Imperial Emotions

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Columbus in 1892

The story of the nationalization of Spain’s colonial past, of the lionization of the conquest and colonization of the Americas by the Spanish state and its cultural institutions, is protracted and complicated. For a long time, it was thought that it was only in the aftermath of the Spanish-Cuban-American War of 1898, when Spain had lost all of its colonies, that it turned to its colonial past for nationalist inspiration (Serrano, El nacimiento 245–329; Pike). In contrast to these opinions, Ángel Loureiro has remarked that “Spain has been haunted for two centuries by the specter of its former colonies” (“Spanish Nationalism” 65) and that at the end of the nineteenth century “Latin America is [already] seen by Spaniards […] as symbolic and material compensation for Spain’s economic and political dejection” (69). Echoing Loureiro’s concern with the place of the Spanish-American ex-colonies in the Spanish national imagination, Christopher Schmidt-Nowara has recently argued, in The Conquest of History (2006), that Spanish patriots appropriated the history of the colonization of the Americas for their projects much earlier, since at least the mid-1820s. This recognition of the importance that the Spanish empire in the Americas has had for the nation-building process in Spain was long overdue. For this reason alone, Schmidt-Nowara’s study is nothing short of groundbreaking; it attests to the existence of a patriotic imagination based on past Spanish colonization during the course of the nineteenth century by unearthing a series of largely unknown documents and by reinterpreting better-known ones. This recognition of the American empire’s early symbolic importance for Spain’s imagined community, however, has a blind spot: it assumes that the only possible way in which Spanish patriots related to the conquest and colonization of America was through its glorification for nationalistic purposes.

Although this is largely true, especially for the first half of the Bourbon Restoration (1875–1898), I argue that it is possible to rescue some alternative,
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Critical visions of both past Spanish colonialism and the Spanish political community. Taking my cue from Schmidt-Nowara’s insights about the political use of the imperial past, in this chapter I focus on the Columbian commemorations of 1892 in order to examine an important chapter in the Spanish state’s appropriation of the symbols and figures associated with the early modern empire. Building on the suggestion that the Columbian commemorations were not as unanimous as had previously been thought (Fontana 17; Pérez Garzón 91–93; Serrano, El nacimiento 315–16), I analyze three distinct perspectives on the events of 1492: the nationalist discourse of Emilio Castelar (1832–1899) and Antonio Cánovas del Castillo (1828–1897), the freethinking pronouncements of Antonio Machado y Núñez (1812–1896) and Ramón Chíes (1845–1893), and most importantly, the federalist views of Francesc Pi i Margall (1824–1901). In contrast to the nationalist fervor that swept the nation during the fall of 1892, when the commemorations gave way to jingoistic reassertions of Spain’s imperial legacies, Pi i Margall related to the conquest and colonization of the Americas mostly with indifference, and occasionally with indignation. By reconstructing Pi i Margall’s forgotten views, I seek to demonstrate that there was an alternative political use of the imperial past, one that acquired its meaning not within a nationalist framework but rather within a federalist political formation. In this manner, I hope also to clarify the distinct roles of the imperial past and of imperialism in the articulation of nationalism and federalism, two of the main discourses of political identity and difference in the nineteenth century.

Certainly, as various historians have remarked, the different readings of the colonial past produced during the last quarter of the nineteenth century were, by and large, unanimous. The predominant interpretation is that during the Restoration there was a general agreement within Spain about the defense of Spanish forms of colonization and their capacity to assimilate the colonized regardless of political ideology. In this sense, Schmidt-Nowara rightly points out how “the conflicts endemic to political life in the metropolis disappeared in the imagined community of la España ultramarina” (The Conquest 10). For Schmidt-Nowara, this Spanish consensus about the colonial past is especially clear “when seen in dialogue and contention with patriotic Antillean or Philippine histories of Spanish colonization” (41), histories that, naturally enough, often contradicted those of Spanish patriots. Frederick Pike adds to the argument by asserting that the fundamental conviction of hispanismo, namely that “Spaniards (peninsulares) and Spanish Americans are members of the same raza, a raza shaped more by common culture, historical experiences, traditions, and language than by blood or ethnic factors,” was common to both liberals and conservatives of the time (1). In a recent essay on the subject, Antonio
Feros concurs, forcefully asserting that “if since the 1870s there were various and conflicting views on the identity and the history of Spain as an Iberian nation, there was, however, only one view about the identity of Spain as a global empire” (112). Finally, Carlos Rama reinforces this alignment of the liberal and conservative visions of the history of colonization by pointing out that during the Restoration it is difficult to distinguish between the liberal’s and conservative’s foreign policy with respect to Spanish America (183–84), suggesting that colonial policy validated the historical defense of Spanish colonialism put forth by Spanish intellectuals.

These accounts, however, do not ask if these visions of Spain’s imperial past related to other, more critical visions that were circulating at the time and that were articulated with other, less markedly essentialist national projects. If these scholars are right in arguing that knowledge about the imperial past was produced in order to foster bonds of loyalty between the Spanish state and its citizens, then the next question that needs to be asked is how this imperial knowledge was interpreted in other conceptions of the political community, regardless of whether such conceptions were institutionalized or not, were successful or failed. The failure of a political project, such as Francesc Pi i Margall’s federal organization of the Spanish state, can sometimes be more telling than a success. Indeed, as my reading of the 1892 commemorations will show, this particular failure reveals the existence of a critical vision of the history of colonization in the Americas, one whose suppression is constitutive of the tradition of imperialistic affirmation that shaped the dominant Spanish nationalist imagination during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. As the federal articulation of the Spanish community failed, a staunchly nationalist, self-congratulatory, complacent vision of the imperial past imposed itself. This vision is precisely the one that historians have emphasized thus far in their accounts of the nationalization of the Spanish colonial past.

In the following, I will look at failed political projects to determine their corresponding visions of the history of colonization. My point of departure is Schmidt-Nowara’s observation that the historical works of Martín Fernández de Navarrete (especially Colección de los viajes y descubrimientos que hicieron por mar los españoles desde fines del siglo XV [1825]), the wealth of published documents from Spanish archives on the colonization of the Americas, and the uses of Christopher Columbus and Bartolomé de las Casas as national symbols show that “the empire bequeathed to nineteenth-century patriots a deep layer of scholarly authority, historical sources, glorious heroes and events, and pointed responses to foreign critics of Spain” (The Conquest 34). Ultimately, I aim to nuance the conclusion that (i) Spanish representations of the conquest and colonization were uniform across the political spectrum.
of the Restoration and (ii) that these representations were exclusively articulated in a centralist, essentialist conception of the Spanish community.

If this unanimous defense of Spanish colonialism were constant throughout the Bourbon Restoration (1875–1923), one would expect an even higher degree of unanimity in 1892, when at first glance it appeared that the whole country was rallying to celebrate Columbus and the events of 1492. But was it really? If in 1892 Spaniards were so unanimously singing the praises of Columbus as a “symbol of Spain’s reinvented colonialism and national history” (Schmidt-Nowara, The Conquest 64), how is one to understand the pronouncements of free-thinkers and federalist republicans who dared to condemn Spanish colonial violence and the injustice of Spanish political institutions in America? How is one to judge statements such as the following by Ramón Chies, a freethinking republican, who wrote that during the conquest “masas de hombres sin malicia y sin ambición fueron reducidas a la más dura esclavitud” [multitudes of men without malice or ambition were forced into the harshest of slaveries] (1)? Or, the stance taken against Spanish colonial institutions by Antonio Machado y Núñez, the grandfather of the famous poet Antonio Machado, who declared that Spaniards had been “bad rulers” in America, and had managed to “producir en ellos un odio extraordinario a sus padres” [create in them an extraordinary hatred toward their fathers] (2)? Or finally, the reference to the collective responsibility of Spaniards for “el despotismo con que […] gobernamos [las colonias]” [the despotism with which we ruled the colonies], which can be found in an editorial of El Nuevo Régimen, Francesc Pi i Margall’s federalist weekly (“El Centenario de Colón,” Oct. 8, 1892, 5)? Certainly, these statements are more complex and contradictory than suggested herein, but when read together in the appropriate context they represent some of the few critiques of past (and present) Spanish colonialism that one can salvage from 1890s Spain. As we shall see, this critique of the history of Spanish colonization contains a number of contradictions and ambiguities, but that most definitely does not mean that it should be simply swept under the rug.

And yet this is precisely what happened in the main accounts of the nationalization of Spain’s imperial legacies during the end of the nineteenth century. Likewise, a critique of past Spanish colonialism only appears obliquely in the best and most complete description of the Columbian celebrations written, Salvador Bernabéu Albert’s 1892: El IV centenario del descubrimiento de América en España. Bernabéu Albert’s study, published in 1987 in preparation for the 1992 commemorations, is primarily based on the official chronicle of the festivities as found in the brainchild of the state’s commission entrusted with the organization of the quadricentennial
activities, the journal *El Centenario: Revista ilustrada*. Because it is largely based on the facts and interpretations recorded by *El Centenario*, Bernabéu Albert’s narrative of the quadricentennial activities reproduces many of the silences that were already inscribed in the original – and thus, for instance, he only attributes marginal significance to those ideas that contradicted the dominant epic glorification of Spain’s colonization of America, turning them into a hardly significant “background” for the exaltation of Spanish colonialism (131–33). In a later work entitled “La conquista después del desastre,” Bernabéu Albert comes closer to our line of inquiry by treating the dissenting views of the conquest and colonization as a historical topic in its own right, but he fails to show how these critical views were part of an alternative conception of national memory.

In short, historians have tended to minimize the symbolic relevance of dissenting views about past Spanish colonialism in America because either (i) they do not perceive a significant difference between liberal and conservative accounts of Spanish colonialism and its legacies (Pike; Feros), (ii) they do not perceive a difference between metropolitan accounts of Spanish colonialism when contrasted with colonial accounts of the same events (Schmidt-Nowara, *The Conquest*), or (iii) they acknowledge the existence of sources that contradicted the official, state-sanctioned, nationalist narrative but endow them with minimal retrospective significance by failing to articulate them within an alternative conception of the Spanish political community (Bernabéu Albert, 1892; this is also the case in Blanco’s *Cultura y conciencia* 82–87). As a result, the critiques of past Spanish colonialism that did manage to appear in the public sphere around 1892 lack a historical narrative that treats them on their own terms.

In saying this, I do not mean to suggest that the general outline of the historians’ interpretive framework is wrong. On the contrary, it seems correct in that it acknowledges the power inherent in the state’s greater access to, and control of, the means of historical production. After all, the commemoration of the events of 1492 was an initiative by the Spanish state, an institution that in 1892 was widely supported by the liberal and conservative elites, both of whom mobilized their economic, political, and cultural resources to produce the “White Legend” of the conquest and colonization of America. But beyond this general (and often unconscious) acknowledgment, most historical narratives rarely track the specific ways in which power is constitutive of the glorious epic of Spanish colonization. That is, historical narratives register (and to a certain extent reproduce) both the Spanish state’s power in organizing sources and the dominant intellectuals’ power in interpreting sources, but they rarely thematize such power or draw any lessons from its operations. Only Schmidt-Nowara offers
a detailed analysis of the workings of Spain’s archival power, showing how Cuban or Puerto Rican patriots had to negotiate the metropolitan organization of sources in crafting their own national narratives (The Conquest 96–128).

But is there anything to say about the workings of power within Spain when it comes to the elaboration of narratives about the conquest and colonization of America? What epistemological and ideological factors explain the operations of power in Spanish narratives about Spain’s rule in America? Is it possible to reduce the ideological factors to the – all too familiar – liberal versus conservative dichotomy? And if so, on what side of the liberal/conservative divide would one place the political uses of the imperial past put forth by freethinkers and federalist republicans?

These are just some of the questions that I wish to address in this chapter. Throughout, my thoughts will be guided by Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s observation that commemorations are essentially narratives of power about the events they celebrate (118). Neither good nor evil, power for Trouillot is constitutive of all historical narratives. Its uneven distribution, both at the level of historical process (what actually happened in 1892) and of historical narrative (what is said to have happened in 1892), accounts for the particular arrangement of silences and mentions that make up narrative history. In this sense, I approach the silences produced in 1892 by the narrative of a global and unanimous defense of Spanish colonialism bearing in mind that “power does not enter the story once and for all, but at different times and from different angles. It precedes the narrative proper [for it affects the making of sources and archives], contributes to its creation and to its interpretation” (28). Thus, the construction of silences obeys a multitemporal logic that makes different types of silence enter the process of historical production at different moments.

In the case of the narratives of 1892, the first significant silence is the one produced by the naming of Columbus’s landfall as the “Discovery.” This first silence, which is inextricably linked to the process of making Columbus and the Spanish Empire relevant for national memory and is common to all Spanish (and European) celebrations of the “Discovery,” determined the exclusion of an indigenous perspective on the events of 1492. The second silence that is relevant for our purposes is the result of the political culture of the Bourbon Restoration, which was characterized by the polarization of the intellectual field between liberals and conservatives (the two political parties shared power after 1881). As centralist, nationalistic ideologies, liberalism and conservatism marginalized the voices of federalist republicans, and made their alternative conceptualization of collective memory – and thus their renderings of Columbus and of past Spanish
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colonialism – both unspeakable and inaudible. This marginalization of federalist, secular thought also determined the creation of a third silence with regard to the narratives produced during the 1892 commemorations, a silence that did not affect the framework within which a critique of past Spanish colonialism could have been understood but instead affected the quantity and visibility of the sources. Indeed, the few critical voices against Spanish colonialism that were expressed appeared in a series of minor, peripheral outlets that are not considered part of the canon but rather simply part of the archive. In spite of these silences, federalist republicans managed to put forward a critique of past Spanish colonialism in the late 1890s. My attempt to reconstruct this critique will involve unearthing a series of obscure and often neglected sources from the archive, such as Francesc Pi i Margall’s writings on the subject, and articles that appeared in weekly publications such as El Nuevo Régimen or Las Dominicales del Libre Pensamiento. These sources not only questioned the dominant representations of Spanish colonialism, but also the national story imposed by the Restoration regime, thereby constructing an alternative collective memory that has been all but buried in later historical accounts.

In short, my argument involves a twofold, seemingly contradictory strategy. It attempts to redress a silence that has had no clear historical effects – the critiques of past Spanish colonialism – by simultaneously recognizing and displacing the power asymmetry between the official narrative vindicating Spanish colonialism and its critical counterpart. In other words, my argument grants that historical efficacy is important, but at the same time attempts to minimize it. This is the paradox embedded in my attempt to address the silences that make up the narrative of the events of 1892 as a unanimous vindication of Spanish colonialism. This type of delicate balancing act is required of any narrator of silences, a storyteller who, according to Trouillot, “must both acknowledge and contradict the power embedded in previous understandings” (56).

In previous accounts of the 1892 commemorations, narrators have often limited themselves to acknowledging the uneven power in the production of sources, archives, and narratives, thus presenting Columbus as the uncontested embodiment of the White Legend of Spanish colonialism. In my account, I will both acknowledge and contradict the power embedded in the narrative of Spanish imperialism that emanated from the nation-state by treating alternative political uses of the imperial past as a historical topic in its own right. This is no easy task, for the nation-state was the most decisive agent shaping the narratives of commemorated events during the nineteenth century. As John Gillis compellingly demonstrates, since at least the 1850s the nation-state and its professional historians instrumentalized
commemorative practices for the construction of a singular national identity. A quick reference to the ways in which Columbus’s first voyage was commemorated around the globe bears out this judgment. Mexico’s contributions to the 1892 celebrations, for instance, “expressed its search for national identity through the translation of the ‘discovery’ narratives into politically vehement statements that told of an indigenous population brutalized by foreign invaders” (Vázquez 21). In Spain these narratives were an occasion to showcase “la política española de reivindicación de la conquista y la colonización” [the Spanish policy of vindicating the conquest and colonization] (Díaz Quiñones, “1892” 477). And in the United States, at the World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893, they “overlapped with the ongoing narrative of conquest that U.S. power was busily writing in the lands of this hemisphere” (Trouillot 129).

These divergent appropriations of the figure of Columbus and the events of 1492 make clear the conflictive character of commemorative activity, which can be considered a properly political endeavor insofar as “it involves the coordination of individual and group memories, whose results may appear consensual when they are in fact the product of processes of intense contest, struggle, and, in some instances, annihilation” (Gillis 5). If all commemorations, as Michel-Rolph Trouillot once remarked, “impose a silence upon the events that they ignore, and [...] fill that silence with narratives of power about the event they celebrate” (118), then my aim in the following pages is to revive and better understand the different narratives of power, the different readings about the events of 1492 that existed in Spain. In other words, my aim is not simply to re-present the cultural memory of the conquest and colonization of the Americas, but rather to expand it, to make room for the conflicting representations of Spain’s imperial past. Without a clear image of these cultural conflicts, without a clear perception of the embattled legacies of the Spanish Empire, the ambivalent emotional attachments to imperial myths characteristic of the early twentieth century would be very hard to understand.

Nationalist Uses of the Imperial Past

On October 12, 1892 every major Spanish newspaper hailed Columbus as a hero and acknowledged his landing in the Bahamas, now simply called the “Discovery,” as one of humanity’s greatest achievements. However, Columbus’s voyage was not celebrated in 1592, 1692, or 1792.² Therefore Columbus’s relevance as the “discoverer of America” and the initiator of the Spanish Empire is something that cannot be explained only by the circumstantial fact that the year 1892 marked the quadricentennial
of Columbus's landfall. If the liberal-oligarchic state of the Restoration committed over 2 million pesetas from its meager resources to celebrate the figure of Columbus in 1892 by holding several scientific congresses, popular exhibitions, and lavish parades, then this must be explained by a more powerful rationale than chronological coincidence alone. In fact, the state's interest in the events of 1492 betrayed an intense zeal to make Columbus's voyage part of a grand historical myth.

The first element that contributed to the relevance of Columbus and of past Spanish colonialism was the Spanish state's interest in forging new cultural alliances between Spain and its former American colonies. According to one commentator, the attempts up until 1866 to build cultural bridges between the intellectual elites on both sides of the Atlantic were “narrow in scope and limited in effectiveness” (Van Aken 99). By the end of the nineteenth century, however, they were considerably more successful. Carlos Rama has chronicled these efforts, which were designed to counter the growing economic and political influence of the United States in Latin America. Among the most notable, he mentions the publication in 1884 of a government-sponsored journal devoted to America (Unión Iberoamericana), the increase in the book trade between Spain and America, the critical writings on Latin American history and literature of Emilio Castelar (1832–1899), Juan Valera (1827–1905) and Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo (1856–1912), and the Columbian commemorations of 1892, which are the focus of this chapter (Rama 161–98, 241–330).

The Restoration’s concern with the public use of history, however, was more fundamental than these international cultural initiatives for determining the relevance of Columbus. As Stuart Hall points out, “nations construct identities by selectively binding their chosen high points and memorable achievements into an unfolding ‘national story’” (25). In 1892, Columbus’s landing in the Bahamas was designated (or rather, constructed) as the mother of all memorable achievements, as the beginning of Spain’s glorious history of colonization. This, however, required the active participation of the state and its organic intellectuals.

Whereas in other Western countries, the nationalization of the past was relatively strong, in Spain it was not, despite the fact that history was born in liberal, early nineteenth-century Spain “como un saber nacional, como una disciplina estatal y como una escuela de patriotas” [as a national knowledge, as a state discipline, and as a school for patriots] (Pérez Garzón 63). As in other European countries, the nationalization of the past in Spain was instrumental in legitimizing the nationalization of both politics (the rise of the Liberal state) and the economy (the expansion of capitalism). But in contrast to other European countries, the nationalization of the past in Spain...
remained, for the better part of the nineteenth century, an elite phenomenon with a weak impact on the political integration of the masses (Álvarez Junco, *Mater dolorosa* 563–65). Neither the army nor the public education system, the two main institutions in the socialization of national identities, succeeded in producing the cultural assimilation of an overwhelmingly rural, diverse population with strong local loyalties. Propertied classes were able to evade the army by paying for substitutes, and the national system of education, chronically underfunded as it was, had to face competition from Catholic schools and, to a lesser extent, from democratic left institutions such as the Institución Libre de Enseñanza. Carolyn Boyd’s examination of primary and secondary school history books of the Bourbon Restoration leaves no room for doubt: “Like the political settlement of 1876 itself [the Restoration’s Constitution], the books discouraged popular mobilization in defense of national ideals [...] by distancing readers from their own past in a variety of ways” (*Historia patria* 98).

This does not mean, however, that during the Bourbon Restoration, the state and the intellectual elites (especially Catholic traditionalists) were indifferent to Spain’s past. Quite the contrary: the 1890s witnessed in Spain, much as in other European countries, an upsurge in the “invention of traditions,” the establishment of symbols, rituals, monuments, and memorials designed to foster a sense of continuity with the past and to promote bonds of loyalty between the population and the Liberal state (Hobsbawm, “Mass-Producing Traditions”). But where Spain diverges from other European countries is in the fact that the invented traditions were primarily designed for the consumption of the urban, professional middle classes, and only occasionally reached a wider audience.

Nonetheless, during the late 1880s and early 1890s a number of commemorations bear witness to what commentators have described as the redefinition of Spanish nationalism by the political and cultural right (Álvarez Junco, *Mater dolorosa* 433–64; Pérez Garzón 87–95): among them, the commemorations of Calderón de la Barca in 1881, and of Saint Teresa of Ávila in 1882, the celebrations of the thirteenth centennial of Reccared’s conversion to Catholicism in 1889, and, to be sure, the fourth centennial of Columbus’s first voyage in 1892. Although the political meanings of these events were not always unanimous, they do signal the definitive mobilization of Catholic groups in favor of national ideals. Initiated by Jaume Balmes in the 1840s and achieved by Menéndez Pelayo in the early 1880s, the national-Catholic view of Spain’s past grounded the continuity of the nation in the Spanish people’s fidelity to both Church and Monarchy, two aspects that were certainly present in the 1892 solemnities.

Like other commemorations, the 1892 celebrations possessed “a courtly,
solemn aspect and a popular aspect” (Pavone 79). The Spanish government, with conservative leader and historian Antonio Cánovas del Castillo at its helm, planned the celebrations as a combination of intellectual activities and parades and spectacles.4 The erudite aspects of the celebrations can be seen in the more than forty-five lectures delivered before the Ateneo de Madrid, the capital’s most prestigious cultural institution, on different aspects of American history; in the eleven congresses that took place in Spain during the months of October and November alone (see Bernabéu Albert, 1892 76–94; Blanco, Cultura y conciencia 111–40); and finally, in publications by some of the most respected intellectuals of the Restoration (for instance, Emilio Castelar’s Historia del descubrimiento de América, Francesc Pi i Margall’s bibliophile edition of Historia de la América antecolombiana, and Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo’s Antología de poetas hispanoamericanos). The popular aspects of the celebrations, although less successful, were no less apparent: a national holiday was declared on October 12, all major Spanish newspapers included a special issue commemorating Columbus and the events of 1492, popular dances and fireworks were programmed in Spain’s major cities, and in Huelva, the royal family and the Spanish government participated in a historical reenactment of Columbus’s departure for the Indies (Abad Castillo 29–38).

The lack of integration between the erudite and popular aspects of the celebrations, as well as the limitations of the Restoration’s efforts to nationalize the past, materialized in the lectures delivered before the Ateneo de Madrid. In theory, the organizer of the lectures, Antonio Sánchez Moguel, justified them as an instrument to foster a collective sense of history among the public. For Sánchez Moguel, the explicit purpose of these lectures was to educate the wider Spanish public about “el conocimiento positivo y completo de la empresa descubridora” [the complete and positive knowledge of the discovery], a much needed effort inasmuch as the historical works about America published up until that moment “apenas si habían trascendido más allá del contado número de los eruditos” [had hardly transcended the circle of a handful of erudite men] (6). In practice, however, writer Emilia Pardo Bazán informs us that attendance was sparse in two thirds of the lectures and that, when the lectures were attended, the audience showed “apatía o frialdad” [apathy or lack of enthusiasm] (“El Descubrimiento de América, II” 19).

In spite of their apparent lack of genuine popular resonance, it is important to emphasize that the primary concern of the 1892 commemorations was the production of collective representations of Spain’s imperial past. This is ultimately what explains Columbus’s and the imperial past’s relevance: both served, by and large, the political purpose of establishing a
continuity between past and present colonialism, between what happened in the territories of the Monarquía hispánica and what was happening in its nineteenth-century colonial possessions in the Caribbean and the Pacific, between the “Spaniards” of 1492 (whatever this word might have meant then) and those of 1892. In other words, the 1892 commemorations engaged in the ideological production of what Ernest Renan considers to be one of the essential components of all nations: the possession of a common legacy of glorious memories (19).

However, the production of the image of Columbus as the hero of the discovery and of Spanish colonialism did not happen overnight. Rather, it was a process long in the making. Christopher Schmidt-Nowara has skillfully outlined the different steps involved in the Spanish state’s recognition of Columbus’s importance to Spanish history. The story of Spain’s love affair with Columbus, the nation’s enthusiastic if sometimes ambiguous colonofilia (Schmidt-Nowara’s term), unfolded during the second part of the nineteenth century. Statues of Columbus popped up in Madrid, Cartagena, Havana, and Barcelona; all over Spain, streets, plazas, and hotels were named after the illustrious discoverer; Columbus was the protagonist of intellectual gatherings (the 1881 Fourth Congress of the International Association of Americanists), learned societies (the Sociedad Colombina Onubense, founded in Huelva in 1880), and more popular, large public exhibitions (Barcelona’s 1888 Universal Exposition); and, Columbus’s remains were even the object of a heated controversy between Spain and the Dominican Republic in the late 1870s (The Conquest 53–75).

The dark underside of this Columbian love affair, the condition for Columbus’s entrance and legitimation into national memory, was a drastic simplification and mythicization of the historical record. In order to be the object of a celebration, as Trouillot explains, the landing in the Bahamas first had to become a clear-cut event fixed in time, as opposed to the convoluted process and series of disorderly events that Columbus and his crew must have experienced. Second, it had to be appropriately named. In fact, the naming of this “historical fact” as “the discovery of America” is in itself a narrative of (Eurocentric) power insofar as “‘Discovery’ and analogous terms ensure that by just mentioning the event one enters a predetermined lexical field of clichés and predictable categories that foreclose a redefinition of the political and intellectual stakes” (Trouillot 115). Indeed, the expression “the discovery of America” suggests that Europe is at “the center of ‘what happened’” and that “whatever else may have happened to other peoples in that process is already reduced to a natural fact: they were discovered” (Trouillot 115).

Thus, the naming of the “landfall” as a “discovery” determines the
imposition of a first silence: the exclusion of an indigenous perspective on the events of 1492. This silence, in turn, is linked to the long cycle of silences that have made up Europe’s narrative of global dominance since 1492. In the logbook entry of October 11, 1492, Columbus depicted the inhabitants of Guanahani as beautiful, young, good-natured, seemingly obedient people who gladly accepted his trinkets, who lacked an organized religion and thus were ready to be Christianized, and who did not “traen armas ni las cognosçen, porque les amostré espadas y las tomavan por el filo y se cortavan con ignorançia” [carry or have knowledge of arms, because I [Columbus] presented them with swords, and they took them by the blade, thus ignorantly cutting themselves] (Colón 111). Here the natives, who appear closer to nature than to human civilization as understood in Spain, have no part in telling their version of Columbus’s landfall. Similarly, during the commemorations in 1892, their descendants or advocates had no part in narrating their version of the events of 1492. If the erasure of indigenous voices seemed essential for the production of Columbus’s diary (the propagandistic account of his deeds in America), it seemed even more essential four hundred years later, when the West’s urban masses were ready to consume the events of 1492 as yet another example of Western global dominance. During the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, this story of global dominance had the United States vying to be the main protagonist and thus providing industrialized America both with a utopian vision of material and racial progress (Rydell) and with a legitimation for ongoing U.S. imperialism in Latin America (Trouillot 129). Merely a year before, in Madrid, Spanish historians, writers, journalists, and bureaucrats were busy making Spain the sole protagonist of the story. At stake was nothing less than the production of a shared understanding of Spain’s imperial past.

As has been suggested, the dominant vision of Columbus was that of the Admiral “as a symbol of Spain’s reinvented colonialism and national history, one to which groups from throughout the peninsula sought to affiliate themselves through various kinds of commemoration” (Schmidt-Nowara, The Conquest 64). During the 1892 commemorations, the Restoration regime appealed to the earlier Spanish Empire to assert its legitimacy, specifically that of its colonial policies, and thus strengthen its rule over both the metropolitan and colonial populations. This surplus of legitimacy was much needed in the 1890s, when the Restoration’s intransigent policies fueled unrest in the colonies. In contrast to the Glorious Revolution’s and the First Republic’s open attitudes toward colonial autonomy and reform of the colonial order, which culminated in a failed attempt to shift “the basis of Spanish colonial hegemony away from slave owners and peninsular merchants
and instead to liberal creoles and freed slaves” (Schmidt-Nowara, *Empire and Antislavery* 159–60), the Restoration’s colonial policies were becoming increasingly authoritarian. Both the centralizing, fiscally repressive policies of conservative Francisco Romero Robledo and the decentralizing, reformist measures undertaken by his successor the liberal Antonio Maura Montaner, the government’s overseas ministers between 1891 and 1894, were designed to reassert the integrity of the nation (Roldán de Montaud).

For this reason, Columbus seems invariably to be depicted as the precursor of the virtues of Spanish colonialism, as the one who, with his numerous positive and negative qualities, made Spain’s glorious entrance onto the world stage possible. But, for Spanish intellectuals it was important to emphasize Spain’s role in the Columbian adventure and thus ensure that enthusiasm for Columbus himself did not take center stage. This was especially important in a context where foreigners, like Romantic, Catholic, French historian Count Roselly de Lorgues, used the figure of Columbus to critique Spain and its colonial practices. These critiques, which came to be known as the “Columbian Legend,” were rooted in Fernando Colón’s biography of his father, *Historia del Almirante* (1571) and “emphasized Spain’s brutal treatment of the saintly, visionary Columbus” (Schmidt-Nowara, *The Conquest* 80).

In the face of such accusations against Spain for its ungrateful treatment of Columbus, Cesáreo Fernández Duro (1830–1908), perhaps the leading Columbian scholar of the time, delivered a lecture at the Ateneo de Madrid in which he asserted that “en parte alguna (y es natural) se han tributado al navegante insigné admiración ni honra tan altas como en España” [of course, nowhere has the illustrious seafarer received such outstanding admiration and honors as in Spain] (25). The gratitude that Spain demonstrated toward Columbus, however, was tempered by Fernández Duro and others by noting the less than flattering aspects of Columbus’s biography (such as his rule of Hispaniola). To counter Roselly’s blind admiration for the Admiral, Spanish intellectuals sought to present a self-serving depiction of Columbus, one that would protect Spain from any foreign criticism and facilitate the appropriation of Columbus as a national symbol.

Needless to say, the most prominent Spanish intellectuals of the period rallied around Fernández Duro’s image of Columbus as a heroic yet flawed figure, an image that made it possible for Columbus to form part of Spain’s national memory. Delivering the inaugural lecture at the Ateneo de Madrid lecture series, Cánovas del Castillo echoed Fernández Duro’s “realistic” pronouncements by affirming that the main duty of Spaniards during the commemorations consisted in “desagraviar de notorias injusticias a nuestra raza, indudablemente digna de Colón, de su genio y de su hazaña” [making
amends for the notorious injustices done to the Spanish race, which is undoubtedly worthy of Columbus, of his genius, and of his great deeds] ("Criterio histórico" 36). Famous liberal writer Pardo Bazán concurred with Cánovas’s desire to vindicate Spain’s treatment of Columbus and its imperial past. Convinced that Fernández Duro’s superior scholarship completely invalidated Roselly de Lorgue’s critiques, she observed:

A la aseveración del Conde, de que en España ni se han cantado ni se han escrito las glorias de Colón, responde Fernández Duro con un aparato bibliográfico de poesías, vidas, viajes, y colecciones diplomáticas.

[In response to the Count’s assertion that no one in Spain has written or sung Columbus’s praises, Fernández Duro replies with a bibliographic apparatus full of poems, biographies, travel narratives, and historical manuscripts]. ("El Descubrimiento de América, I” 72)

Conservative Catholic critic Menéndez Pelayo, for his part, did not mince his words against the “fanatical charlatan” Roselly de Lorgues (“De los historiadores de Colón, I” 437) and urged all Spaniards to fight the Columbian Legend:

es la que hay que exterminar por todos los medios y hacen obra buena los que la combaten, no sólo porque es antipatriótica, sino porque es falsa y nada hay más santo que la verdad.

[we have to exterminate it by all means possible, and those who combat it certainly do great work, not only because the Columbian Legend is unpatriotic, but also because it is false, and nothing is more sacred than the truth]. ("De los historiadores de Colón, II” 67)

In sum, Spanish intellectuals approached the figure of Columbus with a sense of realistic positivism that was clearly aimed at fabricating an image of Columbus that would find its place within Spain’s glorious national memory. In order to accomplish this, they had to first discredit the Columbian Legend, which converted Columbus into a symbol of Spain’s disgrace. Ultimately, these intellectuals crafted a depiction of the Admiral that was almost as idealistic as that of Roselly’s – the only difference being that instead of working against the Spanish state, this depiction helped strengthen it.

In addition to these appropriations of Columbus as a national symbol, the 1892 celebrations were an occasion to vindicate the imperial past on a more explicit level. I will not devote too many pages here relating the 1892 commemorations’ orthodox view of the colonial past and its jingoistic celebrations of the cultural and religious ideals of Spain’s “civilizing mission”
in America because they are all exhaustively documented in a legion of primary sources. The complacent, narcissistic historical imaginary of 1892 can be traced in, among other places, the commemorative books of Emilio Castelar (Historia del Descubrimiento de América [1892]) and Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo (Antología de poetas hispanoamericanos [1893–1895]); the lectures delivered before the Ateneo de Madrid on different aspects of American history; the talks given at the Congreso Geográfico Hispano-Portugués-Americano; the articles published in El Centenario, the official chronicle of the festivities; and the special issues published on or around October 12, 1892 by Spanish newspapers of all ideological stripes, from El Imparcial to La Época and El Siglo Futuro. All of these texts display a similar logic that can be exemplified by one of the contributions to El Centenario, namely Emilio Castelar’s 1892 essay “América en el descubrimiento y en el Centenario.”

In this essay Castelar, who had been one of the leaders of the Spanish abolitionist movement but by 1892 was an increasingly conservative republican politician, offers a narrative in which past Spanish colonialism appears as the foundation for the material and moral progress achieved by the Americas at the end of the nineteenth century. His text displays one of the crucial discursive strategies of the period: the construction of a genealogy in which the present figures as the continuation of a glorious past. The arrival of Columbus to the Bahamas is described as an organic, necessary development of Spanish Renaissance culture, which is depicted as a triumphant achievement:

[C]omo la cultura española, tan espléndida, no podía quedar encerrada entre los Pirineos y la desembocadura del Tajo y del Estrecho, necesitó extenderse, y para extenderse, mientras Portugal encontraba las perdidas Indias, nosotros evocábamos entre los dos Océanos América.

[Since such a splendid culture as that of Spain could not remain locked in between the Pyrenees and the estuary of the Tagus and the Strait (of Gibraltar), it had to expand itself; and to do so, while Portugal was busy finding the lost Indies, we evoked America in between both Oceans]. (103)

The arrival of the Spaniards in the Americas is characterized as an act of generosity whereby the gifts of Christian religion and European science were magnanimously bestowed upon the lesser civilized peoples: “En dos años Cortés aportó a México la cultura elaborada por el humano espíritu desde Abraham hasta Colón” [in two years, Cortés gave to México all of the culture produced by the human spirit from the times of Abraham to those of Columbus] (116). In the face of such putative material and
moral “improvements,” the violence of the conquest and colonization simply appears as an inherent part of human nature, as something belonging to the order of those “fatalidades inevitables” [unavoidable fatalities] (106) that have plagued the world since times immemorial.

The self-idealization of the “discovery,” conquest and colonization of America, together with the spectacular achievement of progress, are the central tropes in the modernizing rhetoric designed to celebrate (and thus legitimize) the present in 1892. America is characterized in the essay as a land gifted with “las instituciones más altas y las formas de gobierno” [the highest institutions and the most perfect forms of government], “las escuelas que pulen y abrillantan el alma” [schools that polish and refine the soul], and “las colosales máquinas que metamorfosean la materia” [colossal machines that metamorphose matter] (117). As such, according to Castelar’s (tautological) reasoning, America is both the product of a superior culture (Spanish/European culture) and the supreme proof of its superiority.

As a whole, the narrative of the conquest and colonization of the Americas created in 1892 is an example of what David Spurr calls “the rhetoric of affirmation in colonial discourse” (110). For Spurr, one of the distinguishing features of colonial discourse is the constant deployment of its authority through “techniques of self-idealization and repetition” (113). Rehearsed in El Centenario as well as in the official and popular forums referenced above, these orthodox views of the colonial past ultimately served “to establish a political and ethical order” (Spurr 110) that articulated and mirrored Cánovas’s imperialistic conception of the Spanish nation as outlined in his Discurso sobre la nación (1882).

Originally a lecture delivered at the Ateneo de Madrid on November 6, 1882, Discurso sobre la nación can be considered the Restoration’s official master narrative of the Spanish nation and therefore the framework in which the dominant views of the colonial past acquire their meaning. Cánovas, a respected scholar of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spain, the architect of the Restoration system and the leader of the Conservative party, unabashedly privileged the nation’s objective features (its supposedly “natural” racial, linguistic, historical and geographical bases) over its subjective features (the will of its people), profoundly affecting his conceptualization of Spain’s imperial past. Like many others during the “Age of Empire” (to borrow Eric Hobsbawm’s famous title), Cánovas affirms that the greatness of the Spanish nation is inextricably tied to its imperial origins and destiny:

Mándanos el deber nuestro, visiblemente, que entremos en el número de las naciones expansivas, absorbentes, que sobre sí han tomado el empeño de llevar a término la ardua empresa de civilizar el mundo
entero: y para comprender por qué nos lo manda, sí que fuera bueno recordar sin tregua la honra, no extinta aún, que heredamos de nuestros padres.

[Our duty clearly dictates that we become part of the group of expansive, assimilative nations that have burdened themselves with the arduous task of civilizing the whole world. And to understand why our duty dictates such a command, it is worth relentlessly recalling the honor that we inherited from our forefathers, an honor that is still alive today]. (131)

Within Cánovas’s ideological scheme, it becomes clear that the events of 1492 could only be read with pride, self-satisfaction, and complacency. If past Spanish colonialism was conceived, again in a highly self-idealized form, as “the honor that we inherited from our forefathers” and as a blueprint for the nation’s future endeavors, then there is no doubt that the only way that one could relate to Columbus and the Spanish conquistadors in 1892 was through jubilant celebration. The continuity that Cánovas established between the honor of late fifteenth-century “Spaniards” and the honor of late nineteenth-century Spaniards is reiterated in the commemorative speech that he delivered at the Ateneo de Madrid in 1891, where he vindicates the accomplishments of Martín Alonso Pinzón, the Captain of La Niña, and refers to him as “un compatriota nuestro de tal valía que, sin él, Colón mismo con ser quien era, no habría podido realizar su descubrimiento” [our countryman who was so valuable that without him Columbus, for all of his greatness, would not have been able to discover America] (“Criterio histórico” 31). By referring to Pinzón as “un compatriota nuestro,” Cánovas is projecting a modern political category (Spanish nationality) on a pre-modern political subject of the Catholic Monarchs (Pinzón). He is thus first perpetrating an anachronism since “in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the idea of the ‘state’ as the essential concept that unified and gave meaning to the political community had not yet entered the political imagination of the Spanish polity” (Cañeque 7); and second, inserting this anachronism into a nationalist teleology whereby a glorious past is seen as the forerunner of a no less glorious present.

Cánovas’s emphasis on Spain’s imperialistic, objective foundations was doubtlessly appropriate for the Restoration’s conservative, past-oriented cultural politics, but it also precluded the emergence of more sober, less jingoistic evaluations of the nation’s imperial past. As a regime literally designed to restore, that is, to resume, the traditions embodied in the Catholic Church and the monarchical state that had been interrupted by
the democratic tendencies of the Revolutionary Sexennium (1868–1874),
the Restoration instrumentalized the imperial past for social control and
ideological reproduction. It is within this general political culture that one
should understand the success of Castelar and Cánovas’s self-idealized view
of the conquest and colonization, a success that can be accounted for by a
variety of factors.

First, as we have seen, it was repeated *ad nauseam* both in scholarly venues
(by some of Spain’s most powerful intellectuals) and popular outlets (the
nation’s most important newspapers). Although the incessant repetition
of those self-idealized images of Spain’s conquest and colonization had a
downside (the eventual erosion of their claims to authority), it also had an
undoubtedly powerful effect: repetition multiplied the traces vindicating
Spanish colonialism, enlarged the number of sources defending Spain’s rule
in the Americas, and consequently reduced the space available for alternative
views. In short, repetition helped secure future historical relevance – an
aspect that is attested to by the fact that the “Discovery” was instituted
as Spain’s national holiday some twenty-five years later (in 1918) and that
it continues to be celebrated today, at least in official circles, in much the
same way.

Second, the state-sponsored version of the colonial past benefited from
the support of one of the strongest and most influential institutions in Spain
at the time, the Catholic Church, which canonized the discovery as one of
its most memorable achievements. I have already mentioned that the 1880s
saw the redefinition of Spanish nationalism by the political and cultural
right and the definitive mobilization of Catholic groups in favor of national
ideals. Within this context, the political colonialism advocated by the state
was resignified as a spiritual colonialism: 1492 became a stable reference for
Spanish Catholics, one that would be remembered by conservative groups
throughout the twentieth century. For instance *La Época*, a conservative
newspaper close to the ideological positions of Cánovas, claimed that the
significance of the discovery resided in the conquistadors’ planting “en el
nuevo Continente la cruz, símbolo de las creencias de nuestros mayores, y la
bandera de la Monarquía española, símbolo de nuestra patria” [the cross, the
symbol of our forefathers’ beliefs, and the flag of the Spanish monarchy, the
symbol of the fatherland on the new Continent] (“El Centenario y las fiestas”).
The Catholic integrist newspaper *El Siglo Futuro*, for its part, commemorated
Columbus by publishing a two-part article loaded with footnotes and
entitled “Misión providencial de la Iglesia católica y de la nación española
en el descubrimiento del Nuevo Mundo,” where the civilizing aspect of the
conquest and colonization was recast as an exclusively Catholic endeavor,
one that could only be understood as part of the providential plan assigned
to a nation that had been united by the Catholic Kings (Simonet).

Third, the self-idealization of the conquest and colonization found a powerful ally in Juan Valera’s *Cartas americanas* (1889) and, above all, in Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo’s widely successful *Antología de poetas hispano-americanos* (1893–1895), a four-volume treatise that perpetuated the values of the “White Legend” of Spanish colonialism by canonizing a number of texts that were operative for this ideology and silencing those that opposed it. Commissioned by the Spanish Royal Academy in 1892 as part of the celebrations, it is the first modern attempt by any Spanish literary critic to give a systematic account of Latin American literature (despite its title, it is closer to a historical reconstruction of the different national literary traditions than to a mere anthology of poetry). Translated into the cultural realm, the exaltation of the virtues of Spanish colonialism became for Menéndez Pelayo a reassertion of Spain’s literary prestige in its former colonies. Much like his protector Cánovas del Castillo, who thought that imperial expansion was the final goal of European nations, and much like his friend Castelar, who dismissed pre-Columbian peoples’ culture, Menéndez Pelayo conceived of Spain’s cultural colonization of the Americas as a glorious, morally impeccable endeavor that brought lettered culture to a land of barbaric peoples. His imperialist and racist assumptions are made clear when he proclaims that “la literatura americana es literatura colonial, literatura de criollos; no es obra de indios ni de sus descendientes” [American literature is colonial, criollo literature; it is not the work of Indians or their descendants] (27: 118–19), and when he states that non-Spanish traditions belonged to “gentes bárbaras y degeneradas” [barbaric, degenerate peoples] (27: 10). One could adduce many other examples, but it is already clear that Menéndez Pelayo’s erasure of any form of cultural heterogeneity, let alone cultural otherness, places his national-Catholic vision of the Latin American cultural past very much in line with the Restoration’s vision of the colonial past.

Interestingly, one other factor that helped promote the success of the self-idealized view of the conquest and colonization was the fact that the influence of Menéndez Pelayo’s work was not confined within Spain’s borders. In his insightful reading of Menéndez Pelayo’s *Antología de poetas hispano-americanos*, Arcadio Díaz Quiñones offers us a definitive account of its power within Hispanophone cultures. For Díaz Quiñones, Menéndez Pelayo not only exercised a visible influence on such disparate figures as Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío, Uruguayan essayist José Enrique Rodó, and Mexican writer José Vasconcelos, but also was crucial for the dominant cultural and ideological practices of Hispanism as it developed in the Spanish and U.S. academies (*Sobre los principios* 123–58).
Freethinkers and Empire

But if the official, celebratory view of Spain’s colonial past presented under the Restoration was so unanimously revered, what was the purpose of the endless proclamations of Columbus’s deeds? What ends were served by the repeated vindications of Spanish colonialism in historical accounts, religious newspapers, and literary treatises? What are we to make of the fact that these incessant acclamations of past Spanish colonialism were continuously reasserted and recycled by the Spanish state, its official religion, and its cultural institutions? And, if the majority of intellectuals and journalists propagated *ad nauseam* the virtues of Spain’s methods of colonization, was it even possible to hear the voices of dissent?

As we have seen, a fundamental component of the rhetoric of affirmation of colonialism is repetition. But, ironically, the more authority is constantly displayed and proclaimed, the less effective it becomes. Far from reinforcing the moral superiority of past (and present) Spanish colonialism, the constant celebrations that were seen in the press as well as in scholarly lectures ended up pointing to colonialism’s moral abjection. At stake here is what Spurr calls the “splitting open of authority.” As he explains, “once authority begins to be asserted [...] there opens up a split between assertion and authority itself, in which the latter is revealed as conditional and contingent on its representation” (124). For this reason, the insistent affirmations of Spanish colonialism through the mythicization of the imperial past read more like a desperate attempt to impose an image of cultural and moral superiority than – as most Spanish nationalists wanted – the objective realization of a self-evident, morally unimpeachable truth.

This sense of urgency can perhaps be understood better if we recall that since the late eighteenth century Spanish colonialism had faced attacks from two very different foreign sources. First, it sustained critiques from rival imperial powers (most notably the British), who saw in the earlier, pre-enlightened methods of colonization an “inescapable legacy” of “human and material waste followed by moral degeneracy” (Pagden 10). Second, Spanish colonial rule endured unrest in Spain’s remaining colonies, which were more and more forcefully demanding political and economic autonomy – recall the separatist rebellions that broke out in Cuba and Puerto Rico in 1868, or the intensification of antislavery mobilizations during that same period. These foreign critiques of Spanish colonialism coming from both rival imperial powers and present and former Spanish colonies cast Spanish colonialism as a project on the defensive. The more Spain lost its grip on its colonies and the world, the more insistent its affirmative repetition of colonialism became.
Outside of Spain the memory of Spanish colonialism clearly was contested, but these foreign critiques do not indicate whether the cultural memory of the conquest and colonization was also challenged within Spain, at the very same moment of its production. To what extent was the vindication of past Spanish colonialism put on the defensive within Spain? Did the history of Spanish colonization in the Americas appear illegitimate in the eyes of at least a few Spanish commentators? Several largely unknown documents seem to suggest that the 1892 commemorations were also used as the instrument of a secular, non-imperialistic conception of the political community. A case in point is the prohibition of the Congreso Universal de Librepensadores, one of the many scientific congresses devoted to celebrate the fourth centennial of Columbus’s first voyage. Organized by noted freemasons such as Antonio Machado y Núñez, Odón de Buen, Ramón Chías, and Fernando Lozano (the last two were coeditors of the masonic/freethinking weekly *Las Dominicales del Libre Pensamiento*), the congress paid homage to Columbus by depicting the discovery of America as the triumph of science and free thought over Catholic obscurantism – a characterization that, to be sure, involves its own share of anachronism (“A los libre-pensadores” 1).

As children of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, freethinkers defended critical thought based on science, logic and reason, and attacked clericalism in all of its manifestations. Throughout the nineteenth century, they also embraced a set of heterogeneous, anti-traditional, secular causes such as positivism, Darwinism, Left Hegelianism, the Worker’s Movement and, of course, anticlericalism in all its variants (Llosa). In Spain, in contrast to other European countries, freethinkers were also often freemasons, a coincidence that might be explained by their common opposition to the Catholic Church and the Catholic Monarchy, the two institutions upon which the Restoration regime was founded (Álvarez Lázaro). In the 1892 congress, their plan to memorialize Columbus included the discussion of topics such as the “obstáculos puestos por la vana ciencia teológica a la ciencia positiva de Colón” [the obstacles placed on Columbus’s positive science by wishful theological science] and the “influencia del descubrimiento de América en la emancipación del pensamiento” [influence of the discovery of America on the emancipation of thought] (“A los libre-pensadores” 1).

Before the police shut down the congress, Machado y Núñez managed to address the audience. In his opening speech, which was later printed in *Las Dominicales*, he reiterated the image of Columbus as “un genio eminente [que] llegó a descubrir un hemisferio desconocido, una región desconocida entre los obstáculos que le opusieron la ignorancia, las preocupaciones y el fanatismo” [an eminent genius [who] discovered an unknown hemisphere, an unknown region, amid the obstacles set up by ignorance, worries, and
fanaticism]. But more importantly, he broached a topic that had been absent from all of the other official celebrations: the history of Spanish-American independence. Allow me to quote from Machado y Núñez’s speech, a document that has been all but forgotten:\textsuperscript{15}

Nosotros, podemos decir, contribuimos con nuestros hijos al descubrimiento y conquista de América; América, pues, que hoy está emancipada de nosotros con justicia [...] porque nosotros, malos gobernantes, llegamos a producir en ellos un odio extraordinario a sus padres, a los que les habían dado patria y hogar, y con justicia verdaderamente, porque el régimen absolutista, porque el fanatismo y porque las preocupaciones exigían de ellos lo que era opuesto a su razón y a su inteligencia.

[It is possible for us to say that we gave our sons to the discovery and conquest of America. But America today is justly emancipated from us [...] because we were bad rulers who managed to create in them [the colonized] an extraordinary sense of hatred toward their fathers [the Spaniards], who had given them a fatherland and a home. And Spanish-Americans gained their independence with true justice because the absolutist regime, because fanaticism, and because all sorts of difficulties required them to act against their reason and their intelligence].

In the rest of his speech, Machado went into a passionate tirade against all of the historical symbols of absolutism (from the Inquisition and Emperor Charles V to his son Philip II), and in favor of a new moral life based on the principles of the French Revolution (liberty, equality, fraternity) and on those of science and justice. Contrary to the official narrative of 1892, the origin and telos of Spanish nationhood here is not its imperial conquests but rather its imperial losses. For Machado y Núñez, the single most important event in the conquest and colonization of the Americas was not the heroic adventures of the likes of Cortés and Pizarro, but its emancipation from them. By displacing the focus of his speech from the conquest and colonization of the Americas to the processes of Spanish-American emancipation, Machado y Núñez was positing a different telos for his narrative: instead of celebrating Columbus as proof of the Spanish nation’s ability to compete in the imperialist race for the domination of other people (recall Cánovas’s \textit{Discurso a la nación}), he celebrated the discovery as a first step in the universal emancipation of mankind.

In the midst of the imperial fervor and the Catholic revival of 1892, the critical and, above all, secular views of the discovery and the Spanish
Empire promoted by the Congreso Universal de Librepensadores were too much for ardent Catholics to stomach. The Catholic press first demanded the government’s intervention and then celebrated its repressive actions, which resulted in the prohibition of the congress after its first few sessions and in the detention of its organizing committee – soon after to be released on bail of 1,000 pesetas. Few voices were raised against this act of censorship. Although Las Dominicales and El Nuevo Régimen (Pi i Margall’s weekly) complained vehemently about it, and El Liberal published a letter of protest, mainstream Spanish intellectuals hardly disapproved, which was quite understandable given that they had viewed the congress with contempt from its announcement.

Much in line with Machado y Núñez’s take on the 1892 celebrations, Ramón Chies, another of the preeminent freethinkers of the time, published an article in Las Dominicales on May 20, 1892 titled “La fiesta del Centenario: carta abierta.” There he offered a similar perspective on the discovery, albeit peppered with nationalist allusions that made his arguments decidedly ambivalent. Like Machado y Núñez, Chíes viewed the fourth centennial as an expression of the ideals of free thought and, consequently, he saw the commemoration as a “rational, universal, and secular” celebration. At first glance, the telos implicit in Chíes’s narrative is, like Machado y Núñez’s, cosmopolitan and markedly non-nationalistic. For Chíes, the ultimate significance of the discovery resides in its being the first stage in the march toward the unification of the world, toward

la confusión de todas las razas en una gran familia, de todas las religiones en el solo culto de la Razón, y de todos los Estados en una gran federación republicana.

[the fusion of all races into one family, of all religions into the cult of Reason, and of all States into a great, republican federation].

But unlike Machado y Núñez, Chíes addresses at some length both the particular glory of the Spanish nation and the conquest and colonization of America, offering a nuanced image that is critical and praiseworthy at the same time. Chíes does not hesitate to depict the conquest of America as an endeavor that earned Spain “humanity’s love and respect” but at the same time he admits that this great accomplishment was full of violence and human suffering. The ambivalence (and the clichés) with which he characterizes the conquest is worth quoting:

¡Qué virtudes tan grandes y qué crímenes tan abominables contiene! Pueblos inermes, pacíficos poseedores de una tierra pródiga, que
sin trabajo alguno les alimentaba, fueron cruel y villanamente exterminados por el codicioso rebuscador del oro y la plata. Masas de hombres sin malicia y sin ambición fueron reducidas a la más dura esclavitud. Torrentes de sangre inocente mancharon las tierras cubiertas de fragantes flores desconocidas. No hubo crimen con que aquel don de la Providencia no fuese escarnecido: el latrocinio, el asesinato, el adulterio, estuvieron a la orden del día por muchos, muchos años.

[What great virtues and abominable crimes it {the conquest} contains! Unarmed, peaceful peoples, owners of a provident land that was feeding them without toil, were cruelly and treacherously massacred by the greedy seeker of gold and silver. Multitudes of men without malice or ambition were forced into the harshest of slaveries. Torrents of innocent blood soiled lands covered with fragrant, unknown flowers. There was no crime that did not ridicule that gift of Providence {the conquest}: robbery, murder and adultery were the norm for many, many years].

Here, far from its idealized depiction in the 1892 official narrative, the conquest is an event that is simultaneously embraced and rejected.

Another element that demonstrates Chíes’s ambivalent, uneasy judgment on the 1892 celebrations is the fact that the article adopts the form of an “open letter” written in the second person singular and addressed to Chíes’s fictional friend “Antonio.” Chíes’s observation that he is writing the letter so that Antonio may celebrate “con la conciencia tranquila y el corazón alegre el Centenario” [the Centennial with a clear conscience and a cheerful heart] despite all of the cruelties committed by Spanish conquistadors and colonizers in the Americas implies that for certain sectors of the population – or at least for the readers of Las Dominicales – celebrating the events of 1492 was not self-evident. Instead, it was something that required a previous pedagogical intervention (note that the article was published in May 1892, five months before the celebrations) precisely because the associations conjured up by the discovery included, as Chíes noted in his letter, images of violence, exploitation, torture, and slavery. In the end, Chíes’s ambivalence toward the conquest and colonization is canceled by his justification of it in the name of the supposedly secular progress that it brought to America, thus perhaps foreshadowing the marriage between anticlericalism and Spanish nationalism that would prove to be such a strong force for the nationalization of the masses at the turn of the twentieth century.18 Thanks to Chíes’s letter, Antonio can indeed celebrate the centenario with a cheerful heart.
Machado y Núñez’s and Chíes’s pronouncements against the cruelty of Spanish colonial institutions are best understood as a combination of two liberal historiographic currents: (i) the view of the Spanish past known as austracismo, which originated at the end of the eighteenth century and situated the end of Spain’s medieval splendor, and the beginning of its decadence, with the foreign, absolutist Habsburg monarchs (especially Charles V and Philip II); and (ii) the view of the Spanish past that gained currency in the early 1850s and that for the first time questioned the role of Catholicism (including the Catholic Kings) in Spanish history, leading to the incorporation of the main tenets of the Black Legend of Spanish cruelty, intolerance, and fanaticism within liberal historiography (Álvarez Junco, Mater dolorosa 221–22, 392–405).

Within the parameters of these two historiographic traditions, the Spanish Empire was seen more as a burden than as an asset, more as a source of cruelty and despotism than as a source of pride and glory. These liberal myths about the Spanish Empire, which were quite popular in the 1850s and 1860s, had lost their purchase by 1892, when belief in European imperialism was the norm and the scrambles for Africa and Asia were well under way. The writings of Machado y Núñez and Chíes suggest, however, that these liberal myths were not completely silent at the time.19

The Failure of the Federalist Critique

As can be seen in the reaction to the Congreso Universal de Librepensadores, it turns out that the dominant narrative of the 1892 celebrations, far from being the product of unanimous consensus, rested instead upon the repression of those views that problematized the Catholic, nationalistic history of Spanish colonialism. The most theoretically and politically articulate example of this alternative vision of Spanish colonialism is to be found in Pi i Margall’s pronouncements on the subject. To flesh out Pi i Margall’s political use of the colonial past, I will comment on various of his writings, ranging from his early opinions on America to his later works on the 1892 celebrations and his short 1899 play on the conquest, Guatimozín y Hernán Cortés.

Unlike Machado y Núñez’s pronouncements, Pi i Margall’s vision of the colonial past is part of an alternative conception of political community, one that sought to accommodate the plural history and territorial diversity of the different regions that made up the Spanish state. The polity’s federal articulation was seen as a solution to the aspirations to self-government expressed in both Cuba and Catalonia, two regions that by 1892 had made abundantly clear their discontent with their status within the state (recall the Ten Years War of 1868–1878 between Cuba and Spain, or the advent of
political Catalanism in the early 1880s). As Pi i Margall succinctly put it in *Las nacionalidades* (1877), “Somos federales precisamente porque entendemos que las diversas condiciones de vida de cada provincia exigen, no la uniformidad, sino la variedad de instituciones” [We are federalists precisely because we understand that provinces, because of their diverse living conditions, do not require uniformity but rather a variety of institutions] (276). By reconstructing Pi i Margall’s uses of the colonial past, it becomes possible to catch a glimpse of an alternative collective memory of the conquest and colonization of the Americas, one that is the product of his federalist ideology.

Written in the wake of the collapse of the First Republic, *Las nacionalidades* can be considered a counterpoint to Cánovas’s *Discurso sobre la nación* in more than one way: it sought to bring about a federal, as opposed to a unitarist (and centralist) organization of the Spanish state; it proposed that a particular nation’s “objective” characteristics (its language, natural borders, history, or racial makeup) should always be mediated by a “subjective” agreement (a consensual pact by which heterogeneous groups accept a federal power that regulates their non-national interests, such as their commercial, juridical, or security affairs) (115); it recognized the universal nature of the principle of autonomy and self-determination and therefore considered just those wars undertaken by invaded peoples against their invaders (75); and, most importantly, it deplored the imperialistic domination inherent in the nation form – as Pi i Margall put it, “Se reproduce hoy la teoría de las nacionalidades; y ¡ay! no se ve que sólo se busca en ella medios de superioridad y de engrandecimiento” [The theory of nationalities is endlessly reproduced today; but, alas, nobody sees that this is only a means to achieve superiority and expansion] (70).

All of these democratic, federalist ideas, however, were completely marginal during the Restoration. At a time when it was common to think of the nation as a purely genealogical, objective entity, and when pride in imperialism was the norm, Pi i Margall’s insistence on achieving a political order through democratic means respectful of pluralism did not fit within the limits of what was considered comprehensible in Spanish political language. Caught between the failure of the First Republic to establish a federal organization of the state, the extreme centralism and uniformity introduced by the Restoration, and the rise of political Catalanism (Villacañas Berlanga, “La idea federal” 1–2; Balcells, *Catalan Nationalism* 28–43), Pi i Margall’s federalist theories hardly stood a chance.

From the beginning, in his first important book on political theory *La reacción y la revolución* (1854), Pi i Margall alluded to the conquest and colonization of the Americas as a political endeavor that failed to establish bonds of loyalty between the metropolis and its colonies. In order to
highlight the difference of Pi i Margall’s early readings of Spain’s rule in the Americas, let us recall that during the Restoration, such rule was often portrayed as an inherently moral endeavor in that it brought civilization and progress to “primitive” people (recall our reading of Castelar’s intervention). This self-idealization of past Spanish colonialism was nothing more than a naturalization of the violence and injustices that were constitutive of imperial rule in the first place. But instead of naturalizing colonial violence, Pi i Margall emphasized that such violence had been an integral part of the way that Spain ruled its colonies:

Nuestras leyes han levantado una valla eterna entre vencedores y vencidos; nuestros gobiernos las han entregado constantemente a la rapacidad y al despotismo de los capitanes generales.

[Our {colonial} laws have built an eternal fence between the victors and the vanquished; our governments have regularly handed over the laws to the greed and despotism of the General Captains]. (330)

He went on to explain that

Los hemos inhabilitado para todo cargo público [a los colonizados], les hemos negado toda participación en su gobierno. Los hemos puesto bajo el mando de virreyes que han ejercido una autoridad casi suprema.

[We have made it impossible for the colonized to hold public office, we have denied them the possibility of participating in their government. We have put them under the command of viceroys who have exercised an absolute authority over them]. (330–31)

Consequently, “fomentamos allí [en las colonias] el espíritu de rebelión” [we fomented the spirit of rebellion there {in the colonies}] (331).

In these proclamations, Pi i Margall’s “we,” the collective subject, was acknowledging its historical responsibility in a way that echoed both the pronouncements by Machado y Núñez and Chíes and a long tradition of Spanish intellectuals who took a stance against the more egregious aspects of Spanish domination in America. The most famous and earliest example of this tradition is of course Bartolomé de las Casas’s Brevisíma relación de la destrucción de las Indias (1552). Another example of this emphasis on the cruel and despotic aspects of the Spanish Empire appeared two centuries later in José Cadalso’s private correspondence: in a letter to Tomás de Iriarte written in 1774, Cadalso confessed that

desde que tuve uso de razón […] me ha llenado de espanto la posesión
de las Américas y destrucción de unos catorce millones de almas hecha por unos cuantos extremeños, que fueron allá a predicar a cañonazos la ley del Cordero.

[for as long as I can remember {...}, I have been horrified by the possession of the Americas and the destruction of some fourteen million souls carried out by a bunch of Extremadurans who went there to preach the law of Christ with cannons]. (qtd. in Froldi 125)

Finally, to offer an example closer to Pi i Margall’s time and ideology, one can turn to José María Blanco White’s initial sympathy for the American patriots’ cause in the early 1810s. Writing in El español, the monthly review that he edited in London, about the pathetic situation of a Spanish Empire on the point of collapse, Blanco White asserted that it was useless to attempt to restore royal authority in the American territories before “los gravámenes que han producido la revolución [en América]” [the burdens that gave way to the Revolution [in America]] had disappeared (269). He later added, drawing on the image of the viceroy as an absolute and arbitrary ruler, much like Pi i Margall would do a few years later:

Aquellos pueblos, entregados al despotismo de un virrey o de un jefe militar, sentirán bien pronto que nada han ganado con la revolución de Madrid, y acostumbrados ya a la resistencia, volverán con el menor motivo a tomar las armas en su defensa.

[Those people, who live under the despotism of a viceroy or a military chief, will soon realize that the Revolution in Madrid has not improved their lot, and since they are used to engaging in resistance, they will rise up in arms again to defend themselves for the smallest of reasons]. (269)

What singles out Pi i Margall’s proclamation from the above indictments against the tyrannical aspects of Spanish colonial power, however, is his acknowledgement that individual liberty had priority over the nation’s rights for, shortly after condemning colonial despotism, he criticized the Spanish nation’s attempts to crush the freedom to which colonial subjects aspired (331). In short, the collective subject that can be deduced from Pi i Margall’s vision of the history of colonization is one whose substantive cultural foundations (the tradition of despotic colonial administration) are mediated and rectified by universal political ideals (a utopian belief in liberty that arises from the rationalist individualism informing La reacción y la revolución [Villacañas Berlanga, “La idea federal” 11]).
Pi i Margall’s early attempt in *La reacción y la revolución* to conceive of the relationship between colonized and colonizer in political terms, an attempt that differs from the 1892 commemorations’ conception of colonial relationships in terms of collective myths and a sense of belonging together, would have decisive implications for the particular way in which he celebrated Columbus and the discovery. A cursory look at the articles he published in *El Nuevo Régimen* in October 1892 already makes clear the relative importance that the events of 1492 had for his conception of the Spanish federation. In contrast to popular newspapers such as *El Liberal* and *El Imparcial*, *El Nuevo Régimen* did not publish a special commemorative issue on October 12, 1892. And, in the issue published on October 15, it is hard to perceive the fascination with the events of 1492 that was displayed and promoted in mainstream newspapers. In fact, the worship of Columbian history and the collective myths created around the discovery were only marginally present, if at all. The issue included commentaries on recent political events in Spain and elsewhere (there are reports on the political situation in France, Chile, and Venezuela), articles on cultural events of general interest (such as the obituaries of Ernest Renan and Alfred Tennyson), and only three historical articles focused on Columbus. The first of these, “El Centenario de Colón,” claimed that the 1892 celebrations were appropriate because of the unfair treatment dispensed on Columbus during his life. Commenting on Columbus’s last days in Valladolid, where he died supposedly poor and alone, the anonymous author of the article seized the opportunity to take a jab at the monarchy by way of the *Cantar de Mio Cid*, casually remarking that “Así suelen pagar los reyes a los que bien les sirven” [this is how kings usually pay those who serve them well] (“El Centenario de Colón,” Oct. 15, 1892, 4). Thus, the so-called Columbian Legend, which highlighted the Catholic King’s dishonorable conduct toward Columbus and hindered the appropriation of Columbus as a national symbol, made its way into the federalist weekly.

The second article in the October 15 issue, “América en la época de su descubrimiento,” is an excerpt from a longer conference paper that Pi i Margall delivered before the Ateneo de Madrid and which I will analyze shortly, while the third article, “Las fiestas a Colón,” also by Pi i Margall, again emphasized the justice of the Columbian celebrations based on the unfair treatment of Columbus. Far from lionizing the figure of Columbus and the discovery in the service of a unitarist national memory, Pi i Margall cast a shadow upon them by observing that America was “para nosotros los españoles motivo de decadencia y ruina” [for us Spaniards a cause of decadence and ruin] in that it “alentó la ambición, la codicia, la lujuria, y nos hizo, a la vez que héroes, bandidos” [promoted ambition, greed and lust,
and made us simultaneously heroes and bandits] (“Las fiestas” 5). The same ambivalence that dominated Pi’s opinion of Columbus’s status in collective memory also emerges when he contemplates the Spanish Empire, a system of government that was at odds with the principles of self-determination and pluralism that he developed in Las nacionalidades. On the one hand, Spanish rule in the Americas brought despotism, cruelty, and human suffering and, as such, had to be unequivocally rejected since it turned Spaniards into “bandits.” On the other hand, the Spanish conquest and colonization of the Americas turned Spaniards into “heroes,” since it was made possible by and contributed to the advancement of modernity (note here that Pi i Margall does not say it contributed to Spain’s glory). Thus, Columbus’s rightful place was not so much in national memory as in universal memory, since he “agrandó la tierra para todos los hombres; abrió a la ciencia nuevos horizontes y a la industria ocultos veneros de riqueza” [made the earth bigger for all of mankind, opened new horizons for science and new sources of wealth for industry] (“Las fiestas” 6).

The final point that I would like to make with regard to the discussions of Columbus and the discovery in El Nuevo Régimen is that they do not lend themselves to the complacent, celebratory nationalist appropriation that was the main purpose of the 1892 commemorations. The reason behind this ambivalent appropriation of Columbus and the discovery is that, for Pi i Margall, collective memory cannot be reduced to the worship of history and national character that informed the official narrative of 1892. Instead, the collective memory of the discovery is always mediated by the normative scheme of his federalist conceptions, one that guarantees the universal right to self-determination.

Importantly, Pi i Margall’s more substantive interventions in the 1892 celebrations did not focus on Columbus, the discovery, or the conquest and colonization of the Americas, but rather on the Indian civilizations that inhabited the American territories before Columbus’s arrival. Both in his lecture given at the Ateneo de Madrid, “América en la época del descubrimiento,” and in his profusely illustrated two-volume study Historia de la América antecolombiana (1892), Pi i Margall departed from the self-congratulatory tone and the commonplace emphasis on events that could be characterized, with varying degrees of historical simplification, as reflecting on Spain’s glory and greatness. In contrast, his depictions of Indian civilizations demonstrate the concerns of a historian guided by federalist political principles who wanted to promote a view of the Spanish state in which the cultural particularisms of the different regions could fit. Using both well-known Spanish sources like the writings of Las Casas, Díaz del Castillo or Cabeza de Vaca, as well as the Mexican chronicles of Ixtilxochitl
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and indigenous sources such as the Popol Vuh (2: 1911–18), Pi i Margall wrote with a prudent tone that decidedly set him apart from the simplifications and the arrogance characteristic of run-of-the-mill Spanish accounts of Indian civilizations. That said, it remains true that Pi i Margall organized the materials of Historia de la América antecolombiana by distinguishing between “civilized” (Aztec, Maya and Inca) and “barbarian” peoples (all others), and that he considered both groups to be undeniably less advanced than Spanish civilization at the time of the conquest (Bernabéu Albert, “La conquista” 112; Schmidt-Nowara, The Conquest 121).

Much like Cánovas, who anachronistically considered the subjects of the Catholic Monarchs as Spaniards, Pi i Margall projected his federalist political categories on the Indian civilizations. In “América en la época del descubrimiento” he praised the Iroquois federation where “fuera de los asuntos comunes a todos los iroqueses cada nación era autónoma” [each nation was autonomous outside of the affairs that were common to all] (18). The superiority of such political organization was unquestionable for Pi i Margall, since “Gracias a esa organización gozaron los iroqueses de una paz interior nunca interrumpida, y crecieron como ningún otro pueblo salvaje” [Thanks to such organization, the Iroquois enjoyed uninterrupted domestic peace, and they progressed like no other savage people] (19). At the same time, he made clear his rejection of monarchical and imperial forms of government that exemplified power’s tendency toward absolutism and not liberty (15–16). The paradigmatic example of such misguided political system was the Aztec Empire, a clearly despotic and self-destructing organization according to Pi:

Quiso Moctezuma reunir las tres naciones en un imperio del que fuera jefe único; y preciso es confesar que [...] lo consiguió en gran parte con menoscabo de sus fuerzas y las de su patria.

[Moctezuma sought to unite three nations in one empire of which he would be the only ruler; and we must confess that [...] to a large extent he achieved this with great damage to his and his country’s powers].

Pi i Margall was reflecting on the pre-Columbian political systems of the Iroquois and the Aztecs, but surely he was also trying to legitimate his own vision for the Spanish state, sharply contrasting the virtues of a federal organization with the vices of a monarchical/imperial rule.

While Pi i Margall’s characterization of Indian peoples depended on a modern, Eurocentric vision of progress (see “América en la época del descubrimiento” 7–22), there are two elements that qualify such Eurocentrism
and distinguish it from other Spanish (and Western) accounts of the time. The first is that, within Pi i Margall’s description, “barbarism” and “civilization” are relative and historical concepts that can simultaneously manifest themselves in different areas of a given civilization. If “Barbarie y cultura son dos maneras de ser de nuestra especie que carecen de valor absoluto” [Barbarism and culture are two ways of being for our species that lack an absolute value], and if Spaniards themselves were considered barbarians by Greeks and Romans (Historia 1: 221), then it should come as no surprise that Pi i Margall thought that slavery, even among the “savage” Indians, “distaba allí realmente de ser lo dura que era en [la civilizada] Europa” [was far less harsh than in [civilized] Europe] (Historia 2: 1352), or that he praised the political institutions of a “barbarian” group like the Iroquois who, as we have seen, had established a confederacy that was for Pi i Margall “una luz entre tinieblas” [a light in the darkness] (Historia 2: 1261).

In keeping with this line of argument, Pi i Margall explained the disparity in the development between American and European civilizations in 1492 as a result not of the deficient nature of its inhabitants, but of America’s isolation from the rest of the world (Historia 1: 3).

The second element that qualifies Pi i Margall’s belief in Western superiority is that such belief does not entail the affirmation of Spanish colonial discourse. As we have seen, most Spanish commentators depicted the Indian peoples as uncivilized to better justify Spain’s rule in the Americas (for instance, in Castelar’s essay “América en el descubrimiento y en el Centenario” references to human sacrifices were immediately followed by a eulogy of Spanish colonialism [115–16]). In Pi i Margall, however, this nationalistic/imperialistic argument is completely absent. His representations of the indigenous peoples of the Americas were not aimed at vindicating the Spanish methods of colonization. Rather, their purpose was to provide a better understanding of the people that Spain conquered and, most importantly, to advance his federalist theories. As such, they hardly ever included references to the conquest and colonization. Thus, if these depictions implicitly reflected on the greatness of a particular civilization, it was not on the greatness of Spanish civilization but rather on that of Western civilization as a whole, a cultural system that in his view had produced the principles of liberty, democracy, and self-determination, that formed the core of his political views.

Moreover, when Pi i Margall did offer an explicit rendering of the relationship between colonizer and colonized, it hardly produced the kind of nationalist identification sought by the imperialist narratives of 1892. I have in mind here the dramatic dialogue Guatimozín y Hernán Cortés, a piece that Pi i Margall wrote in 1897, published in 1899, and which was only
recently unearthed by historian Salvador Bernabéu Albert. As Bernabéu Albert rightly points out, the singularity of this fictionalized verbal duel between the ghosts of the last Aztec emperor Cuauhtémoc (Guatimozín in the play) and the Spanish conquistador resides in its critique of the heroic image of Cortés promoted during the nineteenth century by such literary works as Alfonso García Tejero’s ballad “Hernán Cortés” (included in El Romancero histórico [1859]), Carlos Jiménez-Placer’s play Hernán Cortés (1867) or Ramón Ortega y Frías’s serial novel Conquista de México por Hernán Cortés (1874) (113–18). In this sense, Bernabéu Albert continues, Guatimozín y Hernán Cortés is a text that can be inscribed into a twofold tradition: on the one hand, it belongs to a series of works that at the end of the nineteenth century internalized the Black Legend and presented an overly critical view of the conquest and colonization (for instance, Luis Vega-Rey’s Puntos negros del Descubrimiento de América, a work that was prefaced by Pi i Margall himself); on the other hand, it foreshadows the scholarly tradition of liberal intellectuals who attempted to forge cultural alliances between Spain and its former colonies at the beginning of the twentieth century (such as Rafael Altamira, Ramón Menéndez Pidal, and Américo Castro) (119–21). While the first context proves interesting for our purposes here, the second seems slightly misguided for the centralist, cultural nationalism upon which Altamira, Pidal, and Castro based their historical understandings of the Americas is too far removed from the federalist ideals through which Pi i Margall read the conquest of Mexico in Guatimozín y Hernán Cortés. For this reason, I propose to read Guatimozín y Hernán Cortés within the context of Pi’s own reflections in Las nacionalidades.

In order to recover the alternative, federalist collective memory produced by Guatimozín y Hernán Cortés, it is important to foreground the main issue debated by the two protagonists: the legitimacy of the Spanish conquest of Mexico. As Guatimozín laments: “¡Ah, Cortés! Pretendéis en vano justificar vuestra conquista. Nada hubo que la autorizase; nada vino después a legitimarla” [Alas, Cortés! It is in vain that you {the Spaniards} attempt to justify your conquest. Nothing authorized it, and nothing that came after legitimized it] (139). The play is the story of the confrontation of two worlds, the world of the colonized and that of the colonizers. Guatimozín speaks for the rich cultural world of the Aztecs (their religion, political institutions, economic life, and aesthetic traditions [134–39]), while Cortés stands for the more “advanced” world of Spanish and European cultures (Christianity, scientific and technological discoveries, alphabetic writing [126–27]). The play’s structure is certainly Manichean, but the fact that it depicts two heterogeneous worlds, one that by Pi i Margall’s own standards is less civilized than the other, raises a political issue that is at the heart of
Restoration Spanish nationalism: how should the state integrate that which is radically other and embodied in particular groups (the colonies, the working class, the Catalanists) whose interests are opposed to those of the government? The answer given by Cánovas, Castelar, and those who crafted an imperialistic national memory in 1892 is well known: these constituencies should abandon their particular affiliations and embrace the collective myths of an identitarian, unitarist nationalism – here it is useful to recall Cánovas’s belief that the state is “mejor constituido donde haya una sola nación, o una propia raza, y una misma lengua” [better constituted where there is one nation, or one race, and one language] (100). The answer proposed by Pi i Margall in Guatimozín y Hernán Cortés could not be more different since, rather than erasing the heterogeneous interests of the colonized, it attempts to accommodate them within the vision of the federation.

Pi i Margall acknowledged in Las nacionalidades that invaded peoples had the imprescriptible right to wage war against their invaders (75), and asserted from this belief that the state must only exercise the minimum possible amount of power (115). Echoing these and earlier comments in La reacción y la revolución about the colonized’s “spirit of rebellion,” Pi i Margall has Guatimozín articulate his unconditional right to self-determination: in the face of the cruelty and humiliations inflicted on the Aztecs by the Spaniards,

La Nación [Azteca …] sentía cierto disgusto que cada vez se fue acentuando y se convirtió al fin en odio. Vino la matanza de la fiesta Toxcatl, y ese odio estalló en abierta rebelión y decidida guerra.

[The Aztec Nation {…} felt a certain distress that grew constantly and was ultimately transformed into hatred. Then came the slaughter at the celebrations of Toxcatl, and that hatred exploded into an open rebellion and all-out war]. (129)

The character of Cortés, for his part, demonstrates why there should be limits on state power. Cortés is depicted as possessed by “un loco afán de dominarlo todo” [an insane eagerness to dominate everything] (137) that is only backed by might and not right (126), and that manifests itself in the generalized infliction of human suffering through violence, torture, and slavery (132, 138). In contrast, the ideal configuration of state power is symbolized by the way in which the Aztecs waged war and treated the vanquished:

No hicimos nunca nosotros la guerra, sino provocados por las vecinas gentes. Si las vencíamos, nos limitábamos a imponerles tributos en
especies y en sangre; no les quitábamos jamás ni sus leyes ni su gobierno.

[We never waged war unless we were provoked by our neighbors. If we defeated them, we limited ourselves to the collection of taxes in kind or in blood, but we never deprived the vanquished of their laws, nor of their government]. (138)

Taken together, these two principles – the right to self-determination and the moderation of state power – provide us with the normative content of a virtual alternative collective memory, one that is not based on the will to dominate and the erasure of cultural particularity, but rather on the pursuit of peace and commitment to pluralism. The fact that this alternative collective memory still depends on a cultural hierarchy (Pi i Margall does not question Western superiority, but merely its unjust effects) is as much an undercurrent in Pi i Margall’s belief in universal imperatives as a measure of what was possible at the end of the nineteenth century in Spain. And the fact that it can only be expressed through Pi i Margall’s rudimentary aesthetic principles points to Pi i Margall’s own creative limitations as well as to the fact that the most talented novelists and essayists of the time, such as Benito Pérez Galdós (1843–1920), Emilia Pardo Bazán (1851–1921), or Rafael Altamira (1866–1951), adhered to the centralist collective memory promoted by the state, not the one promoted by Pi i Margall.

Contrary to the memory produced by the official 1892 narrative, this collective memory does not aim to assert the legitimacy of the Restoration’s increasingly violent colonial policies, but rather aspires to challenge them. Instead of seeing imperialism as the embodiment of the nation’s highest aspirations, this collective memory reconnected with the First Republic’s old project of reforming the colonial regime by undermining its reliance on slavery and centralized, oligarchic rule (recall here Pi i Margall’s 1854 complaint about the despotism of the General Captains). In a demonstration of coherence and political courage, Pi i Margall understood that his historical, federalist discourse required him to take a stance against the state’s repressive colonial policies in the 1890s. He thus tirelessly campaigned first for Cuba’s autonomy and then for its independence, writing literally hundreds of articles and giving countless speeches on the subject.22 Because of this, he was ostracized, persecuted by the government, and accused of antipatriotism by both the press and most Spanish intellectuals, including his former colleague Castelar (Jutglar 1: 89–90; Conangla Fontanilles 101–13). But Pi i Margall, who was famous for his inflexibility, was not ready to recant his political beliefs or his historical convictions. Thus on August 17, 1895,
when what would ultimately become the definitive Cuban rebellion had just broken out, he argued once again in favor of Cuba's autonomy. His parody of those who were calling for war in the name of the nation's integrity and its imperial memory is worth quoting at length:

“España es siempre España, se dice ahora; no podemos consentir, en modo alguno, la pérdida de Cuba; antes nuestra propia ruina que tanta deshonra. No importa que hayamos de gastar el último centavo y verter la última gota de sangre; hemos de asombrar a las gentes demostrándoles que aún somos los que hace tres siglos llevamos nuestras armas vencedoras a todos los ámbitos del mundo.”

¿Cabe concebir ni mayor inconsciencia ni mayor locura? En nuestro ánimo está poner fin a la guerra; basta que concedamos a Cuba la autonomía a que tiene derecho. ¿Y por qué no hemos de concedérsela? ¿Es nunca indecorosa la justicia? ¿Hay nunca humillación en dar a nuestros mayores enemigos lo que por ley de naturaleza les corresponde?

[“Spain is forever Spain,” people say these days. “In no way can we allow ourselves to lose Cuba; we should rather allow our ruin than such a dishonor. It does not matter if we have to spend the last dime and shed the last drop of blood; we have to astonish the world by showing them that we are the same people who three centuries ago paraded their victorious arms around the four corners of the world.”

Is it possible to conceive of a greater irresponsibility or foolishness? It is our intent to put an end to the war: it is sufficient, then, that we grant Cuba the autonomy that is rightfully hers. And why should we not grant it? Is justice ever shameful? Is it ever humiliating to bestow upon our greatest enemies that which belongs to them on account of their nature?]. (Conangla Fontanilles 190)

Clearly, Pi i Margall’s reliance on firm, federalist, political beliefs to produce a critical view of the colonial past also informed his critical stance on the Spanish government’s repressive colonial policies. In both cases, Pi i Margall maintained that the respect for cultural heterogeneity and the moderation of the power of the state were fundamental principles – and that they applied to Cuba, Catalonia, or any other nation of the Spanish state.

In terms of the larger argument being made here about the conflicting political uses of the early modern Spanish Empire, this last quotation makes an interesting point. Certainly, the means employed by Castelar, Cánovas, Chíes, Machado y Núñez, and Pi i Margall to characterize the protagonists, deeds, and values of the imperial adventure inaugurated by Columbus in 1892 were quite similar – to a greater or lesser extent, they all seem to have
embraced a number of superficial, over-simplified historical interpretations in order to foster their political agendas. Perhaps that is the fate of all those who engage in commemorative activity. But where these figures part company is in their relationship to the narrative of Spanish colonialism that was being written at the end of the nineteenth century. While Cánovas and Castelar were busy providing a solid historical base for this narrative, Pi i Margall was attempting to undermine it, showing that the nationalization of Spain’s colonial past was much more ambivalent than had previously been thought. This ambivalence sets the stage for the conflicting emotional responses spurred on by the demise of empire, which I examine in the following chapters.

Notes

1 For two uses of the critical term archive that inform my own, see Roberto González Echevarría’s *Myth and Archive* and Wadda Ríos-Font’s *The Canon and the Archive*.

2 Josep Fontana offers a succinct yet insightful analysis of the changing functions attributed in Spain to Columbus’s first voyage in 1592, 1692, 1792, and 1892.

3 For more details on the celebration’s budget, see Bernabéu Albert, *1892: El IV centenario* (60).

4 For a fascinating analysis of the parade that reenacted the “discovery” and conquest of America in the streets of Madrid, see Blanco’s *Cultura y conciencia imperial* (95–110).

5 One of the main polemical issues of the Columbian Legend had to do with the way in which King Ferdinand treated Columbus upon his return to Spain after his fourth – failed – voyage. Roselly de Lorgues, in *Vida de Cristóbal Colón*, does not hesitate to proclaim Ferdinand’s envy of, and ingratitude toward Columbus, whose last days he depicts with melodramatic clichés: “ Así el hombre que en aquel momento hacía a la España el reino más rico, extenso y poderoso de la cristianidad, no tenía un techo propio que le abrigase, se acostaba en una cama alquilada y tenía que pedir dinero prestado para pagar su cuenta en la posada” [Thus the man who in that precise moment was making Spain the richest, largest, and most powerful kingdom in the Christian domains, did not have a roof to shelter him, slept on a rented bed, and was obliged to borrow money to pay his bill at the inn] (351). Opposing Roselly de Lorgues, Fernández Duro sides with the Spanish Crown and emphasizes “la paciencia, la parsimonia, la condescendencia verdaderamente paternal con que el Monarca maestro toleraba las genialidades infantiles de su Gobernador en las Indias, por llamarse Colón” [the truly paternal patience, temperance, and deference with which the great Monarch tolerated the infantile strokes of genius of his Governor in the Indies, only because his name was Columbus] (24).

6 For an insightful discussion of Fernández Duro’s extensive Columbian scholarship, including his interventions in the several polemics surrounding the Admiral’s figure, see Schmidt-Nowara’s *The Conquest of History* (75–86). For
a useful contextualization of the polemics surrounding Columbus during the fourth centennial, see Bernabéu Albert’s 1892: El IV centenario (109–26). The two-part articles of Pardo Bazán (“El Descubrimiento de América en las letras españolas”) and Menéndez Pelayo (“De los historiadores de Colón con motivo de un libro reciente”) are invaluable accounts of the polemics later analyzed by Schmidt-Nowara and Bernabéu Albert.

7 These lectures have been edited in a three-volume book titled El Continente Americano: conferencias dadas en el Ateneo científico, literario, y artístico de Madrid con motivo del cuarto centenario del Descubrimiento de América. Each lecture is numbered separately.

8 Bernabéu Albert characterizes the dominant interpretations of Columbus and his deeds as “realistic.” Opposed to the romantic, historical idealism of Roselly de Lorgues as well as to the denigratory view of Columbus coming from the U.S., “realist” authors such as Fernández Duro claimed that their renderings of Columbus were impartial, objective, based on an exhaustive study of written sources and thus showed all aspects of Columbus’s character. Realism was, in short, another name for a mixture of positivism and nationalism. See Bernabéu Albert, 1892: El IV centenario (115–21).

9 I provide full bibliographic references for the books by Castelar and Menéndez Pelayo in the works cited section. The proceedings of the Ateneo are collected in El Continente Americano; those of the Congreso Geográfico can be found in Congreso Geográfico Hispano-Portugués-Americano. For the newspaper accounts, see “12 de Octubre” (El Imparcial), “El Centenario y las fiestas” (La Época) and Simonet (El Siglo Futuro).

10 Originally published in El Centenario in 1892, this essay is reprinted as the prologue to Castelar’s 1892 monumental Historia del descubrimiento de América, a book comprised of a series of lectures on Columbian themes. According to Castelar, the book was written at the request of some very powerful New York editors who had already published several excerpts in translation (5), something which testifies not only to Castelar’s popularity in Spain and beyond, but also to how widely accepted the rhetoric of colonial affirmation was.

11 As Alejandro Mejías-López notes, there is an anxiety driving Valera’s imperial nostalgia in his Cartas americanas (1889). According to Mejías-López, Valera’s 1888 review of Rubén Darío’s Azul unintentionally enacts and anxiously registers the shift in cultural authority from Spain to its former Spanish American colonies that attended the rise of modernismo on both sides of the Atlantic (85–94).

12 The four-volume Antología de poetas hispano-americanos consists of a series of introductions to, and selections from, the different national poetic traditions of Latin America. A year before his death, in 1911, Menéndez Pelayo revised the introductions and published the first volume of a two-volume work that he renamed Historia de la poesía hispano-americana. The second volume was published posthumously, in 1913. Both have been included in the edition of Menéndez Pelayo’s complete works coordinated by Ángel González Palencia as volumes 27 and 28. I will be quoting from this edition.

13 On the renewal of the Spanish colonial project after 1833 and the central, if polemical, place that slavery occupied in such a project, see Schmidt-Nowara’s Empire and Antislavery.

14 Álvarez Lázaro’s book is one of the few sources about the main figures advocating
the secularization of Restoration Spain. It contains useful information on Fernando Lozano (whose pseudonym was Demófilo), Ramón Chies (whose pseudonym was Eduardo de Riofranco), and Odón de Buén (whose pseudonym was Lamarck) and on *Las Dominicales del Libre Pensamiento*. For an exposition of Ramón Chies’s thought, see Diego Romero.

As is the case with Chíes, there are practically no sources on Antonio Machado y Núñez. For an overview of his life and works, see Jiménez Aguilar and Agudelo Herrero.

For the Catholic integrist press’s stance, see the editorial of *El Siglo Futuro*, “Profanaciones.” The conservative *La Época* was also highly critical of the Congreso Universal de Librepensadores, but, unlike *El Siglo Futuro*, it defended the government instead of attacking it (see “Los librepensadores” and “Providencia justa”).

Just contemplate, for example, how Leopoldo Alas, in a cruelly ironic commentary on the congress, claimed that free thought was “an old relic” (173), or how Pardo Bazán considered that the celebration of the congress was above all an “act of bad taste” (“El movimiento intelectual del Centenario” 100). For criticisms of the government’s actions, see the editorial by Lozano in *Las Dominicales*; the editorial by Sánchez Pérez in *El Nuevo Régimen*; and the letter “Una protesta” in *El Liberal*.

For a study of the way in which anticlericalism and republicanism converged into a powerful Spanish nationalist ideology promoted by the journalist José Nakens, among others, see Sanabria.

Although both Cánovas and Castelar mounted spirited defenses of the Spanish Empire in 1892, they had earlier participated in a critical, liberal view of the empire. For Cánovas’s earlier critical stance about the Spanish Empire, see Juliá 39; Castelar wrote in 1868 that “There is nothing more dreadful, more abominable, than that large Spanish empire, a shroud extended all over the planet” (qtd. in Sáinz Rodríguez 119).

For an elucidation of Blanco White’s moderate liberal positions on the American rebellion, see Brading 544–51; for a fascinating account of the principles and mechanisms of viceregal power in New Spain, see Cañeque.

The full text of this dramatic dialogue is included as an appendix in Bernabéu Albert’s article “La conquista después del Desastre. Guatimozín y Hernán Cortés. Diálogo (1899),” de Francisco Pi y Margall,” which is a long and lucid introduction to Pi i Margall’s work. I will be quoting from this edition of Pi i Margall’s work.

All of these articles and speeches are collected in Conangla Fontanilles.