

Spanish Architecture in exile
Arquitectura española del exilio

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Last July 18 was the eightieth anniversary of the failed coup d'état that triggered the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). The media, documentaries, and academic debates are repeatedly reminding readers and viewers of the relevance of a rigorous and apolitical analysis of this episode in recent Spanish history. Over the last three decades, a considerable number of academic books and articles have been published with different perspectives and interests that principally come from historical studies. All of them analyse the different reasons which led part of the Spanish army to revolt against the government of the Second Spanish Republic (1931-1939), as well as the political, social and cultural consequences that the war and the subsequent Franco Regime (1939-1975) had on Spanish society. As the Spanish historian Julian Casanova argues, "the most relevant facts of the Spanish Civil War have already been researched and the most important questions are solved"¹. British and American Hispanists, such as Gabriel Jackson, Hugh Thomas or Stanley Payne, initiated the study of the Spanish conflict. Thanks to their research, the following generations of historians could develop a more documented literature with specific approaches – biographical studies, oral history, women's history, etc-, such as the writings of Antony Beevor, Paul Preston, Ronald Fraser, Helen Graham from English-speaking academia, and the texts of Carlos Gil Andrés, Enrique Moradiellos, Ángel Viñas, and Julian Casanova, among others, from Spanish academia.

Despite the diversity of historical studies, the repercussions that the Spanish conflict had –and has- on the culture of Spanish Architecture is a contentious subject for researchers. Most of the historiographical studies on Spanish Modern Architecture produced from the Sixties onwards have focused on style concerns, principally because the priority was to analyse the evolution of the International Style in Spain and its connections with canonical aesthetic discourses. The selection and analysis –aesthetically and technically- of modern buildings and the study of the work of the main architects –monographs- are the predominant approaches used in order to research how Modernity was understood in Spain. Books and articles whose approach is political are limited and still insufficient. Therefore *Arquitectura española del exilio* (*Spanish Architecture in exile*) is a welcome addition. The book –unfortunately only published in Spanish- is a global study of the life and work of Spanish architects whose political ideology meant they went into exile after or during the Spanish Civil War.

The World Wars are the main global conflicts that historians have used to segment the study of the evolution of Modern Architecture worldwide. Thus, it is usual to talk about pre-war, inter-war and post-war architecture. Due to the Civil War and the non-participation of Spain in World War II this kind of organization is not completely appropriate for this country. The historiography of Spanish Modern Architecture has its own chronology. The times marked by the military conflict and the subsequent Franco Regime are the main periods used to organize the evolution of Modernity in Spain. Before the military conflict, the twenties and thirties were years of assimilation of early Modernity, which was prematurely curtailed by the victors. The first decade after the Civil War was a period of economic depression and cultural isolation. In addition to the thousands of deaths, and the social and economic tragedy, the three year long conflict blocked the cultural progression that Spain had been experiencing during the first third of the twentieth-century. The affinity of some architects with the Government of the Spanish Second Republic had rough and violent consequences, as also happened with other left-wing professionals and intellectuals, such as the filmmaker Luis Buñuel, the poet Rafael Alberti or the painter Pablo Picasso, among many other well-known cases. Many architects suffered the 'cleansing guidelines' for the architecture profession dictated by Franco's Government, and some professionals decided to go into exile in an attempt to continue their profession –some with more fortune than others. Two facts should be added to all this to understand the reason for the cultural architectural regression suffered: the death of some architects in the conflict, and the impact of historicist architecture promoted by Franco's Regime. It was in the growth years of the fifties when the situation started to change, and the country experienced a calm but essential opening up to international influences, with Modern Architecture coming to the fore again.

Spanish Architecture in exile is edited by Juan José Martín Frechilla, associate professor at the Central University of Venezuela, and Carlos Sambricio, full professor at the Polytechnic University of Madrid (Spain), and, perhaps, the most relevant architecture historian in Spain during the last three decades. The book is organized geographically, so that each chapter analyses one host country according to three main areas: Latin America, United States and Eastern Europe. A specialised author on the topic writes each chapter. Thus, a total of eight authors participate in the book, and this heterogeneity enables each chapter to be read independently. Sambricio's powerful introduction is written as a protest. He considers himself as part of a generation of historians for whom "the mere mention of the name of architects who left the country in 1939 was a wink of complicity", and for who "political commitment was identified with avant-garde architecture, a kind of avant-garde that Franco's Spain wanted to eradicate and condemn to oblivion"². The prologue also rigorously presents a state of the art, considering the strengths and weaknesses of previous writings on the subject. Sambricio makes clear the necessity of a global study of the work of Spanish architects that went into exile with three points of comparison: firstly, their buildings and proposals should be compared with the architecture built in Spain during the first years of Franco's Regime; secondly, their work should be contrasted with the architecture they found in the host countries, which implies an understanding not only of the state of the debate about Modernity in those countries but also their economic and political situation and its implications for architecture culture; and finally, to consider their contribution to the host countries' culture in relation to other architecture built in those countries during the same period³.

In addition to the prologue, Sambricio writes the chapters about the architects who chose Mexico and the former USSR for their exile. Mexico was the country with most exiles, with twenty-five architects disembarking on the other side of the Atlantic. According to Sambricio, few were aware of theoretical debates, indeed they barely knew who Le Corbusier or Teige were, so that most of them developed their career in construction management and minor buildings. Nevertheless, one of the youngest, Felix Candela managed to develop a great career becoming the brilliant architect we know. The situation was different for Luis Lacasa and Manuel Sánchez Arcas, whose license to practice as architects was permanently taken away in 1942 for their political affiliations with the Republican Government. Despite being outstanding pre-war architects, their careers unfortunately miscarried in the USSR. On the other hand, two cases of careers that prospered before and after the Spanish conflict are those of Antonio Bonet and Josep Lluís Sert. Fernando Álvarez Prozorovich (Polytechnic University of Catalonia, Spain) explains the three decades that Bonet spent in Argentina with a three year break in Uruguay, where he became founder of the Austral group and developed important housing and urban planning projects in the city of Buenos Aires. Mar Loren (University of Seville, Spain) presents the particular and brilliant case of Sert in the United States, also disqualified as an architect by Franco's Regime. Other Latin America countries studied are Colombia by Carlos García Vázquez (University of Seville, Spain) and Jorge Ramírez Nieto (National University of Colombia), Chile by David Caralt (University of San Sebastian, Chile), Cuba by Francisco Gómez Díaz (University of Seville), and Venezuela by Martín Frechilla. In total, there were forty-nine architects that went into exile with diverse trajectories, achievements and cultural implications in their host countries. The book also presents a thought-provoking epilogue called the 'interior exile', where the 'cleansing guidelines' are explained. Fernando Agrasar (University of A Coruña, Spain), the author, concludes that those rules not only penalised left-wing professionals but also meant "the social destruction of [Spanish] architects"⁴. There were eighty-three architects punished with different kinds of disqualifications - temporary or permanent-, among them Matilde Ucelay, the first female architect in Spain. The reasons given for doing so were related with "being part of the governmental service during the 'Marxist domination', the publication of writings opposed to the 'National Movement', the signing of documents in favour of the Marxist revolution, or services rendered to the Judeo-Marxist and Anarchist cause"⁵.

The narratives do not present the different cases as 'heroic', indeed quite the opposite. Another strength of the book is the rigour and objectivity in presenting the diverse case studies, which also refutes some common fallacies in the historiography of Spanish Modern Architecture, such as going into exile was the best option possible, and architects would have had great possibilities to continue their professional careers in those foreign countries. The brilliant and world known careers of Sert, Bonet or Candela outshine the trajectories of the rest of the exiled architects, and create this impression. In parallel, some misunderstandings are cleared up, such as that the Spanish architect Jesús Martí, who chose Mexico as a host country, never received the order for designing the Spanish Pavilion for Paris in 1937, or that Sánchez Arcas was not in charge of the reconstruction of Warsaw once in the USSR, as some unreliable sources stated. However the most common simplification is to directly relate left-wing ideology with avant-garde architecture, and this is perfectly clarified in the different chapters. The amount of cases presented perfectly shows that not all the Spanish architects with progressive thinking at that time were also

innovative in the kind of architecture they were doing. Moreover, many of them designed historicist buildings in their host countries, such as Pablo Zabalo in Chile or Alfredo Rodríguez Orgaz in Colombia. Additionally, there were Spanish right-wing architects whose architecture is considered a canonical example of early Modernity in Spain, such as José Manuel Aizpurua -Nautical Club in San Sebastian, 1930, for example-, who died on the battlefield.

Spanish Architecture in exile leaves, however, an open door to further research. The clarity with which the different authors illustrate the political ideology and positions of the architects that went into exile, and the relationship to the development of their professional careers suggests the same clear analysis is possible for the contrary case: research into the political ideology and affiliation of the architects who were able to build on Spanish soil during the period of Franco's Regime and embraced Modernity. Sambricio implies the relevance of this matter with this passage: "In the fifties the political circumstances had changed, and it was a determining factor for the discouraging experience of exile. There was also another equally important fact that was to reveal that a younger generation of Spanish Architects (Coderch, Sostres, Fisac, Cabrero, Aburto, Oíza..., all of them 'unshakably' close to the Regime) departed from the historicist pastiche and opened the door to Modern Architecture"⁶. As Sambricio states "some claim that political affiliation is a secondary subject and it must be avoided in a writing whose aims for objectivity and an academic approach: big mistake, I would say..."⁷.

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¹ J. Casanova, 'La Guerra Civil española explicada en 10 libros'. *Tinta libre* 38 (2016), p.17. Original quotation: 'Los hechos más significativos de la Guerra Civil han sido ya investigados y las preguntas más relevantes están resueltas'.

² C. Sambricio, 'Arquitectura española del exilio' in J.J. Martín Frechilla, C. Sambricio, eds., *Arquitectura española del exilio* (Madrid, Lampreave, 2014), p.7. Original quotation: 'para quien la simple mención a los arquitectos que en 1939 marcharon fuera del país era un guiño de complicidad' y que, además, identificaban "compromiso político con pertenencia a la vanguardia arquitectónica, a una vanguardia que – en la España franquista – se quiso erradicar y condenar al olvido'.

³ Ibid., p.14.

⁴ F. Agrasar, 'El exilio interior' in J.J. Martín Frechilla, C. Sambricio, eds., *Arquitectura española del exilio*, p.335. Original quotation: 'tenían como finalidad un castigo inhabilitador, pero también la destrucción social del arquitecto'.

⁵ Ibid., p.330. Original quotation: 'la aceptación o desempeño de cargos durante la 'dominación marxista', la publicación de escritos contrarios al 'movimiento nacional', la firma de documentos 'beneficiosos a la revolución marxista', o servicios a favor de la 'acción marxista judaica y anarquizante'.

⁶ C. Sambricio, 'Arquitectura española del exilio' in J.J. Martín Frechilla, C. Sambricio, eds., *Arquitectura española del exilio*, p.28. Original quotation: 'En los años cincuenta las circunstancias políticas habían cambiado y fue determinante en el desánimo que viviera el exilio. Pero hubo otro hecho igualmente importante como fue tener noticias de que en España una joven generación de arquitectos (Coderch, Sostres, Fisac, Cabrero, Aburto, Oíza... , todos ellos 'inquebrantablemente' afines al Régimen) daba al traste con el pastiche historicista y abría puertas a la moderna arquitectura'.

⁷ C. Sambricio, 'Del entusiasta recibimiento de Cárdenas a la realidad de Miguel Alemán' in J.J. Martín Frechilla, C. Sambricio, eds., *Arquitectura española del exilio*, p.271. Original quotation: 'Habrà quien objete que las militancias políticas son tema de segundo orden y que debieran obviarse en un trabajo que se quiere académico: grave error, me atrevo a decir...'