

*Review***MIGUÉLEZ-
CARBALLEIRA,
Helena***Galicia,
A Sentimental Nation:
Gender, Culture and
Politics***Cardiff: University of Wales
Press. 2013. 253 pp.
ISBN 978 0 7038 2653 4****Phoebe Oliver**
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In this monograph, Miguélez-Carballeira gives the first detailed critical insight into what has been long-held as a prominent marker of Galician identity: sentimentality. She begins *Galicia, A Sentimental Nation* outlining the development of this ‘myth’, as she initially terms it. However, the main impetus of her pioneering work is to expose and trace the implications of this deeply-ingrained, ubiquitous and ambivalent trope. Her versatile analysis, grounded in references to sentimentality in pivotal texts of Galician literary historiography, presents this supposed national predisposition as a colonial stereotype born out of Spanish-Galician relations. Developing a gender-based postcolonial critique of the nation, Miguélez-Carballeira reveals how (self)representations of Galicia have been conditioned by the colonial dynamic of this relationship. She contends that Galician sentimentality has been articulated through a variety of gendered cultural representations since the nineteenth century. Departing from this principle, her work analyses the conflicting political ends to which it has been employed in an increasingly fragile and fragmentary Spanish State.

The main body of the work is divided into an introduction and five chapters and, in recognition of the open-ended nature of its central argument, is rounded off by an afterword. Over the course of the introduction, Miguélez-Carballeira lays out her methodological framework, which combines literary criticism and cultural history to explore the effects of colonial discursive structures on representations of national identity and the development of nationalist movements. The main purpose of *Galicia, A Sentimental Nation* is to expose how the power dynamics and national discourses which she scrutinizes are profoundly gendered. Furthermore,

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it highlights the dangers of this practice, pointing out how cultural and political statements which counter these colonializing, patriarchal national narratives are lost. To this end, Miguélez-Carballeira elaborates a composite methodology which illustrates the convergence of gender, colonial political practices and culture in the Galician case as exemplified by sentimentality.

She begins, drawing on work on Galician cultural resistance by Xoán González-Millán, emphasising the necessity to approach the subalternity of Galicia in relation to Spain as an organic dialectic which is informed by their unequal colonial relationship. Accordingly, she proposes a convincing model for understanding the network of contradictory discourses of nation in Galicia and its historical development, based in large part on postcolonial and Orientalist critiques of representation. Influenced by the theorisations of the colonial stereotype as an ambivalent and interconnected tool for simultaneously asserting and resisting colonial power expounded by Said (1995) and Bhabha (1994), Miguélez-Carballeira reveals Galician sentimentality as such a flexible metaphor. This provides a solid basis for her argument that national identity and discourses in Galicia cannot be simply understood as a binary process of oppression exercised by centralising efforts of Spain and resistance to them. As she explains clearly throughout *Galicia, A Sentimental Nation*, the narrative of sentimentality articulates the nuanced interrelation between dominant Spain and subaltern Galicia. It provides a valuable means of understanding how this dynamic is inflected by a range of interconnected strategies: breaking down the subaltern national culture and supplying limited conditions in which its difference can be expressed, mediating self-expressions which, at times, implicitly service the colonializing aims they purport to resist.

Two further related theoretical strands substantiate Miguélez-Carballeira's relational approach to sentimentality and nation. She builds on Fanon's (2001) discussion of 'constitutional depravity of the colonised' with gender critiques of Orientalism (Mills 1991; Lewis 1996; Yeğenoğlu 1998); and studies of the gendering and degradation of sentimentality by Clark (1994) and Huyssen (1986) as a means of preserving patriarchal-colonial hierarchical structures. In this way, she demonstrates that the negative connotations imputed to sentimentality and its effects, as a colonial stereotype, cannot be extricated from questions of gender and sexuality. In support of this assertion, *Galicia, A Sentimental Nation* comprises the first attempt to analyse a major discursive strand in Galician nationalism: *celtismo* and the trope of the feminized Celt. Miguélez-Carballeira gives a crucial overview of how the figure of the Galician Celt was transformed from proud and bellicose to sentimental and quiescent at the turn of the twentieth century and the enduring political and cultural reverberations caused by this discursive transition. By illustrating this significant rhetorical feature of modern Galician-Spanish relations, *Galicia, A Sentimental Nation* contributes vitally towards fleshing out postcolonial approaches to Spain.

Miguélez-Carballeira's relational framework enables her to use a broad range of interconnected historical sources to evaluate the fluctuating trope of sentimentality and its implications. The analysis of each chapter revolves around a significant moment, figure or text of Galician literary history since the mid-nineteenth century: centring on the work of Augusto González Besada, Eugenio Carré Aldao, Antonio Couceiro Freijomil, and Ramón Piñeiro, as well as the on-going processes of linguistic and cultural normalisation. She situates her detailed analysis of the theme of sentimentality running through these national(ist) discourses within

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the historical context, incorporating political developments and a range of cultural artefacts: literary histories, journals, translations, as well as advertising campaigns, commercial ventures and the Panteón de Galegos Ilustres. This permits Miguélez-Carballeira to uncover how sentimental discourses have shaped differing and often competing articulations of femininity, masculinity and sexuality in Galicia. Furthermore, it enables her to examine the implications of such discursive dynamics on power structures within Galicia and Galician culture. This provides a richness to her approach that makes a solid case for understanding sentimentality as interrelated with national identity, its political expression and their history. In laying bare the mechanics operating, both retrospectively and presently, in Galician historiography, Miguélez-Carballeira has produced a book upon which Galician Studies scholars must reflect. She does not shy away from dissecting foundational myths, sacrosanct figures and articles of faith of Galician culture and its study. Whilst no individual chapter is dedicated to its emblematic figurehead Rosalía de Castro, *Galicia, A Sentimental Nation* addresses, at various points, the imperative question of the nineteenth-century author as pre-eminent discursive figure in Galician history, culture and politics. On the one hand, this provides original analysis of how the recurrent feature of de Castro as national touchstone has been inflected by gender, sexuality and sentimentality. On the other, it examines the effect of the gendered-colonial dynamic of national identity on women as cultural and critical agents in Galicia. This strand is extended through examination of the development of Galician feminist criticism and the work of contemporary authors such as Lupe Gómez, Xohana Torres, María Reimóndez and María Xosé Queizán.

In conjunction with Miguélez-Carballeira's *A Companion to Galician Culture* (2014), this work constitutes an invaluable survey of Galician political and cultural history, foregrounding —rightly— the significant place of literature and literary historiography in shaping its narrative in the last century and a half. Alongside *Contemporary Galician Cultural Studies* (Hooper & Puga Moruxa, MLA, 2011), it provides meticulous analysis of the chief theoretical lines of Galician historiography, such as the *criterio filolóxico*, while contextualising the forces conditioning it up to the present day and presenting an useful examination of cultural practices at work in Galicia and Galician Studies. This study will thus be indispensable primary reading for researchers who are new to the field. The clarity of her writing, coupled with the breadth of her research, not only means that *Galicia, A Sentimental Nation* is accessible to readers with little knowledge of the Galician case, but also reinforces its broader scholarly relevance. Its articulation of national identities occluded and/or distorted by colonial discourses and practices will be of interest to those researching such dynamics, especially regarding how they are inflected by gender and sexuality. The unequal interaction between national projects in Spain that it exposes makes the work an essential reference for scholars of nationalist discourses in the country. Similarly, its application of postcolonial critiques to the effects of centralising state narratives on stateless identities would be of considerable interest to researchers engaging with similar situations outside Spain. Miguélez-Carballeira's evaluation of sentimentality in relation to nationalism is likewise relevant beyond Galicia and Spain. Her methodology draws on historical studies of the trope of the feminized Celt as a tool in enacting British imperialist policies within the British Isles. Accordingly, the book would be of interest to academics researching the continued effects

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For a comparative review of the two versions see CASAS, Arturo, 'O modelo homosocial da cultura nacional galega: unha historia crítica da historiografía literaria galega en perspectiva feminista e poscolonial'. *Abriu* 4, 2015: 151-157.

of these rhetorical strategies throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first century.

Galicia, A Sentimental Nation is underpinned by a solid theoretical basis and reads easily. It is not surprising therefore that the book intervenes actively in broader ongoing debates about Galician national identity and right to nationhood. This aspect of Miguélez-Carballeira's work has been galvanized by the Galician version *Galiza, um povo sentimental? Género, política, e cultura no imaginário nacional galego* (2014). Published by Através Editora as part of their 'De Nós' series, it was awarded the Asociación de Escritoras e Escritores en Lingua Galega essay prize in 2015.¹ The reach of this translation, which displays considerable fidelity to the original (Casas 2015) and which Miguélez-Carballeira has presented throughout Spain, is a testament to the accessibility of *Galicia, A Sentimental Nation*. The fact that the English version has already been reprinted shows potential to engage more widely with non-academic Anglophone commentators on nationalisms in Spain. However, this possibility is hindered largely because it carries the price of a book produced within the academic market.

Addressing forms of Galician self-representation lying beneath the sentimental mediations that she studies may constitute a 'heartening, future project' for Miguélez-Carballeira. However, I contend that the abiding significance of *Galicia, A Sentimental Nation* rests in the fact that it implicitly challenges researchers to tackle these very subjects. It asks persuasively that colonial, gendered discourses on and within nationalist movements in Spain be examined in order to expose their lasting effects on both cultural expressions of identity and on historical and contemporary power structures. Although this proposal could be readily applied to various cases, her work primarily calls upon scholars in Galician Studies to give voice to ways of being Galician which were, and are, denatured and silenced by narratives of sentimentality. Indeed, Miguélez-Carballeira ends her study with the sobering reminder that colonial stereotypes about Galician identity have living victims and on-going political consequences, affecting how political activism in Galicia is handled by the Spanish State and how it is reported in the media.

Whilst *Galicia, A Sentimental Nation* draws necessary attention to Galicia, its publication in the UK can also encourage the reader to reflect on the impact and articulations of the colonial trope beyond Spain. In the UK context, increasing attention is being paid — both outside the academia and within it — to national identity in Spain, with parallels being repeatedly made between the ever more pressing debates on sovereignty and independence in Catalonia and Scotland. Nevertheless, discussions of the interaction between state and non-state nationalist movements rarely incorporate Galician articulations and perspectives, which would usefully illustrate some significant aspects of colonisation in the European context. Following Miguélez-Carballeira's lead, we can ask whether this oversight, or inattention, is itself another by-product of structures built and sustained by a pervasive colonial stereotype. In the case of academic inquiry, we can go further still and examine the effects of this and similar structures on research and teaching in contemporary Spanish Studies. When considering future directions for the field, addressing these issues would raise two substantive questions. What can be done to avoid perpetuating such colonial structures and the limiting effects which attend them? And more optimistically, as Miguélez-Carballeira points out, what approaches and avenues of research might open up as a result of dismantling them?