction announces three women starring as leading characters: Malinche – known as Cortez’s lover, Manuela Sáenz – made known as the lover of Bolivar, and Heide (Haydée) Tamara Bunke – topically marketed as the would-be lover of Che Guevara (right at the top of the iceberg: Friedl José A. Zapata, *Tania. Die Frau, die Che Guevara liebte*, Berlin 1997). After reading these three sketches on their respective place in the tour de force of the book’s sweeping narrative, we are left with something like disappointment. (Quite to the contrary: the portrait of the Mexican feminist revolutionary Elvia Carillo, which does not get lost in secondary discourse debates.) Potthast has scratched on the surface, but no portrait miniatures emerged. Alas, Nathalie Zemon-Davies’ *Women on the Margins, Three Seventeenth Century Lives* (Cambridge, Mass. (Harvard University Press) 1997) is prose from a different star, definitely not from German academia. But let us not blame it on the language that there is no single trace of amour or even hunting spirit. Humboldt, Kisch and our most tragic Latin America traveller, Stefan Zweig, they would have made you feel the stardust in those three faces! Yes, I know, all three capacities cited are men. But why does Potthast readily fulfil the role of an uninspired mistress managing a fast food chain? Might such attitude itself contribute to the construction of macho roles in academic cycles? Men’s pictures of the three star

women in Latin American history this point at least gets clear by the authors turn-over, men's pictures are already more than enough on the market place of customary opinion setting.

Barbara Potthast has adopted a synthetic compilatory style, which allows her to pass century after century, country after country with decent short cuts. But it is in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that her professional superficiality ultimately brakes its neck. As a rule, the author is mainly summarising the results of studies, which have reached fame in the US-markets. To reach such heights of glamour, though, you have to hit hard, wrap your findings in the language of sensation, undermine enemy schools and promote your own until everybody buys it. When you attempt to build a German encyclopaedic introduction out of the most spectacular scientific stock exchange hits in the US, all you will get is a patchwork tapisserie of harsh contrasts. Starting with pre-Columbian woman roles until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century this patch-work is well readable. Maybe just because it constantly combines unrefined opposites in social concepts, methodology and levels of abstraction. But with the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the line of patience, spun by the author to join the unjoinable comes to a series of fatal interruptions. Maybe the task was just too ambitious. In some instances the reason is more banal than that. Barbara Potthast has allowed for bad practice in her own historical sweatshop.

Let us just take out the example of Cuba. Starting with the Caribbean plantation regime, the author is notably bored to get over and done with the obligatory issue. She would have had so much more fun writing about her beloved Paraguay, but it would not be appropriate to devote the whole of the book to those two or three outposts in the *pampas* where she has without doubt lost her heart. Even in the subdued version of the book we are instructed on no less than three separate occasions where *mate* comes from and that the interesting gender-bias of its death toll is a revelatory breeding ground for menless societies. Thus, every Cono Sur fan is sure to know what she or he had somehow known before: *mate* is a ingenious way to spend life before dying. While urban slavery in Rio de Janeiro is worth at least some stereotype portraits, the forced effort to shut the obligatory chapter on the Caribbean has not led to shed an advantageous light on the rough sketching. So we are left with two conflicting points in time, where Potthast fixes Cuban slave emancipation. To be frank the date was not entirely without significance for some millions of AfroCubans. Unfortunately, both dates suggested by Potthast are incorrect.

A few pages later, it is exactly an utterly despicable macho grandpa of the parascientific Cold War campaign against class consciousness, the Yankee poverty romantic Oscar Lewis, who has to fulfil the role of crown witness in Barbara Potthast's sweeping assertion. Her point is that the Cuban Revolution is devoid of true women's emancipation.

I am not so blindly in love with Cuba as to have lost interest in arguments from the other side of the barricade. I can accept accusations against the Cuban way even from western career women who want to see the highly qualified scientific and technical workforce of Cuba comprising some 60% of women end up grounded on the International Monetary Fund (IMF) like their miserable sisters in Nicaragua. But to make me consider, I would have to be given at least a chance to hear arguments of substance, references, studies, ego-documents (on the later there is a citation of US-documentation on p. 421 but findings from them remain unrevealed). What Barbara Potthast perceived as an easy way out was slightly different. She decided to merely reproduce the dubious

voice of reactionary paperback writer dating from the 1960s, who betrays to know Cuba foremostly from the accounts of US-compatriots hanging around with local prostitutes.

Is it not a wonderful feature of a listless manual, that it can provoke such ferocious outrage in a reader? It would be curious indeed, if this negative climax of the book would not have been topped consequently in the following. For Barbara Potthast, Salvador Allende – an enemy of women – and Augusto Pinochet – a friend of women – are just two different discourses. And to present these two in the arena serves her to accuse such bad things as the “Schweigen der Linken (the silence of the left)”. There is a gentle omission in this narrative, i.e. the fact that left women were silenced foremostly by their supposed benefactor Pinochet. And the German Federal government, notably the minister Franz-Josef Strauss, gave Pinochet a helping hand in administering his system of concentration camps and thus ending the anti-women’s rights policy of Salvador Allende. The book, Potthast copied in this case, importing such courteously queer perspective has been elaborated and scientifically sanctified in the political homeland of Pinochet’s close friend, Bavaria, the constituency of Franz Josef Strauss.

It is not really a proof of investigative efforts to sum up UN statistics using UN formulas of concealment. The tone of catch phrases with a distinctly general nature is hardly abandoned in the final parts of the book. What succeeds in capturing the authors imagination is the hallow formula of “democracy in the family”, a slogan developed by Chilean women close to Pinochet and later taken up by upper-class women around the continent. Hardly any word has been so abused as “democracy”. On linking its content with pro-Pinochet upper-class issues Barbara Potthast has placed herself in a dubious setting. This could be a point of departure to leave the level of catch phrases, to start discussing the concept of women’s liberation within the Zapatista movement, the patriarchal continuity in the reactionary development of Nicaragua. But we hear nothing of that sort. The author wants to impress her predominantly left readership with ready-made provocation, expand her general knowledge but not to enter a discussion of contents. To make myself understood, I have no principal reserve against upper-class women neither against their maybe emancipatory agenda of a whatsoever democracy in the family. Personally, I would rather see the family as an anachronist conglomerate of insincere relationships, mainly relicts of feudal unenlightenedness sometimes regressing to outright traces of slavery. Instead of charging this dubious ideological mess with something as vulnerable as the notion of democracy, I would rather have a close look whether family might be eventually rather an upper-class catholic fiction in Latin America. But I would never come to terms with Barbara Potthast on such a more experimental approach. She sincerely wants to believe in the culturalist narratives she copied so meticulously from US publications throughout her career. She asserts to have them respected as anthropologically binding, at least for her scientific niche, i.e. Latin American social history in general as her website declares. I would rather discuss political economy with a Latin American upper-class activist than the materialist bases of cultural perception with Barbara Potthast.

Political movements, especially those directly serving upper-class interests, are apt to use short-cuts and generalisations, instrumentalising phrases to devoid them of their content, that is part of their *raison d’être*, d’accord. But scientists should not follow so close in their footsteps not even for the sacred sake of getting a book done away with

quickly. Whatever movement Barbara Potthast wants to promote, she does not succeed in doing so.

Another tricky catchword is the “Feminisierung der Arbeit (feminisation of work)”. Barbara Potthast is visibly afraid to speak about capital relations. Curiously enough this leads to a rather entertaining disability to speak about work itself. Like a piece of false money we continually encounter the weird term of “Unterschichtfrauen (lower class women)”. Their existence seems to be somehow connected with services but besides they seem to vegetate rather unimpressed by social change through the many centuries treated by the author. “Noch heute... (still today)” many chapters on pre-Columbian issues conclude with a peculiar chatty tone and contribute rather stifling tourist views on the timeless Indígena, the ultimate “Unterschichtenfrau”.

Thank you, that is not what I wanted to buy with this title! Maybe such sentimental trash does well to a bourgeois coffee chat (fair-trade and full of Christian compassion for the poor, of course) but frankly speaking, this is not even a faint recollection of the social history Barbara Potthast wants to stand for. It is no wonder that the wholes in her patchwork asphalt are increasingly covered by the sticky conglomerate termed “Modernisierung (modernisation)”. This filling has to help out whenever the poor social conceptualisation of the study proves to fail. And once again, we are not told what kind of school this term has been borrowed from. For sure it can hardly be an Anglo-Saxon notion of modernisation, for – to the difference of Salvador Allende – it proves curiously inert to any consideration about democracy, even to this mystical measure of “democracy in the family”.

But the general conception of the book remains effective as such. Indeed, it is a nice idea to link the stance of Zapatista women directly to their pre-Columbian ancestors 25 generations back. Take alone this piece of folklore so becoming for a best-seller in the solidarity community. The book will be a roaring success in its segment, it will become a standard citation in hundreds of young students works to come and my passionate anger will hardly be of any concern.

## V

The book (D. Pereyra, *Argentina* 2003) bears the wonderfully imprecise documentary subtitle “que se vayan todos (all have to go)”. Its author, a well-known writer on Latin American social movements offers us a comprehensive journalistic study on today’s Argentina after the military dictatorship.

The conviction that “all are to go” was not restricted to the cabinet blamed for the spectacular neoliberal failure of 21<sup>st</sup> December 2001, nor to one of its countless successors. Instead, as Daniel Pereyra argues, the target was the whole of that class which displayed such striking situationist disability to treat with the emergence of a new “revolutionary subject” (p. 107) on the streets of Argentina. Frankly speaking, this class which still defines itself as the ruling class on a global scale is a rather extensively corporate enemy. And even the publisher of these lines would do well to revise whether the cry of “you have to go all” can be finally neutralised and therefore become an ultimately stabilising motion for world capitalism as so many provocateurs before, successfully employed to power cultural industry and its commercialist mission.

Daniel Pereyra explains why self-managed firms are only one part of a larger scope of democratisation conflicts within a sweeping tendency of pauperisation. Neighbour-

hood assemblies, occupations of factories as well as blockades and picket lines by so-called *piqueteros* are a trifold indicative movement against the IMF co-ordinated free fall into the state of a banana republic... or worse. The heritage of military dictatorship is present everywhere. But Pereyra believes in the possibility of self-help and social creativity among his compatriots. Taking the street blockades for an example, since their building up in the 1980s every participant has an equal voice in decision-making. Decisions are being taken in consensus, women are being perceived in important, active and also aggressive roles, long before mainstream media made a point of it. Already in 1996, one of the later main culprit of the Argentinean breakdown, the Spanish multinational Repsol faced the following popular build-up: “1996: (p. 54) Cutral-Có y Plaza Huincul, surgen los ‘fogoneros’ [...] unos 20 000 (sobre un total de 50 000 habitantes de ambas localidades) [...] /Asambleas de varios miles de personas, barricadas con (p. 55) neumáticos ardiendo para impedir el paso de vehículos y para combatir el fuerte frío de la zona (por esta causa los manifestantes fueron llamados fogoneros, porque encendían fogones o fogatas), cortes que se mantuvieron noche y día con turnos de tres horas [...]. Este movimiento se caracterizó por la organización de la protesta, con una red de comunicaciones, de abastecimiento y de funcionamiento de los cortes de ruta. Y por un ejemplar sistema democrático de toma de decisiones mediante asambleas en las que participaban todos asistentes a los piquetes, sin diferencias de sexos, edades o actividad laboral, ya fueran trabajadores en activo o parados”.

We are apt to believe the author, not heeding to the latest wave of defeatist media products celebrating the autodestruction of the key factory occupation at Brukman’s, the rerise of Peronism, etc. In their respective third year, both the French, the Russian Revolution were a disaster, a profound challenge for all progressive forces. Argentina never went that far, though. According to the author, the Argentinean way can be continued towards a consistently democratic economic structure. Such structure would have little to do with capitalism, to be sure.

After a short introduction on the institutionally secured robbery under neoliberal policies, Pereyra soon comes to his main point, the varieties of forms and potentials of resistance (p. 41ff). Expanding this phenomenology of creative antagonisms is his main concern. He has a strong point there! Who studies the systematic account carefully cannot fail to notice how the antiglobalisation movement adopted Argentinean conflict competence in the course of the months. The author also highlights the reverse transfer processes. Three days after the political murder of Carlo Giuliani in the streets of Genoa, the Argentinean “Congreso Piquetero Nacional de Organizaciones sociales, barriales y de desocupados”, found to a unity of action between little farm holders and pensioners which had its part to dismantle the government within 5 months to follow – a deconstruction of neoliberal hegemony unreversed until today (pp. 103-106).

Daniel Pereyra describes the Argentinean police forces and their crowd control modelled after the disastrous example of Genoa (p. 109). Their main preoccupation is to keep more active elements busy with the looting of small shops. In some instances the book’s passages can be read like a manual for street-fighting, e.g. the situation on the night following the 19<sup>th</sup> of December 2001: “The answer of the street showed a high readiness to engage in conflict. Stones were thrown and advances forced against police barriers. Suddenly, the crowd would retreat and return by side streets to regain the initiative.” (p. 102). Revising the result we cannot help from shrinking at the price of such initiative. 30

demonstrators were directly killed by police intervention. On the other hand president de la Rúa had to flee just as did his colleague and equally exemplary Romanian IMF servant Ceausescu in 1989, using a helicopter to abandon the site once and for all.

The author is eager to communicate the competence acquired in these contradictions. He wants to acquaint his readers with a sincere account of how popular intentions are being alienated and what we could learn from the oscillations of long lines of development in social conflict. Maybe Argentina itself needs a different type of texts now, but for the global periphery of social revolt Pereyra's account is good reading.

Being finalised in spring 2003 in a Spanish printing shop, the book does not bother to name its place of publication (Madrid). "El viejo topo", as the editor choose to name itself, seems to be quite experienced in hiding. What a strange thing that it insists on its copyright! Content and form of the publication would rather qualify for copyleft, would it not?

However, "El viejo topo" has succeeded in astonishing me considerably and quite to my amazement this surprise took place on Spanish soil. When the street-workers of local initiatives returned from the latest European Social Forum, they were all buzzing with the novelty, that now instead of organising resistance at the workplace, it would be wiser to mobilise in the locations of life and marginalisation, to put it in a nutshell: revolt grows in the quarters, the barrios.

Nothing else was proliferated month ago with the fervour of experience by Pereyra. Concluding his report, he came to the result, quite astonishing for a rather traditional labour activist though, that the country where the Argentinean crisis was set off (Spain, the base of Repsol, p. 54) might not be the one where the instruments are being developed for its consistent resolution. Maybe things are apt to be just the other way round when the subject of change is liable to change. And these were his prophetic words: "La debilidad sindical, la reducción del número de trabajadores, la amenaza de suspensiones o despidos, obligó a desplazar el centro de gravedad de la acción que, tradicionalmente radica en los centros de trabajo, se asentó muchas veces en los barrios populares." (p. 44) But even in the *barrios*, the cause is all but won, as Pereyra documents. The Argentinean shows in all respects what a bottom-up movement without an imminent political conception can achieve and where it is apt to fail. And his analyses recognise lots of respects. With striking compassion he describes the human sacrifice related to this disquieting path.<sup>1</sup>

## Bibliography

- Amorós, Miquel: *La Revolución Traicionada. La verdadera historia de Badius y los amigos de Durruti*. Barcelona: Lallevir/Virus editorial, Casa Aurora 2003. 444 pages.
- Davison, Peter: Orwell in Spain. *The Full Text of Homage to Catalonia with Associated Articles, Reviews and Letters from The Complete Works of George Orwell*. London: Penguin Books 2001. 393 pages.

<sup>1</sup> Note: I sincerely thank my colleague, Sharon Kaspar from New Brunswick (NJ, USA), for her assistance in cutting down some overexaggerated Germanisms in this paper. Nonetheless all errors remaining in form and content are due to my own defaults exclusively. Please, notify me if you are so kind to assist in preventing them from spreading further: martin@faipl.org.



- Gallego, Manuel Raquena/Rosa María Sepúlveda Losa (eds.): *Las Brigadas Internacionales. El contexto internacional, los medios de propaganda, literatura y memorias*. Cuenca: Ediciones de la Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha/Centro de Estudio y Documentación de las Brigadas Internacionales (CEDOBI) (= Col. la Luz de la Memoria, No. 1) 2003. 214 pages.
- Pereyra, Daniel: *Argentina Rebelde. Crónicas y enseñanzas de la revuelta social*. Madrid: Ediciones de Intervención Cultural/El Viejo Topo 2003. 359 pages.
- Potthast, Barbara: *Von Müttern und Machos. Eine Geschichte der Frauen Lateinamerikas*. Wuppertal: Peter Hammer Verlag 2003. 428 pages.