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# “Everything Remains the Same”: Julio Camba Travelling Spain

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## ABSTRACT

In the first decades of the twentieth century, the Madrid-based Galician journalist Julio Camba (1882–1962) acquired long-lasting fame as a travel writer thanks to his foreign chronicles published in the Spanish press and subsequently compiled in a series of volumes. *La rana viajera* [*The Travelling Frog*] (1920), however, gathers some of the pieces he wrote about Spain. This article examines Camba’s domestic travel writing, which not only provides an excellent insight into significant social and political issues at the time (with references to the rise of sub-state nationalisms and political corruption in the country), but also highlights the similarities between the Restoration period and present-day Spain. Using his characteristic humorous style and subverting pre-existing tropes of travel writing, Camba represents Spanish society by combining criticism of Spain’s economic stagnation and national decay with a centralist view of the country. In particular, his scorn towards the Galician, Catalan and Basque languages and his parodic take on Catalonia’s claims for autonomy shed light on the formation of Spanish nationalism in the decades prior to the Civil War. Drawing on studies on state nationalism (Billig 1995) and Spanish nationalism (Taibo 2014, Delgado 2014) this article examines not only Camba’s own views but the response from contemporary scholarship to his texts.

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“Cuando una insubordinación se manifiesta en Barcelona o en otra provincia ... sólo procediendo enérgicamente se domina y se la hace entrar en la ley ... Si es preciso ... se arrasa la población” [When an insubordination arises in Barcelona or in another province ... it is only by acting with energy that one can dominate it and enforce the law ... If necessary, one must destroy the population] (Camba 1981: 131).<sup>1</sup> This statement, quoted by Julio Camba in one of the articles included in his book *La rana viajera* [*The Travelling Frog*] (1981 [1916]), was pronounced by the general Ángel Aznar at the Spanish Senate in 1919. Aznar’s speech shows the uneasiness felt by the Spanish establishment (and in this case particularly by the army) about the so-called Catalan problem: Catalan claims for more autonomy, and even independence, at the turn of the twentieth century. A statement with similar overtones was published by the ultra-right wing newspaper *Alerta Digital* on 31 August 2012, as part of an interview with the coronel Francisco Alamán:

¿La independencia de Cataluña? Por encima de mi cadáver y el de muchos. Los militares hicimos un juramento sagrado: cumplir el ordenamiento constitucional que consagra la unidad de España como principio irrenunciable ... la Constitución deja muy claro cuál deberá ser el papel del Ejército ante una situación como la que pretenden los separatistas catalanes. (Solé 2012)

[Catalonia’s independence? Over my dead body and many others’. We the members of the military made a sacred oath: to comply with the constitutional laws which consecrate the unity of Spain as an undeniable principle ... the Constitution is crystal clear about the role that the army must play in a situation like the one intended by Catalan separatists.]

Alamán’s virulent reactions against the possibility of Catalan independence echo Aznar’s words in 1919. Criticism from the Spanish government and some sectors of the Spanish press also ensued in 2014, leading up to and following the unofficial self-determination referendum that took place on 9 November, and in 2015, when the then president of the Catalan government, Artur Mas, announced that the approaching Catalan elections would function as a plebiscite to determine the will of the Catalan people to move towards independence.<sup>2</sup> In 2017, the Spanish government sent 12,000 police and Guardia Civil officers to stop the new referendum called by Catalan president Carles Puigdemont for 1 October. Almost a century later, the violence shown against voters by the police was reminiscent of general Ángel Aznar’s suggestion to “arrasar la población”.

When Julio Camba, a journalist specialising in foreign chronicles, returned to Madrid in the aftermath of the First World War having spent several years in Paris, London, Berlin and the USA, he stated that “España no ha cambiado” [Spain hasn’t changed] (1981: 13). In this article, I examine Camba’s views on Galicia, Catalonia and the Basque Country, especially those expressed in *La rana viajera* (but also looking at a variety of his texts), in the context of the tensions triggered in the country by the articulation of sub-state nationalisms at a historical moment when Spain was suffering a crisis of national identity and at the same time going through a process of (centralist) nationalisation. Firstly, I provide a succinct overview of Camba’s travel writing style, with a particular focus on his interactions with other cultures and his view

1 Unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own.

2 Just to give a couple of examples, in the campaign for the Spanish general elections held in 2016, the candidate of the conservative party Partido Popular and acting Prime Minister, Mariano Rajoy, launched his electoral programme in Barcelona. According to the newspaper *La Razón* of 17 May 2016, “[l]a presión independentista parece que ha bajado a un segundo plano, pero el problema político sigue estando ahí ... la elección de la capital catalana es una decisión política cargada de simbolismo, ya que en ese acto el PP volverá a reafirmar su compromiso con una Cataluña integrada en España y con la unidad nacional” [the pressure for independence seems to have somewhat decreased, but the political problem is still there ... the choice of Barcelona is a political decision charged with symbolism, since in this event the PP will again reaffirm its commitment with a Catalonia integrated in Spain and with the unity of the nation] (Morodo). The tone is even stronger in the Catalan branch of the PP: “[l]a presidenta del Partido Popular Catalán ... Alicia Sánchez-Camacho, ha asegurado hoy que ‘el Partido Popular es el único garante de la unidad de España’. ‘No vamos a permitir que nadie nos divida, que nadie nos separe y que nadie rompa España, y eso solo lo va a garantizar el PP y nuestro presidente Mariano Rajoy’” [the president of the Catalan Popular Party ... Alicia Sánchez-Camacho, has claimed today that ‘the Popular Party is the only guarantor for the unity of Spain’. ‘We’re not going to allow anybody to divide us, to separate us and to break Spain, and that’s only going to be guaranteed by the Popular Party and our president Mariano Rajoy’] (*e-noticies*, web).

of Spanish identity. Next, I analyse the underlying Spanish nationalism that underpins Camba's domestic travel writing and the reception of his work in post-Franco literary criticism. A century later, it might seem that, echoing Camba's words, "[t]odo está igual" [everything remains the same] (1981: 14).

## JULIO CAMBA, A (SPANISH) TRAVELLING FROG

Julio Camba Andreu was born in Vilanova de Arousa (Galicia, Spain) in 1884, although he left his home region at an early age and, after a stay in Argentina, established himself in Madrid in 1903. In the Spanish capital, he wrote for several newspapers, including *El Mundo*, *ABC*, *El Sol* and *El País*. In 1908, he started to write a series of foreign chronicles which enjoyed great popularity. Many of them were subsequently gathered in several volumes: *Playas, ciudades y montañas* [Beaches, Cities and Mountains] (2002 [1916]), *Londres* [London] (1916), *Alemania, impresiones de un español* [Germany, Impressions from a Spaniard] (1916), *Un año en el otro mundo* [A Year in the Other World] (2009 [1917]), *La rana viajera* [The Travelling Frog] (1981 [1916]), *Aventuras de una peseta* [Adventures of a Peseta] (2007 [1923]) and *La ciudad automática* [The Automatic City] (1932). As María Dolores Costa has argued, "[e]ven when the articles gathered in these publications do not ostensibly constitute travel literature, they are impregnated with the idea of travel" (154). Indeed, given the flexibility inherent to the genre, as shown by scholars such as Jan Born (2004), Charles Forsdick, Feroza Basu and Siobhan Shilton (2006), and Carl Thompson (2011), to give some examples, it can be considered that even though Camba's volumes do not conform to the stricter definition of the "travel book" as established by Paul Fussell ([1980] 1982), they nonetheless revolve around the experience of movement and cultural dislocation which is at the core of the genre. Moreover, Camba's chronicles are often constructed on a difference between "us" and "them" which leads to the view of foreign nations as "Others". This is also a crucial feature of travel writing that, as Tim Youngs has posited, "throws light on how we define ourselves and on how we identify others" (1).

In the particular case of Camba, the creation of cultural difference rests on three key elements. The first is the point of view of the narrator, who acts as main character in the chronicles, and of whose Spanish national identity the reader is constantly reminded. In the prologue to *La rana viajera*, for instance, the writer states: "[m]ientras yo he estado en el extranjero yo he tenido un punto de referencia para juzgar los hombres y las cosas: España. Pero esto era únicamente porque soy español y no porque España me parezca la medida ideal de todos los valores" [while I was abroad I had a point of reference to judge peoples and things: Spain. But this is only because I'm Spanish and not because I think Spain represents an ideal for everything] (Camba 1981: 10).

Secondly, other cultures and their citizens are depicted through the lens of humour, resulting in a caricaturisation of Spain's "Others". Critics have commonly praised Camba's humour as the most accomplished and defining element of his distinctive journalistic, yet literary, style. However, the instances in which his celebrated wit creates racist, misogynist and generally inappropriate stereotypes have usually been played down or even justified as playful and ironic (cf. López 14; Galindo Arranz 2002: 44; Girón 215–23). Socorro Girón has contended that "el humor de Camba es bonachón, nunca hiere a nadie en particular" [Camba's humour is a good-natured one, he never offends anybody in particular] (22) and defines it as "humorismo de ternura, de sonrisa y de lágrima" [a tender humourism, based on the smile and the tear] (254). Few academics have shown a different view on this matter (Costa 1996, Meyer 1996, Miranda-Barreiro 2013, 2014). Yet Camba's "caricatures" cannot be interpreted simply as a flamboyant display of rhetorical skills or an exercise of parody and humour. His humorous portrayal of other cultures reflects prejudices and anxieties held by his contemporaries when, after the loss of the last remaining American colonies in 1898, Spain had ceased to be an empire and its identity as a nation was under scrutiny.

Thirdly, the way in which the writer interacts with his readership also plays a key role in the creation of a sense of "Otherness". As Costa has pointed out, "Camba writes of the things his Madrid audience already thinks it knows sitting in the comfort of its own cultural prejudices" (156). The images of other cultures provided in Camba's articles are thus envisaged to confirm the ideas that the average reader of the Spanish capital has of them; this ideal reader is a

projection of Camba's own fixed views towards foreign countries. Going back to the prologue of *La rana viajera*, the writer describes himself as:

una rana que estuviese en un frasco de alcohol ... Lo que parecen críticas o comentarios no son más que reacciones contra el ambiente extraño y hostil ... [S]i lo que quería mi director era observar el efecto directo de la civilización europea sobre un español de nuestros días, ahí tiene el resultado: una serie constante de movimientos absurdos y de actitudes grotescas. (9)

[a frog in a jar filled with alcohol ... What looks like criticism or remarks are just reactions to a strange and hostile environment ... [I]f what my editor wanted was to observe the direct effect of European civilisation on a contemporary Spaniard, there he has the result: a constant series of absurd movements and grotesque attitudes.]

The "travelling frog" remains impervious to the effects that contact with other cultures might have on him. His views on foreign countries are "preserved" from external influences and therefore he always remains "purely" Spanish and reacts negatively to a different environment, regarded as hostile. His views on other countries are based on preconceived stereotypes, to the extent that Camba

se muestra bastante escéptico con la aceptada consideración de la importancia formativa del viaje ... la personalidad y las opiniones del cronista ya están formadas antes de sus viajes, y raramente cambian al entrar en contacto con las nuevas sociedades, en las que de ningún modo se integra. (Alarcón Sierra 53)

[seems to be quite sceptical regarding the accepted educational importance of travelling ... the journalist's personality and opinions are already formed before his journeys and rarely change after coming into contact with new societies, ones into which he does not integrate at all.]

Although the writer feels closer to Latin cultures (French, Italian and Portuguese), he always emphasises his "Spanishness", which becomes even more pronounced when he is abroad. In the article "Escuelas de españolismo" [Schools of Spanishness], included in *Playas, ciudades y montañas* (Camba 2012: 149–51), he argues that the Spaniards living in London and Paris remain "perfectly Spanish" (Camba 2012: 149). In Paris, especially, "se aficiona uno a los toros. Aquí, muchos muchachos catalanes y gallegos adquieren acento andaluz. Aquí ... aprende uno a bailar flamenco" [one becomes a fan of bullfighting. Here, many young Catalan and Galician lads get an Andalusian accent. Here ... one learns to dance flamenco] (Camba 2012: 150). Camba's view of Spanish national identity is defined by the use of clichés (bullfighting, flamenco), which contribute towards the creation of a homogenised Spanish stereotype. Significantly, the "Spanishness" that Camba boasts about in his foreign chronicles will still be very much present in his home travels, in this case as a reaffirmation of a monolithic view of Spanish national identity that reacts against the internal "Others" embodied by sub-state nationalisms, as I will demonstrate next.

## JULIO CAMBA'S CONFLICTING VIEWS ON NATIONALISM AND THEIR CRITICAL RECEPTION

*La rana viajera* constitutes an example of "domestic travel" or "home travel", a variation of the genre that has not received as much attention as the more conventional literary journey to foreign (and especially exotic) locations. Tzvetan Todorov has even argued that the journey of a European citizen to another European country "would not result in a 'travel narrative'. It is not that such narratives do not exist, but they clearly lack the feeling of alterity in relation to the people (and the lands) described" (68). On the contrary, Carl Thompson points out that "[t]here is also a well-established literature of 'home travels', in which writers variously celebrate, lament or poke fun at their compatriots, and the state of their own nation" (Thompson 17). *La rana viajera* fits Thompson's definition perfectly. However, similarly to other travel texts written by Camba, the book does not establish a clear itinerary (which would include the preparation for the journey, departure, arrival, experience in the new location and return). Instead, the "travelling frog" hops from one place to the next without prior notice. Camba's volumes were

not, in fact, originally conceived as books but comprised articles first published separately in the press. The grouping of the essays into sections that correspond to the writer's experiences in different destinations, however, give a certain structure to the volumes. In the case of *La rana viajera*, it opens with a series of articles about Madrid. Afterwards, there is one section about Galicia and two on the Basque Country. For the remainder of the volume, the articles focus again on Madrid, although Catalonia is mentioned in three of these pieces.

As shown by the choice of locations, the literary geography outlined by Camba exhibits a clear tension between the centre and the periphery. The first section about Madrid is entitled "España reencontrada" [Spain Met Again], revealing an apparent identification between Spain and its capital. Galicia is referred to as "La tierra de los políticos" [The Land of the Politicians] and the Basque Country as "El país de la ruleta" [Roulette Country] with regard to San Sebastian, and "El rincón de los millonarios" [The Millionaires' Corner] about Bilbao. A sense of "Otherness" emerges in the use of the words "tierra" and "país"; nevertheless, Camba's articles often function to neutralise such difference. The centripetal leaning of these texts reflects the conflict between competing nationalisms in Spain at the time. Not only were regional movements in Catalonia, Galicia and the Basque Country mutating from a form of cultural self-affirmation into politically articulated nationalisms, but there was also a growing presence of state nationalism in the country (Mar-Molinero and Smith 1). Historians such as José Álvarez Junco (99), Enric Ucelay-Da Cal (124) and Francisco J. Romero Salvadó (121) have shown the weakness of the Spanish project of the "nationalisation of the masses" in the nineteenth century, and therefore the difficulties of both promoting a unified national identity and creating a modern state. Furthermore, the end of the empire in 1898 provoked, in Sebastian Balfour's words, a "crisis of identity" which "was to play a crucial part in the political conflict in Spain" (29). Balfour argues that the unstable unity of Spain had been sustained by the project of imperial expansion and was therefore undermined by the loss of the colonies (29). The end of the empire triggered a long-lasting fear of fragmentation among Spanish intellectuals, as shown by José Ortega y Gasset's essay *La España invertebrada* [Invertebrate Spain] ([1921] 2007), where the Spanish philosopher "warns" against the dangers of sub-state nationalisms for the unity of Spain:

Catalanismo y bizcaitarrismo no son síntomas alarmantes por lo que en ellos hay de positivo y peculiar –la afirmación "nacionalista"– sino por lo que en ellos hay de negativo y común al gran movimiento de desintegración que empuja la vida toda de España. (91)

[Catalanism and Basquism are not alarming symptoms because of what is peculiar and positive in them – the "nationalist" affirmation – but due to their negativity, which is part of the movement towards the disintegration of Spain's whole life.]

In a well-known passage, Ortega y Gasset's text emphasises Castile as the essence of Spain:

España es una cosa hecha por Castilla ... sólo cabezas castellanas tienen órganos adecuados para percibir el gran problema de la España integral... Desde el principio se advierte que Castilla sabe mandar... Castilla se afana por superar en su propio corazón la tendencia al hermetismo aldeano, a la visión angosta de los intereses inmediatos que reina en los demás pueblos ibéricos. (57–8)

[Spain is a thing made by Castile ... only Castilian heads have the right organs to perceive the great problem of Spain as a whole ... It is noticeable from the start that Castile knows how to rule ... Castile goes to great lengths to overcome in its own heart the tendency towards provincial inwardness, the narrow view of the rest of the Iberian peoples who only consider immediate interests.]

Castile is also key in the works of the celebrated Generation of '98, defined by Ucelay-Da Cal as "a loose-knit group of writers who represented a mood or revival, a call for the renewal of national energies and a patent disgust for the political 'truths'" (128). The inward looking of these writers to the Castilian landscape, literature and history and their recuperation of traditional Castilian words is not so different from the cultural "renaissance" that took place in Catalonia, Galicia and the Basque Country. In his work *La invención de España* [The Invention of Spain] (1998), Inman Fox examines "el proceso de invención de una España liberal" [the process of inventing a liberal Spain] in the decades following the so-called Disaster of 1898 (14). Fox



reveals the Castilian-centred articulation of a Spanish national identity in the historiographic work of Rafael de Altamira, the writings of the Generation of '98 and the literary studies of academics supervised by Ramón Menéndez Pidal, among others, all of them forming “un grupo de intelectuales importantes que se dedicaba a construir una identidad colectiva nacional” [a group of important intellectuals devoted to constructing a collective national identity] (13–14). At the same time, a form of right-wing militarist Spanish nationalism emerged which, according to Mar-Molinero and Smith, “drew on nineteenth-century Catholic traditionalism, and then integrated twentieth-century fascist thought” (20). Their view of Spain was equally centralist, as they saw Catalans and Basques “as Spaniards who had to be brought back to the fold by any means, and the left was portrayed as an anti-nationalist cancer which had to be extirpated” (20). Given the importance that the clash between state and sub-state nationalisms had in Spain in the first decades of the twentieth century, the centripetal model proposed in *La rana viajera* reflects an ideology impregnated with state nationalism.

Upon his return to Madrid, Camba claims to be confused by the situation in his country:

Al principio no reconocemos exactamente a nuestro país, no lo encontramos del todo igual al recuerdo que teníamos de él. ¿Es que España ha cambiado? Es, más bien, que la miramos desde otro punto de vista y con unos ojos algo distintos a como la mirábamos antes. (1981: 11)

[At first, we do not exactly recognise our country, we don't find it entirely as we remember it. Is it because Spain has changed? It is, instead, that we look at her from a different point of view, and with somewhat different eyes.]

Initially, it seems that contact with other cultures has altered Camba's perception of Spain. However, by the end of the article, the writer changes his initial opinion; Spain has not changed at all and neither has he:

Poco dinero y malo. Hombres furiosos. Señoras gruesas, siempre sofocadas, o por el calor o por los berrinches, que se abanican constantemente. Muchos curas. Muchos militares ... Grandes partidas de dominó y de billar. Cuestiones de honor. Toros. Juergas. Broncas. Nubes de limpiabotas, los vendedores de décimos de la Lotería, de gitanas que dicen la buenaventura, de músicos ambulantes, de ciegos, de cojos, de paráliticos ... Indudablemente, España no ha cambiado. Y es posible que nosotros mismos no hayamos cambiado tampoco. (13)

[Little and bad money. Furious men. Fat ladies, always out of breath, either because of the heat or because of their tantrums, who fan themselves constantly. Lots of priests. Lots of soldiers ... Great games of dominoes and pool. Questions of honour. Bullfighting. Revelries. Quarrels. Clouds of shoe shiners, lottery sellers, fortune-telling gypsy women, travelling musicians, blind men, lame men, paralytics ... Undoubtedly, Spain hasn't changed. And it is possible that we haven't changed either.]

As José Antonio Llera (58) suggests, the view of Spain conveyed by Camba in the above extract is reminiscent of the “España castiza” [Genuine Spain] and “España negra” [Black Spain] represented in the paintings of José Gutierrez Solana (1886–1945) and Ignacio Zuloaga (1870–1945). This image also echoes the “Black Legend”, a concept disseminated by Spanish historian Julián Juderías y Loyot (1877–1918), whose function was to dismantle negative views of Spain originated in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European historiography, for which “[i]nstitutions such as the Inquisition and the Catholic Church, the intermixing of Spanish, indigenous, and African peoples in the Spanish Empire, and a history of racial, religious, and cultural syncretism in Spain” were “signs of an inherent and intractable cultural and racial deficiency” (Allatson 35–6). By contrast with Juderías y Loyot's criticism of this foreign stereotype, the image of a Black Spain was also adopted by Spanish artists as a way of constructing a Spanish identity differentiated from that of Europe. In particular, the book *España negra* (published in Spain in 1899) by Belgian poet Émile Verhaeren (1855–1916) and illustrated by Spanish painter Darío de Regoyos (1857–1913), as well as the paintings of the aforementioned Gutierrez Solana and Zuloaga, created “imágenes de formas de vida populares que entienden como elocuentes manifestaciones de un carácter nacional” [images of a popular way of life which they understand as eloquent manifestations of a national character] (Lozano 49). Llera points out that Camba

doubts whether these gloomy characteristics of Spanish national identity should be eliminated, as he stated in the article “El español exuberante. Condiciones de carácter” [The Exuberant Spaniard. Conditions of his Character] in the newspaper *El Mundo* of 4 February 1911:

Es espantoso, pero es admirable. Sobre todo, es muy español. Esa mezcla de ferocidad y fanatismo; esas figuras siniestras y repulsivas; todo eso no se encuentra más que en España. ¿Hay que exterminarlo?” (quoted in Llera 60)

[It’s horrible, but it’s admirable. Above all, it’s very Spanish. This blend of ferocity and fanaticism; those sinister and repulsive figures; all of this can only be found in Spain. Does it have to be exterminated?]

In this light, Camba’s view of Spain as never-changing aims to create an image of cultural continuity and therefore of Spain as “eternal”. This view is reminiscent of the nationalising project of the Generation of ’98, which Nicolás Ortega Cantero has also compared to the painters of “Black Spain”:

The writers of the generation of ’98, who constituted in Spain the first group of intellectuals in a modern sense, played an outstanding nationalizing role. In Castile they sought the keys to an understanding of Spanish history and the national identity that derives from it. They thus reinforced the national character that was attributed to its landscape, its meaning as a national landscape. And that vision was promoted not only by the authors, but also, decidedly, by the painters of that generation, as is seen markedly, for example, in the paintings of Aureliano de Beruete, Darío de Regoyos or Ignacio Zuloaga. (380–1)

Instead of the focus on the Castilian landscape as the essence of Spanish national identity found in the *noventayochistas*, though, Camba’s articles take place mostly in urban settings and his literary style stands for a move towards “una nueva poética antirromántica, superadora de las convenciones finiseculares o modernistas” [a new anti-Romantic poetics that supersedes fin-de-siècle or modernist conventions] (Alarcón Sierra 25). Rafael Alarcón Sierra has also argued that Camba’s writing “se caracteriza básicamente por su experiencia descentrada, escéptica, antitrascendental, irónica y relativista de las diversas culturas a las que se enfrenta en sus desplazamientos [is characterised by its decentred, sceptical, anti-transcendental, ironic and relativist experience of the different cultures that he faces on his journeys] (25). Whereas the anti-Romanticism and irony of Camba’s chronicles is evident, his relativism and “decentred” view of other cultures does not seem to be so clear-cut. Camba’s standpoint not only remains anchored in Madrid, but his texts also strive to construct a Castilian-centred image of Spain.

Despite his humorous style, Camba’s texts have in fact been likened to the discussions about “el problema de España” [Spain’s problem] found in the writers and thinkers of the Generation of ’98 and in the *Regeneracionismo* movement (Llera 60–1; Alarcón Sierra 51). Apropos Madrid, many of the articles included in *La rana viajera* revolve around a parodic criticism of the Restoration system. The author denounces Spanish poverty, the devaluation of Spanish currency (in “La peseta”), the lack of housing in the capital (in “Las casas” [Houses]), technological backwardness (in “Croydon y Madrid”), the corruption of Spanish politics and the government’s inefficiency (“La política” [Politics]). Madrid is depicted as the epicentre of Spanish politics and public life, and Spain is shown to be an uncontested national unit.

By contrast, the political articulation of alternative nationalisms within the state is either undermined or completely ignored. In Galicia, Camba parodies the nepotism practised by Galician politicians; however, his chronicles do not allude to Galician politics, but rather to the business they conduct in Madrid:

Para ser un político gallego, lo primero que se necesita es ser pariente de otro político gallego. El hijo de un gran político gallego tiene, desde su nacimiento, categoría de ministro; el sobrino tiene categoría de subsecretario o de director general, y así sucesivamente ... Luego, el nuevo político se va a Madrid y comienza a pedir. (1981: 47)

[In order to be a Galician politician, the first thing one needs is to be the relative of another Galician politician. The son of a great Galician politician already holds, since birth, the status of a minister; the nephew holds the status of deputy secretary or



director general, and so on and so forth ... Afterwards, the new politician goes to Madrid and starts to ask for things.]

Playing on words that allude to Galicia's canning industry, Camba argues that the politicians from this region reproduce like sardines or shellfish (1981: 47, 130). Nevertheless, the focus on Madrid always prevails. In an article included in a later section of the volume, the author points out the abundance of Galician politicians in the capital: "Si, en efecto, la mayoría de mis paisanos residentes en Madrid no fuesen ministros o ex ministros, ¿cómo se las arreglarían para pagar al casero?" [If, in fact, most of my fellow countrymen living in Madrid weren't ministers or ex-ministers, how would they manage to pay their rent?] (Camba 1981: 129). Similarly, in one of the few direct references to the act of travel in the volume, Camba criticises the deficient train connection between Madrid and Galicia: "¿Por qué marchará tan despacio el tren de Madrid a Galicia? Algunos hablan de falta de carbón; pero esto es inexacto. En los respaldos y en las almohadillas de los asientos hay carbón a toneladas" [Why is the train from Madrid to Galicia so slow? Some people talk about the lack of coal, but this is inaccurate. On the back of the seats and on the cushions there are tons of it] (1981: 46). However, the writer is not concerned with the difficulties of travelling across Galicia, but with the creation of national unity in Spain:

[Y]o pensaba que para hacer de España un todo ordenado y armónico puede haber varios procedimientos; pero que el primero debe consistir en unir materialmente unas regiones con otras, construyendo caminos y ferrocarriles que anden. (Camba 1981: 47)

[I thought that there were some methods to turn Spain into an organised and harmonious whole: but the first one must be to unite the different regions physically, building roads and trains that work.]

Camba had already devoted a series of articles to Galicia, compiled in 1916 in the volume *Playas, ciudades y montañas*, which also includes chronicles about Paris and Switzerland. Compared to Madrid, here Galicia represents quietness and rural tranquillity. Repeatedly, the writer includes references to pastoral literature, especially to Virgil's *Georgics* (1916: 46, 63, 73, 85, 124). Only on a few occasions does he engage with the social and economic problems endured by the region, such as the high levels of emigration to America in "El oro de América" [America's gold] and the unfair taxes that farmers have to pay in "Los foros" [Contracts]. In these articles, however, Camba's imagined reader is still centred in Madrid. He writes about these issues to explain them to the capital (1916: 73), and constantly refers to his relationship with this city – for example: "algunos amigos me han escrito desde Madrid pidiéndome mi opinión acerca del mar" [some of my friends have written to me from Madrid asking for my opinion about the sea] (1916: 81). Furthermore, his solution to Galicia's social problems is investment in tourism, that is, in making the region more attractive to people from the capital (2012: 120–1).

Camba's view of Galicia as necessarily subsumed to centralist purposes is crystallised in his comparison between this region and a young woman: "esta tierra es bella y buena, como una muchacha muy bonita y muy hacendosa que fuese a la vez, para sus padres, un orgullo y un sostén" [this land is beautiful and good, like a very pretty and industrious young girl who was a source of both pride and support to her parents] (1916: 76). The article entitled "Carmiña" reproduces a conversation between Camba and his Galician "muchacha" (a word that translates as both girl and maid), in which the young woman is described as affectionate, naïve, innocent and uneducated (1916: 45–8). In her own words, her purpose is to serve him: "Yo le estoy aquí para servir" [I'm here to serve] (1916: 46). Llera suggests that Carmiña is a "personificación de la Galicia pobre y deprimida, conmovedora en su ingenuidad" [a personification of the poor and deprived Galicia, moving due to its innocence] (1916: 43). Rather than this unproblematised interpretation, I would argue that it showcases what Helena Miguélez-Carballeira (2013) has referred to as the colonial stereotype of "Galician sentimentality". Looking at Galicia's position within the Spanish state through the lens of postcolonial studies, she contends that "the trope of sentimentality emerges as a feminizing colonial stereotype, of particular strategic value against national insurgence movements that were seen as a challenge to still unstable state politics" (Miguélez-Carballeira 2013: 7). According to Miguélez-Carballeira, although

the notion of sentimentality was, in the decades before the political articulation of Galician nationalism, a desirable feature for Galicia's national character profile, one which would conveniently help counteract Spanish stereotypical depictions

of Galicians as boorish and barbaric ... towards the end of the nineteenth century, during a key period in the development of Galician nationalist discourses ... the trope of sentimentality would be reappropriated by centralist positions as a colonial stereotype with which to stall the political articulation of Galician national insurgence. (2013: 13)

The image of Galicia as an uneducated maid only fit for serving, and in which her parents arguably represent Spain, echoes Miguélez-Carballeira's argument. Moreover, in stark contrast to the unproblematic assumption of a Spanish national identity and the view of Madrid as the place fit for politics, Camba reacts very strongly against the articulation of a distinct national identity in Galicia and describes Galician regionalism,<sup>3</sup> as being “de una cursilería desesperante” [desperately corny] (1916: 95). Throughout the volume, Camba shows his rejection of Galician nationalism and strengthens his identification with Spain as the “fatherland”: “Galicia es un país encantador; pero tiene un inconveniente: el galleguismo” [Galicia is a lovely country but it has one problem: Galicianism] (1916: 95); “no hay cuidado de que el regionalismo gallego llegue a poner nunca en peligro la integridad de la patria” [there is no worry that Galician regionalism will ever endanger the unity of the fatherland] (1916: 99).

Years later, in *La rana viajera*, the writer reacts even more strongly to the political articulation of Galician nationalism. Sardonicly, he writes: “[l]a última vez que yo estuve en Galicia ... era una de las más hermosas regiones españolas. Ahora ha ascendido a la categoría de nación” [the last time I was in Galicia it was one of the most beautiful regions of Spain. Now it has been promoted to the category of nation] (Camba 1981: 51). Next, and in order to enhance his scorn for a distinctive Galician national identity, Camba parodies the idea of the nation in general:

Una nación se hace lo mismo que cualquier otra cosa ... Con un millón de pesetas yo me comprometo a hacer rápidamente una nación en el mismo Getafe, a dos pasos de Madrid ... Y si alguien osaba decirme entonces que Getafe no era una nación, yo le preguntaba qué es lo que él entendía por tal, y como no podría definirme el concepto de nación, lo habría reducido al silencio. (1981: 51)

[A nation can be made just like anything else can be made ... With one million pesetas, I could swiftly create a nation in Getafe itself, a stone's throw from Madrid ... And if anyone dared to tell me that Getafe is not a nation, I would ask them what they mean by a nation, and as they wouldn't be able to define the concept of nation, I would have reduced them to silence.]<sup>4</sup>

However, whereas the idea of nationalism is here depicted as absurd in the case of Galicia, Camba never questions the existence of a Spanish nation. The emphasis on a uniform Spanish nation reflects and contributes to an existing ideology of Spanish nationalism which, following Michael Billig, can be described as banal. Billig suggests that “those in established nations – at the centre of things – are led to see nationalism as the property of others, not of ‘us’” (2014: 5), even though “in the established nations there is a continual ‘flagging’, or reminding, of nationhood” (2014: 8). Carlos Taibo (2014), who argues for a similar conceptualisation in the case of Spain, has pointed out how the emphasis on the existence of a Spanish nation by the establishment has frequently been accompanied by the negation of the existence of Spanish nationalism (19). Conversely, whereas in post-Franco Spain there has been a resistance to applying the word “nation” to Galicia, the Basque Country and Catalonia (defined in the 1978 Spanish Constitution with the ambiguous term “nacionalidades históricas” [historical nationalities]), sub-state nationalisms are constantly brought to the fore as a negative

3 As explained by Ramón Villares, regionalism was the first stage of Galicianism, “entendiendo como tal la afirmación del carácter diferente de Galicia frente a otros pueblos y la lucha por conservar y dar forma política a esa diferenciación” [meaning the affirmation of Galicia's distinctive character and the fight to preserve and give a political form to such a differentiation]. This first stage arose “con las revoluciones románticas y decimonónicas” and “exalta las peculiaridades de la región y procura su afirmación y conservación ante la avalancha uniformizadora de los Estados burgueses liberales” [with Romantic and nineteenth-century revolutions. It praises the region's peculiarities and stands for their affirmation and preservation against the strong unifying tendency of liberal and bourgeois states] (209–10).

4 Getafe is a city and municipality in the south of Madrid. According to the *Instituto Nacional de Estadística* [National Census], it had a population of around 5,000 people in 1920. Camba is therefore mocking the idea of nationalism by referring to a relatively small population at the time. Getafe is also known for including the geographical centre of Spain, which emphasises the author's centralist view of the country.

phenomenon and a threat to post-Franco constitutional values.<sup>5</sup> “Nacionalismo excluyente” or “discriminatory nationalism”, for instance, is a term nowadays recurrently used by Spanish conservative and far-right political parties. In Taibo’s words, “[l]os nacionalistas son siempre ... los otros, y su condición aparece contrapuesta a la de quienes dicen defender valores saludables, a menudo retratados como demócratas o como constitucionalistas” [nationalists are always other people, and their condition is opposed to those who say of themselves that they defend good values, often portrayed as democrats or constitutionalists] (17). According to Taibo, Spanish state nationalism works as a bolt of sorts, working to avoid the disintegration of Spanish territorial unity, and is based on the premise that discussions about the essence of the Spanish nation must not be tolerated (63–5). The contradictory argument of “a nation without nationalism” has also been remarked upon by Xosé Manoel Núñez Seixas:

[l]a propia existencia de un nacionalismo español en la España de los siglos XIX y XX es aún ... objeto de cierto debate entre los científicos sociales y los propios políticos e intelectuales en general. No se cuestiona la existencia de nacionalismos subestatales opuestos a la concepción de España como patria común. Pero la autodefinición de “nacionalista español” no es asumida por todos aquellos que defienden y asumen que España es una nación. (2007: 78)

[the very existence of Spanish nationalism in the nineteenth and twentieth century still is ... subjected to debate to some extent among social scientists, politicians and intellectuals in general. The existence of sub-state nationalism opposed to the conception of Spain as a common fatherland is not questioned. However, the self-definition of “Spanish nationalist” is not assumed by all those who defend and assume that Spain is a nation.]

Both the assumption of a “natural” national essence and the threat of “separatist” movements are not only reminiscent of Ortega y Gasset’s assessment of the Spanish nation in the 1920s or even of Francoist ideology but, as Luisa Elena Delgado has argued, such ideas can be traced back to the centralised and unitary view of the state established since the eighteenth century (20). Following Carlos Taibo, Delgado suggests the existence of a “‘trama unitaria subyacente’ a la narrativa nacional patriótica española” [an “underlying unitary plot” in the Spanish national patriotic narrative] (54).

Given the unresolved tension between state nationalism and the “threat” of sub-state nationalisms for the unity of the Spanish nation, it does not seem accidental that a great deal of scholarship on Camba’s work has also been charged with comparable undertones. As with his often offensive use of humour, Camba’s nationalism has not been addressed by most of the academics working on his texts. Girón argues that “en dondequiera que escribe, Camba tendrá presente a España, ‘el amor de sus amores’... Su gran preocupación siempre fue su país y todo lo verá desde su lente de español” [whenever he writes, Camba has in mind the love of his life, Spain ... His country always was his greatest concern and he saw everything through the lens of a Spaniard] (72). By contrast, her assessment of Camba’s views on Galician nationalism simply seem to reinforce the writer’s own worldview: “opina ... que el catalanismo es tan nefasto como el galleguismo, como si los problemas de las regiones fueran exclusivos de ellas y no de toda España” [he thinks ... that Catalanism is as disastrous as Galicianism, as if the problems of the regions were exclusive to them and not the whole of Spain] (110–11). More recently, Alarcón Sierra has stated that Camba “es consciente de que, en el extranjero, no puede desprenderse ... de su nacionalidad, su cultura y su forma de ser española (es lo que Ortega y Gasset llamó “destinos étnicos”)” [is aware that, when he is abroad, he cannot get rid of ... his nationality, his culture and his Spanish character (which Ortega y Gasset called “ethnic destinies”)] (28). In this case, not only is Camba’s Spanish national identity completely unproblematised (contrary to his view that nations are inventions), but so is Ortega y Gasset’s biological stand on Spanish national identity, according to which:

[q]ueramos o no, cualquiera que sea nuestra desestimación de la España real, estamos ligados en nuestras profundidades orgánicas a ese fondo de tendencias

<sup>5</sup> For an analysis of the role played by sub-state nationalisms in the first decades of post-Franco Spain, see Xosé M. Núñez Seixas, “The reawakening of peripheral nationalisms and the State of the Autonomous Communities” (2000).

étnicas, imperativo biológico que rige inexorablemente nuestro destino. Si queremos vivir tenemos que vivir a la manera española. (quoted in Alarcón Sierra 28)

[whether we like it or not, whatever our disdain towards the real Spain, in our organic depths we are tied to such a background of ethnic tendencies, a biological imperative which inexorably runs our destiny. If we want to live we have to do it the Spanish way.]

The unchallenged assumption of a biological Spanish identity, and Camba's full identification with it, strongly contrasts with the assessment of Camba's view on Galician nationalism as artificial. Alarcón Sierra argues that Camba's

reiterado cuestionamiento irónico ... acaba por poner de manifiesto ... el radical carácter convencional, y por tanto ficticio, no sólo de las imágenes nacionales, sino incluso, en cierta medida, de las propias naciones. (79)

[reiterated ironic questioning ... ends up showing ... the radically conventional, and therefore fictitious, character not only of national images, but even, to some extent, of nations themselves.]

In his prologue to the volume *Galicia* (2015), which compiles some of the articles published by Camba about his birthplace, Francisco Fuster characterises Galician nationalism as follows: "[Camba] no sintió hacia su pequeña patria ese amor ciego e incondicional que sí profesaron quienes, quizá por haber pasado más tiempo en ella, hicieron del apego al terruño una bandera" [Camba did not feel the same blind and unconditional love for his "small fatherland" as that professed by those who, perhaps because they spent too much time in it, championed attachment to the homeland] (19). On the other hand, in the prologue to *Playas, ciudades y montañas*, Fuster states:

aquí está también el Camba europeo e internacional que ejerce de *flâneur* en ese París cosmopolita y moderno de la *Belle Époque* en el que –paradójicamente– dice sentirse más español que en cualquier otra parte. (2012: 18)

[here we have the European and international Camba who acts as a *flâneur* in the cosmopolitan and modern Paris of the *Belle Époque* where – paradoxically – he says that he feels more Spanish than anywhere else.]

In spite of the "paradox" suggested by Fuster, Camba's Spanishness is not regarded as a sign of excessive attachment to his country and in fact does not stop him, according to this scholar, from being both European and international. These examples show the disparity regarding the criticism towards Camba's different views of national identity, depending on whether they refer to Spain or to Galicia, Catalonia and the Basque country.

Camba's position against sub-state nationalisms is also reinforced by his parody of minority languages. With regard to Galician, in *La rana viajera* he argues that

[n]o creo que haya un idioma gallego distinto del castellano. Lo que sí creo es que se podría inventar. Conozco lenguas medievales que se han fabricado en estos últimos treinta años, de acuerdo con todos los adelantos filológicos ... Podríamos, pues, hacer un idioma gallego; pero, ¿cuánto nos duraría? (Camba 1981: 53)

[I don't think that there is a Galician language different to Castilian. But I do believe that it could be invented. I know medieval languages that have been fabricated in the last thirty years, following the latest advances in philology ... We could, therefore, create a Galician language; however, how long would it last?]

Some years earlier, in *Playas, ciudades y montañas*, he had also stated:

[e]l gallego, que es un idioma dulce, armonioso y abundante en vocales, no sirve para la vida ni para la literatura. En gallego se pueden hacer algunas poesías ... comprar algunos pescados y hablarles a las gallinas, a los pájaros y a las muchachas de aldea. Pero, ¿cómo va a tener nadie la pretensión, no ya de escribir obra filosófica, sino de hacer en gallego un artículo político o una crónica periodística? (Camba 1916: 97)

[Galician, which is a sweet and melodious language, full of vowels, is useless for life and for literature. In Galician one can write some poems ... buy some fish and speak to hens, birds and village girls. But, how could anybody have the ambition of writing a political or a journalistic article, let alone philosophical work?]

Similarly, in the section from *La rana viajera* devoted to the Basque Country, Camba mocks the Basque language by suggesting that its vocabulary is limited and most of its words are invented by imitating Castilian: “[a]hora tengo la idea de que hay trescientas, cuatrocientas, tal vez quinientas palabras de vascuence, y que todas las otras son una hábil invención” [now I know that there are 300, 400, maybe 500 words in Basque and the rest are a clever invention] (Camba 1981: 96). Camba’s undermining view on the Basque language contrasts with the efforts from Basque nationalist writers and linguists to revive the language, especially in the 1920s but also in previous years, when “[t]he first ikastolas [schools using Euskera as the primary medium of instruction] opened” and the Basque Studies Society “collected statistics on its use and attempted to create a standardised version” (MacClancy 210).

As in the case of Galicia, Camba’s depiction of the Basque Country is addressed to an imaginary reader from Madrid for whom the city of San Sebastian appears to be just a holiday resort where one can spend the summer at the casino. Apart from the diatribe against the Basque language, nothing is said about the culture of this country or the rise of Basque nationalism. Instead, Camba describes the life in the casino according to a series of clichés, as he explains in the article “Temas literarios” [Literary topics]:

[E]n San Sebastián no hay arriba de doce temas para artículos. Los corresponsales madrileños que vienen aquí hacen las mismas crónicas cada temporada. Yo conozco a un compañero que lleva ya quince sobre la lluvia. Es un especialista. (1981: 77)

[In San Sebastian there aren’t more than twelve topics for articles. The correspondents from Madrid that come here write the same chronicles every season. I know a colleague who has already written fifteen of them about the rain. He is a specialist.]

Although not included in *La rana viajera* (possibly due to the controversy they caused) and therefore less known to readers, Camba also directed his allegedly parodic stance to the Catalan language in a series of articles published in the monarchic newspaper *ABC* in 1917, under the rubric “ABC en Barcelona”. In “La tragedia del catalán” [The Catalan’s Tragedy] from 24 July 1917, he states:

A todos los españoles suele indignarnos mucho el que los catalanes hablen catalán. Hay algo, sin embargo, que nos indigna más todavía, y es el que hablen castellano. Pasamos el acento gallego, pasamos la sintaxis vascongada, lo pasamos todo, pero este dejo especial de los catalanes lo tomamos casi como una ofensa. No concebimos que pueda decirse nada espiritual con acento catalán, nada amable ni nada galante. El catalán, por razón de su acento, está incapacitado para la mayoría de las cosas cuando sale de Cataluña. Fracasan sus chistes, sus piropos, y hasta sus mismos discursos políticos ... El catalán, como idioma, no estaría tan desarrollado si los castellanos hubieran tenido alguna tolerancia con el acento de los catalanes. No la han tenido, y los catalanes hablarán más catalán de día en día. Es más: si el catalán, como el andaluz, sólo fuese un acento, si no hubiese un vocabulario catalán y una sintaxis catalana, los catalanes tendrían que inventarlos. De otro modo, su vida sería muy triste, porque el acento catalán les incapacitaría para hablar de toros, para ir de juerga, para decir chistes y para otras cosas que les gustan mucho. (6–7)

[We Spanish people all usually feel outraged by the fact that Catalans speak Catalan. There is something else, however, that makes us feel even more outraged, which is that they speak Castilian. We give a pass to the Galician accent, to the Basque syntax, we give a pass to anything, but we find that special accent that Catalans have almost offensive. We don’t conceive that anything spiritual, kind and charming can be said with a Catalan accent. The Catalan man, because of his accent, is incapacitated for most things when he leaves Catalonia. He fails at his jokes, at his compliments to women and even at his political speeches ... The Catalan language wouldn’t be so



developed if the Castilians had had some tolerance towards the Catalan accent. They haven't had any, and Catalans will speak more Catalan every day. What is more: if Catalan, like Andalusian, was only an accent, if there wasn't a Catalan vocabulary and a Catalan syntax, the Catalans would have to invent them. Otherwise, their life would be very sad, because the Catalan accent would incapacitate them from speaking about bullfighting, from partying, from telling jokes and from other things that they like very much.]

Rather than a mere exercise in un-politicised and playful humour, Camba's approach to the Catalan language reveals the tension between state and sub-state nationalisms at the time. It does not seem accidental that, in the same article, he also refers to Galician and Basque (and not as languages but as accents or dialects of Spanish) and seems to worry about the growth of Catalan speaking. In the previous century, these languages enjoyed a period of renaissance, especially thanks to the cultural movements *Rexurdimento* in Galicia and *Renaixença* in Catalonia (see [Baker 162–5](#)), and in the early twentieth century the emerging nationalisms of the periphery strove to give them higher cultural and social status. By contrast, Camba is at pains to stress that, contrary to Castilian, they are not fit for public life, and quite importantly, for politics. Not only does his view of an alleged Castilian intellectual superiority mirror Ortega y Gasset's historiographical conception of the Spanish nation, but Camba's efforts to discredit these languages could also be interpreted as an attempt at negating the possibility of nationhood in Galicia, Catalonia and the Basque Country.

Camba scholarship has often de-historicised and de-politicised the author's comments on Catalonia, to present them as just a joke. Llera considers Camba's parody of the Catalan accent “una hilarante hipérbole” [a hilarious hyperbole] (56) and defends him from the insults received after the publication of the article in question: “la chanza de Camba sobre el catalán fue entendida como una provocación. Recibe cartas insultantes” [Camba's joke about Catalan was understood as a provocation. He received insulting letters] (157). In a subsequent article in [ABC on 6 August 1917](#), Camba listed and classified all the different insults he had received in an article titled “Cataluña y el humorismo o una cuestión de incompatibilidad” [Catalonia and Humourism or a Matter of Incompatibility]. According to Llera, Camba's humorous response to these offensive letters

logra poner de manifiesto la falta de urbanidad y la intransigencia de los que le atacan, ridículos porque esclavos de un dogma, y se demuestra que el humorista se aleja del integrismo gracias a su capacidad para relativizar las cosas. (57)

[manages to lay bare the intransigence of those who attack him, who are ridiculous because they are enslaved to a dogma, and demonstrates that the humourist moves away from fundamentalism thanks to his ability to put things into perspective.]

The reactions to Camba's article are here classified as “dogmatic”; however, and similarly to the analysis of state nationalism provided by Billig, Taibo and Delgado, the author's Spanish nationalism is depicted as a neutral position. Almudena Revilla Guijarro's reference to this controversy also avoids a deep historical and ideological analysis, to suggest that Camba's chronicles from Barcelona “no son entendidas por los catalanes como un reproche al resto de los españoles, sino como una impertinencia hacia ellos” [are not understood by Catalan people as a reproach to the rest of Spanish people, but as an impertinence to them] ([245](#)). Although the article is written in the first-person plural (“we Spanish people”), Revilla Guijarro's statement functions as an “exoneration” for Camba's “misunderstood humourism”.

Yet this was not the only occasion on which the journalist's parodies of other cultures were negatively received by those mocked in his articles. In his biography of the author, Pedro Ignacio López García recounts how some French and German citizens living in Spain felt insulted by Camba's chronicles, to the extent that the French government threatened the writer with expulsion from the country (99–103, 110–11). These reactions are, however, downplayed by López García, who argues that the French threat was rather related to diplomatic tensions, and also insinuates that this was an attack against Camba's freedom of speech (110). Such a lack of critical analysis and blatant defence of the author is common to a great deal of scholarship on Camba and reveals a bias from his commentators.



This is also quite evident in the different treatment given to Camba's view on languages. Whereas Camba's mockery and his undermining of Iberian minority languages is either toned down or simply ignored by some of the specialists on his work, the writer is praised for his "linguistic cosmopolitanism", according to Revilla Guijarro, who refers to the use of foreign words in his articles: "A través del cosmopolitismo léxico que se manifiesta por la presencia de galicismos, anglicismos y germanismos, el escritor demostraría su multilingüismo. Con este cosmopolitismo el autor contribuye al enriquecimiento del lenguaje" [Through the linguistic cosmopolitanism manifest in the use of Gallicisms, Anglicisms and Germanisms, the writer would demonstrate his multilingualism. Thanks to such cosmopolitanism, the author contributes to enriching the [Spanish] language] (202). Llera's thorough study of Camba's style does in fact provide a list of the different words from English, French, German, Italian and Portuguese that can be found in his texts (159–68). By contrast, in the article "Haxádeos de cadeirádegos" [Professors' Findings; mocking pre-standard Galician] published in *ABC* in 1935, Camba not only reacts strongly against the use of Galician for academic purposes, but also the enrichment and development of technical vocabulary in this language:

Yo comienzo por no comprender la necesidad que haya en gallego de ocuparse de los catedráticos ni de sus hallazgos ... junto al gallego de los gallegos, hay el gallego de los galleguistas ... quieren triplicar, por lo menos, el vocabulario gallego dotándolo de golpe y porrazo con todas las palabras necesarias para hablar en él de arte, política, economía, matemáticas, etc., etc. Un idioma, después de todo, no es nunca una creación artificial, sino un hecho biológico ... Lo lógico para poner al día el idioma gallego sería ir poco a poco injertándole palabras castellanas ... Y he aquí lo que se proponen los galleguistas, hermanos de los catalanistas y primos de los bitzcaitaras: ... no quieren hacer un idioma para que se les entienda sino para que no se les entienda, y, bien mirado, acaso lo mejor fuese que pudieran realizar sus propósitos (2015 160–1)

[I begin by not understanding what the need is for a Galician for professors and their findings ... together with the Galicians' Galician there is the Galicianists' Galician ... they want to triple, at least, Galician vocabulary by suddenly providing it with all the necessary words to talk about art, politics, economy, mathematics, etc. After all, a language is never an artificial creation, but a biological fact ... The logical thing to do in order to update Galician would be to progressively implant Castilian words into it ... And this is what Galicianists, brothers of the Catalanists and cousins of the Basquists are resolved to do: ... they don't want to create a language to be understood but rather to not be understood, and all things considered, perhaps it would be better if they succeeded]

The reaction to Camba's view on this matter contrasts, in turn, with his alleged multilingualism. Fuster only expresses a very light criticism, and praises Camba's consistency: "si bien esta última afirmación nos parece discutible, lo cierto es que su posición en este asunto siempre fue la misma" [although we consider the latter affirmation as debatable, the truth is that his views on this matter were always the same] (22). Similarly, Revilla Guijarro states that Camba "ataca al galleguismo, un movimiento que pretende el estatuto de independencia, que busca no sólo el reconocimiento de la lengua gallega sino la aportación de nuevos términos que lo único que consiguen es crear un idioma artificial" [attacks Galicianism, a movement that claims independence, which works not only towards the appreciation of Galician language but also to introduce new terms, only resulting in the creation of an artificial language] (264).

In spite of his self-proclaimed Spanishness, his lack of interest in adapting to visited cultures and the negative reactions caused by his articles, Camba has actually sometimes been characterised as a cosmopolitan. This is, for instance, Fuster's opinion (19). Llera also suggests that "la visión de Camba ... asume la pluralidad como virtud" [Camba's view accepts plurality as a virtue] (69) and contends that his humour, "nos está poniendo en guardia frente a la demagogia y las ideologías de toda laya" [puts us on guard against demagoguery and all sorts of ideologies] (118). This interpretation contrasts with the analysis of Camba's attack on minority languages in Spain: whereas the use of foreign words is regarded as a marker of sophistication, his scorn for Galician, Basque and Catalan is seen as a balanced reaction to the "excesses" of regionalist or nationalist movements, and is simply ignored, or commended because of its

alleged humoristic qualities. Once again, this view promoted in some of Camba scholarship reflects the rhetoric of “banal” state nationalism. Juan Carlos Moreno Cabrera argues that state nationalism also has a linguistic counterpart, namely “nacionalismo lingüístico español” [Spanish linguistic nationalism], which is evident in texts that openly praise the importance and history of the Spanish language, but also has a more subtle presence,

[e]n algunos discursos de personalidades de vasta cultura (investigadores, académicos, profesores) y en los discursos oficiales de instituciones culturales de prestigio (academias, institutos, facultades universitarias) ... para presentar una visión de la lengua española estándar en la que los contenidos étnicos y nacionalistas se disimulan u ocultan con objeto de dar la idea de que el español es una lengua común que trasciende los nacionalismos y que se sitúa en el nivel propio de una sociedad civil basada en la libertad e igualdad para todos los ciudadanos españoles. (351–2)

[in some of the discourses by known specialists (researchers, academicians, lecturers) and in the official discourses from prestigious cultural institutions (academies, institutes, university departments) in order to present a view of the standard Spanish language in which ethnic and nationalist aspects are disguised or concealed with the purpose of giving the idea that Spanish is a common language that transcends nationalisms and is placed at the right level within a civil society based on the freedom and equality of all Spanish citizens.]

The tension between centre and periphery shown in Camba’s texts is therefore also present in current analyses of his work, which tend to promote a similar image of Spain as a unitary nation.

Such a view also becomes evident in the chapter “Arrasamientos” [Demolishing] from *La rana viajera*, where Camba refers to the suggestion made by a member of the Spanish army to “destroy” Barcelona, which was mentioned at the beginning of the present article. Making use of his parodic style, Camba criticises such a proposal, not because he disagrees with it entirely, but because he thinks it is not practical:

para evitar la posibilidad remota de perder Barcelona una vez, no vayamos a realmente a perderla dos veces, primero arrasándola, y segundo, invirtiendo en el arrasamiento el dinero que costó la edificación. Por otro lado, el problema de Barcelona es urgente, y si el arrasamiento puede durar cincuenta o sesenta años, no creo que constituya una solución eficaz. (1981: 134)

[in order to avoid the remote possibility of losing Barcelona once, let’s not lose it twice, first by destroying it and second by investing in its destruction the money it cost to construct it. On the other hand, the Barcelona problem is urgent and if its destruction lasts for 50 or 60 years, I don’t think it’d be an effective solution.]

Expressions such as “the remote possibility of losing Barcelona” denote a centralist position: resorting to colonialist overtones, Camba suggests that Barcelona is one of Spain’s possessions. Once more, whereas the existence of a Spanish nation is never questioned, Catalan nationalism is regarded as a “problem”. As Miguel Ángel Durán Franco has pointed out, such a view was widespread in early twentieth-century Spain:

El llamado problema catalán –o más genéricamente, el problema regionalista– fue, sin lugar a dudas, uno de los temas de controversia político-ideológica más importantes en la España del primer tercio del siglo XX ... por sus implicaciones en los problemas político, social, militar, económico, incluso en el problema de la misma esencia de España como nación. (229)

[The so-called Catalan problem – in a more general sense, the regionalist problem – was undoubtedly one the most important themes of political and ideological controversy in Spain during the first third of the twentieth century due to its implications in political, social, military and economic issues, even in the problem of Spain’s very essence as a nation.]

Camba's position towards Catalan nationalism and his essentialist view of Spain became more pronounced in the 1930s, during the Second Republic (1931–1936). In 1934, he compiled several articles published in ABC in the volume *Haciendo de República* [Pretending to be a Republic]. The book also includes other articles that were not accepted by newspapers due to the censorship placed by the Republican government upon views opposed to its policies, according to López García (157). Although he was a known anarchist in his younger years,<sup>6</sup> by the early 1930s, Camba exhibits a conservative ideology. In this volume, he criticises new laws on divorce (legalised for the first time in Spain), freedom of worship, the abolition of the death penalty and the Catalan statute of autonomy passed by the first Republican government. In the article “Espanolismo y catolicismo” [Spanishness and Catholicism], Camba also unequivocally argues for the existence of a Spanish nation, whose essence is defined by the Catholic religion:

España es un pueblo católico que adquirió su conciencia de nación y fue formando al mismo tiempo su unidad moral y su unidad física en una lucha de siglos contra el moro, contra el turco, contra el judío y contra el hereje ... Lo único que yo pretendo es afirmar que el carácter y el genio de España se han forjado en una afirmación constante del catolicismo. (1934: 125–6)

[Spain is a Catholic nation which acquired its national consciousness and at the same time was forming its moral and territorial unity in a centuries-old fight against the Moor, against the Turk, against the Jew and against the heretic ... All that I intend to affirm is that the Spanish character and its genius have been forged in a constant affirmation of Catholicism.]

His view of Spain now shows all the defining traits of nationalism: national consciousness, myths of national origin (the Reconquest), territorial unity, national character and a national moral or religion. Camba's definition of the Spanish nation is of course not new at this point, but reminiscent, for example, of the ideas contained in Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo's *La ciencia española* [The Spanish Science] (1954 [1876]) and *Historia de los heterodoxos españoles* [History of Spanish Heterodox] (1992 [1880–1882]). Publications such as these provided the backbone for the Catholic nationalism of the Primo de Rivera dictatorship (1923–1930), and subsequently for Franco's dictatorship (1939–1975) (Foard 93). In *La ciencia Española*, Menéndez Pelayo argued for the Catholic unity and essence of the Spanish nation and considered foreign influences as pernicious for the “fatherland” (200–1). *Historia de los heterodoxos españoles*, understood by Foard as “an attempt to define the essence of this nation in terms of Catholic orthodoxy” (90), projects the same ideology.

Camba reacts against the threat to Spain's national unity in the article “El estatuto de Cataluña”, where he criticises the devolution given to the Catalan government in terms that also establish a sense of Spanish nationalism:

España es el primer país europeo que sintió la idea de nación y la impuso en toda la haz de su territorio, lo que no impidió, naturalmente, que quedase[n] aquí ... residuos históricos ... que algunos llaman hechos diferenciales, y los hay en todas partes. Los hay en Cataluña con respecto a España, y en Barcelona con respecto a Cataluña ... En todas partes hay hechos diferenciales, pero la cuestión está en si debe uno cultivarlos o debe, por el contrario, dedicarse al cultivo de hechos igualatorios. (1968: 179)

[Spain is the first European country that assumed the idea of the nation and imposed it to the totality of its territory, which naturally did not prevent some historical “residues” to remain ... which some call “differential realities”, and can be found everywhere. They exist in Catalonia with respect to Spain and in Barcelona with respect to Catalonia ... There are “differential realities” everywhere, but the question is whether one must feed them or, on the contrary, devote himself to the development of “equalising realities”.]

6 For Camba's anarchist writing, see “¡Oh, justo, sutil y poderoso veneno!” *Los escritos de la anarquía* (1901–1907) [‘Oh, just and subtle poison!’ The Anarchy Texts] (2014). Although in these texts Camba shows a dislike for the term “patria” [fatherland], in particular when applied to Galicia (in the article “La Patria”), and criticises some aspects of Spanish society, the idea of a Spanish nation and a Spanish character, even a Spanish “race”, remains unquestioned (for example in “Alma española” [Spanish Soul] and “La cobardía Española” [Spanish Cowardice]). In spite of his alleged ideological evolution from anarchism to conservatism, it seems that Camba's views on Spain and Galicia did not change.

In *Haciendo de República*, Camba's parodic style is aimed against the Republican government. In this case, it is thus much more difficult to justify his diatribes as mere playful jokes or to interpret this text as an example of Camba's "elegante imparcialidad" [elegant impartiality], in the words of the Spanish playwright Miguel Mihura (quoted in Llera 55). However, whereas in his previous books Camba had undermined sub-state nationalisms through mockery, now that they have become a political reality, his attack also becomes more serious. So, those scholars who defend the writer from an uncritical position cannot explain Camba's often offensive remarks by identifying them as humour. Llera's analysis exhibits derogatory commentary such as "diatribas contra los [sic] enardecidas soflamas del republicanismo" [diatribes against Republicanism's fiery speeches] (54), "un conjunto de demagogos hacen su agosto en detrimento de lo que en verdad importa: España" [a group of demagogues take advantage at the expense of what really matters: Spain] (99), and "[l]os desmanes de una República que había transformado el sueño en pesadilla" [the excesses of a Republic that had turned the dream into a nightmare] (102). Similarly, López García describes *Haciendo de República* as "una crítica fina y certera del extremismo izquierdista y anticlerical del primer bienio republicano" [a fine and accurate criticism of the anticlerical leftist extremism of the first Republican biennium] (159). For her part, Girón not only simplifies the Republican period by saying "[l]a segunda República fue un fracaso" [the Second Republic was a failure] (215) but also depicts the Falange Española (Spain's Fascist political party), and its founder, in a rather positive light:

José Antonio Primo de Rivera definió la Falange Española como un movimiento basado en el amor al pueblo, en la justicia social y en el profundo sentido religioso de España ... Amor, justicia y catolicidad fueron los puntos neurálgicos que tocó el movimiento falangista y el pueblo respondió. (168–9)

[José Antonio Primo de Rivera defined the "Spanish Falange" as a movement based on love towards the people, social justice and Spain's profound religious feeling ... Love, justice and catholicity were the nerves touched by the "Falangista" movement and the people responded to them.]

Revilla Guijarro's analysis is more objective, but still includes a certain criticism of the Republic: "Julio Camba contempla el viejo caserón que es España con dolor al percatarse de que no se ha llevado a cabo ninguna reforma en profundidad durante estos tres años de República" [Julio Camba looks painfully at Spain, that old barrack, when he realises that no deep reforms have been carried out in the first three years of the Republic] (262).

By contrast with the examples presented above, Camba's support for Francoism has been often unproblematised. Unsurprisingly, the writer sided with the rebels in the Spanish Civil War, as López García points out, "desde el primer momento" [from the very beginning] (160). López García accepts that the writer is an "hombre conservador, franquista desde luego" [a conservative man, Francoist of course] (182), and paints a very negative view of Madrid (which remained under Republican control until the end of the war) as "el terror y la confusión del Madrid rojo" [the terror and confusion of red [Communist] Madrid] (165). Llera also contends that "Camba es ya, en la España franquista, un hombre desencantado y de ideas conservadoras" [during Francoism, Camba is a disillusioned man with conservative ideas] (54), but also suggests that "por las razones que fuera, Camba no se acerca a calentarse a las hogueras de los vencedores" [for whatever reasons, Camba does not take advantage of the victory in the war] (102). Camba's journalistic activity during the Spanish Civil War has in fact often been ignored by academics and remains one of the lesser-known periods of the writer's production. In 1937, he joined *ABC* in Seville and wrote several articles in favour of the Francoist forces.<sup>7</sup> Yet Revilla Guijarro excludes these texts from her analysis of Camba's collaborations with *ABC*, as she jumps from 1936 to 1939. Similarly, Llera's book does not refer to them either. Girón states:

<sup>7</sup> The tension between state and sub-state nationalisms also appears in some of these articles. In "Los Checoetcéteros" [The Czech-etc] (*ABC*, 26 December 1937), Camba compares Spain to Czechoslovakia and argues that the latter is "el país cuya constitución le ha servido de modelo a nuestra segunda república: una república que, no teniendo que ocuparse de nadie más que de los españoles, se obstinó en ocuparse de los vascos, los catalanes, los gallegos y demás, como si también España fuese una suma de residuos y como si, en vez de llamarse España, se llamase, por ejemplo, la Vascoandaluza, la Gallegocatalana o la Asturragonesa" [the country whose constitution has inspired our Second Republic: a Republic which only had to take care of Spanish people, but instead persisted in taking care of the Basques, the Catalans, the Galicians and the rest, as if Spain was also a combination of residues and as if, instead of being called Spain, it was called, for example, Basqueandalusia, Galiciacatalonia or Asturianaragon].

[p]oco nos cuenta Camba de esos años de la Guerra Civil. Solo en dos ocasiones menciona el año 1936 ... Si sabemos que para fines de 1939 aparecen artículos de Camba en las páginas de ABC. (170)

[Camba tells very little about the Civil War years. He only mentions the year 1936 on two occasions ... What we do know is that he publishes some articles in ABC towards the end of 1939.]

In the brief biographical note devoted to Camba in the anthology *Diez articulistas para la historia de la literatura española* [Ten Columnists for the History of Spanish Literature] (2009), Fermín Galindo Arranz argues that “terminada la guerra, Camba vuelve a escribir en ABC” [once the war finishes, Camba returns to ABC], again disregarding his contributions to this same newspaper during the conflict (200). The only reference to these texts can be found in López García’s biography, where he openly states that “hay que esperar hasta el 29 de Julio de 1937, un año después de empezada la Guerra, para encontrar una primera colaboración suya en el ABC de Sevilla, a favor de Franco y los nacionales” [his first collaboration with ABC in Seville, in favour of Franco and the Nationals’ side, does not appear until 29 July 1937] (160). However, López García quickly attenuates Camba’s support for Franco, and even his antisemitism:

[S]us ideas políticas ... desde luego, no son las del fascismo. Espíritu liberal, en más de un aspecto tiene opiniones bastante modernas e incluso atrevidas para la época ... Menos explicable parece su antipatía por los judíos ... El antisemitismo de Camba parece ... más una insuperable antipatía física ... que un concepto verdaderamente pensado o razonado. (161).

[his political ideas are not, of course, those of Fascism. As a Liberal spirit, in many ways his opinions are quite modern and even daring for his time ... His antipathy towards Jews is harder to explain ... Camba’s antisemitism seems more of an insuperable physical dislike ... rather than a concept that has been truly developed and reasoned.]

The toning down or complete overlooking of his support for Franco’s army is consistent with a lack of critical engagement with Camba’s contradictory views on nationalism, which assume the “naturalness” of the Spanish nation but regard sub-state nations as “artificial”. Certain analyses of Camba’s texts perpetuate – even promote – the writer’s ideas a century on. This seems to confirm his own assessment that in Spain (even in the twenty-first century), “todo está igual” [everything remains the same], especially with regard to the tension between the centre and the periphery that grew after the end of the Spanish Empire in 1898. As demonstrated above, most studies of Camba’s work have toned down his mockery of other cultures (including sub-state nations within Spain), while the underlying ideology of his texts, which shows a centralist form of Spanish nationalism, has not been sufficiently examined.

## CONCLUSION

Edward Said famously argued that “too often literature and culture are presumed to be politically, even historically innocent; it has regularly seemed otherwise to me ... society and literary culture can only be understood and studied together” (27). The examination of Julio Camba’s home travels across Spain in the opening decades of the twentieth century not only confirms Said’s claim, but also demonstrates how this applies to literary criticism itself. In this article, I have suggested that Camba’s chronicles are imbued with a rhetoric of Spanish nationalism which, using Michael Billig’s term, can be described as “banal” – that is, disguised as a “neutral”, “normal” or “natural” way of framing the nation. On the other hand, Camba portrays competing nationalisms within the Spanish state often as “artificial”, “threatening” and “extremist”. Such a logic is pervasive in Spanish society and politics especially since the end of the empire, and a pivotal idea in the conception of Spain promoted by Spanish politicians, intellectuals and polymaths such as José Ortega y Gasset since the beginning of the twentieth century. Given the prominence of this view at the time, the often un-politicised and de-historicised approach to Camba’s writings about Spain, Galicia, Catalonia and the Basque Country, and the interpretation of these texts as “innocent” parody, fails to provide a complete understanding of his work and of the context in which it was produced. On the contrary, and as



I have shown, Camba's texts are part of an underlying ideology of Spanish nationalism which denies the possibility of other national identities within the state and functions, using Carlos Taibo's term, as a bolt that shuts down any discussions about the unity of the Spanish nation. Whereas in his earlier articles Camba makes use of humour (often of a debatable taste, as some of the people he mocked in his chronicles denounced at the time) to discredit not only the political articulation of sub-state nationalisms but also the existence of minority languages, the tone of his discourse evolved towards a more serious and clearly nationalist stance in the 1930s.

The majority of scholarship on Camba's work has not critically examined the tensions of his views on Spain and Spanish identity. Luisa Elena Delgado has pointed out that post-Franco Spanish society is in fact still permeated with such a prevalent discourse:

[c]omo demuestra el repaso fundamental a los debates más frecuentes en prensa escrita, tertulias de radio y televisión, "los nacionalismos" –entre los que nunca se encuentra, por supuesto, el del estado que se identifica como un patriotismo constitucional exento de ideología– han sido representados como el gran problema del estado democrático. (23)

[as the necessary review of the most frequent debates in the press, radio and TV talk shows demonstrates, "nationalisms" – among which state nationalism, identified with a constitutional patriotism devoid of ideology, is of course never to be found – have been represented as the biggest problem of the democratic state.]

As my analysis of the critical reception of Camba's texts has revealed, a similar worldview persists in contemporary literary criticism. The pervasiveness of such views shows that the tensions reflected in Camba's texts are still very much at play in post-Franco Spanish contemporary culture and society.

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