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BEING AND STAYING FAMOUS IN 19th CENTURY SPAIN: BALDOMERO ESPARTERO AND THE BIRTH OF POLITICAL CELEBRITY

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Being – and Staying – Famous in 19th-century Spain: Baldomero Espartero and the Birth of Political
Celebrity*

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Within days of the “Gloriosa” that swept Isabel II from the throne in September 1868, Baldomero Espartero became a frequently-invoked symbol. He was a prominent part of the “fiesta revolucionaria” that spread across the country following the fall of the queen and the transfer of power to the revolutionary Juntas. A portrait of Espartero was exhibited on the balcony of the Huelva town hall as if to preside over the three days of celebration organized by the *ayuntamiento*; in Barcelona, his bust graced the Diputación building and a huge portrait was placed on the façade of the city hall, while in Valladolid, the first day of celebrations was, according to Angel Bellogín, a member of the revolutionary Junta, “dedicado al ilustre duque de la Victoria”.¹ Nor was it just the new revolutionary authorities who invoked Espartero’s name and image. Along with sheet music for *Prim: Himno nacional para canto y piano* and the liberal classic, the *Himno de Riego*, music stores were advertising music for the *Himno de Espartero*.² And in the new world of unprecedented freedom to publish newspapers and pamphlets and perform plays, Espartero figured prominently.³

During the two year *interinidad* that extended from the victory of the revolution until the decision of the Cortes Constituyentes, in November 1870, to offer the throne to Amadeo of Savoy, Espartero, who had refused to assume any role in the revolution and who limited his interventions to calling on his supporters to respect the new authorities, emerged as a popular candidate to become the head of state, either as king in a new-style democratic monarchy or as president of a Spanish republic. This situation was captured in a flyer entitled *Espartero, rey o presidente* which was circulating on the streets of Barcelona late in 1868. Beneath a crude drawing of a seated Espartero being offered a scroll that reads “REPUBLICA FEDERAL” from one side and a crown on the other, there is a dialogue in which “Monárquicos” and “Republicanos” take turns explaining why

¹ Gregorio de la Fuente Monge, *Los revolucionarios de 1868*, (Madrid, 2000), pp . 93-4, 103; Angel Bellogín, “Historia Contemporánea. La Gloriosa de Valladolid” in, Rafael Serrano García, ed., *La Revolución Liberal en Valladolid (1808-1868)*, (Valladolid, 1993), p. 329

² *La Correspondencia de España*, 8 October, 1868, *La Iberia*, 6 Oct. 1868

³ On Espartero in the theatre, see Gregorio de la Fuente, “La figura del general Espartero en el teatro decimonónico”, *Historia y política*, 29, 2013, pp. 103-38; Marie-Pierre Caire-Mérida, “La revolución de 1868 en el teatro representado en Barcelona”, in *Dionisio*, 3, 2006, pp. 11-20 and Caire-Mérida, “Teatro y política durante el sexenio revolucionario”, *Moenia*, 12, 2006. On Espartero in pamphlet literature and the press, see Pablo Sáez Miguel, “Espartero o el cincinato español. Historia de la candidatura a Rey del Duque de la Victoria (1868-1870)”, *Berceo*, 160, 2011, pp. 227-60

they want him as head of state.⁴ And when the new Constitution of 1869 proclaimed Spain a monarchy and the government set out to find a ruler for the throne, Espartero emerged as a popular candidate: between November 1869 and June 1870 some 268 petitions, signed by at least 100,000 people, flooded into the parliamentary mail room.⁵ According to historian and contemporary Antonio Pirala, “[l]a candidatura de Espartero fue indudablemente la más popular. Ninguna se proclamó en más folletos y artículos. Ni se produjo las manifestaciones tan numerosas como espontáneas que en Madrid y otras capitales se celebraron”.⁶ Had the outcome depended on a popular rather than a parliamentary vote, Espartero might well have won.

Espartero was an active public figure for fewer than nine years: between the Battle of Luchana in December 1836 and the end of his Regency in July 1843, and again during the *Bienio Progresista* of 1854 to 1856. At the time of the “Gloriosa”, all this was long in the past and, in any case, Espartero’s political life had been less than a success; even many Progressives had joined the conspiracy that forced him from the Regency in 1843; he disappointed many in the crisis of July 1856, and he remained a divisive figure among them through the 1860s. He was 75 years old. He had spent the previous twelve years living quietly in Logroño, and although he remained the titular head of the *Progresistas* until 1864 he was far removed from active political engagement or the political limelight. By 1868 Espartero should have been yesterday’s man but clearly this was not the case.

Indeed, he remained an important point of reference into the 1870s. This went beyond simple fame; Espartero had charisma, in Max Weber’s sense: “a certain quality of an individual personality by which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are... regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader”.⁷ Traditional charisma adhered to monarchs, but in a curious, and perhaps unique, inversion, in the 1870s two successive Spanish kings, Amadeo I (1870-1873) and Alfonso XII (1874-1885), sought to appropriate Espartero’s. Both had an uphill battle to establish their legitimacy: Amadeo was a foreigner and had been a contested choice; Alfonso had to overcome the immense

⁴ Biblioteca de Catalunya, F. Bon. 2085

⁵ Legajo 229, Archivo del Congreso de los Diputados, Madrid

⁶ Antonio Pirala, *Historia contemporánea. Anales desde 1843*, (Madrid, 1875-79), vol. 3, p. 402.]

⁷ Max Weber, *Economy and Society: an Outline of Interpretative Sociology*, (Berkeley, 1978), vol. 1, p. 241

unpopularity of his mother, Isabel II, which had severely damaged the Bourbon name, so their interest in having Espartero's light shine on them is understandable.⁸

Amadeo of Savoy, the younger son of King Victor Emmanuel II of Italy, was elected king by the Cortes Constituyentes in November 1870. In September 1871, he traveled to Logroño to visit Espartero, spending almost his entire stay in Espartero's home. Four months later, he took the exceptional step of naming Espartero Prince Vergara; only the second time someone other than the son or daughter of a reigning monarch was given the rank of prince.⁹ Alfonso XII, who came to the throne in 1875 following the military coup that ended the sort-lived and chaotic First Republic, visited Espartero three times and confirmed the title Prince of Vergara. The first visit came in February 1875, only six weeks after Alfonso had been proclaimed king. Antonio Cánovas del Castillo, the Prime Minister and the man who had engineered Alfonso's return, considered it so important that, in order not to "privar a la Nación de los detalles interesantes" he had a supposedly confidential letter describing the visit published in the official *Gaceta de Madrid*. After hearing that Alfonso had refused to accept the Gran Cruz de San Fernando, Espartero replied that as Alfonso had been the first Spanish king since Felipe V to lead his troops into battle, he deserved the Gran Cruz and offered to pin on the king's chest "la banda que ha llevado este veterano en cien combates, ganada derramando su sangre por la integridad de la Patria, por su independencia, por vuestros antepasados, y por las libertades públicas" before reminding him that a constitutional monarch must "ser justo y fiel custodio de las libertades públicas". The letter concluded by highlighting the importance of "el abrazo del más anciano y calificado caudillo de nuestra libertad y del más joven y animoso depositario de la Monarquía legítima". The second visit came just days after Alfonso had ended the Second Carlist War, becoming the new "Pacificador de España", the unofficial title by which so many Spaniards referred to Espartero.¹⁰ The final visit was in October 1878, when the recently-widowed king came to share his mourning with the recently-widowed Espartero.

⁸ In 1873 Espartero received a visit from Estanislao Figuera, the first president of the First Republic.

⁹ On Amadeo's visit see Bermejo Martín, *Espartero*, pp. 190-2 and 295-9. The other case was Manuel Godoy, whom Carlos IV named Prince of Peace in 1805.

¹⁰ I want to thank Javier Moreno Luzón for bringing this point to my attention. Bermejo Martín, *Espartero*, pp. 192-3; *Gaceta de Madrid*, 14 February 1875. On January 10, 1875, mere days after Alfonso was proclaimed king, Espartero sent him a letter: "Aseguro a VM que tendra en mi su fiel servidoy en la actualidad solo dese ver a todos los liberales unidos a VM para que podamos devolver la paz y la ventura a nuestra madre patria". Espartero Archive (20) 1875-08. Alfonso had Espartero's letter published in the *Gaceta*. There is some evidence the tactic was effective. One of the congratulatory letters Espartero received on his saint's day in

Why was this so? What were the mechanisms that allowed Espartero to retain his fame, and even his charisma, for so many years after his public life had come to an end? ¹¹ Like that of his contemporary, Giuseppe Garibaldi, with whom he was occasionally compared, Espartero's initial fame was due to the kind of "political and rhetorical strategy" so deftly described by Lucy Riall. ¹² The Espartero cult was created from scratch in a very short time. Before the Battle of Luchana on December 24, 1836 he was known only to his family, friends and comrades. A few days later he was a national hero. The event was "un verdadero drama romántico", to use Luis Garrido Muro's description. ¹³ On a snowy Christmas Eve, Espartero rose from the sickbed where his recurrent kidney stone problem had put him, and to the cry "¡Viva Isabel II y la libertad!" he led a cavalry charge across the Luchana bridge to relieve the city of Bilbao, which had been under Carlist siege for two months. At 8am on Christmas morning, to the pealing of church bells, Espartero led his troops into the city.

This was a crucial and unexpected victory, and liberal Spain "se volvió loco de alegría al saber la noticia". Espartero's dispatch was read in parliament and printed in a special issue of the official *Gaceta*. Progressive politician Joaquín María López gave a famous speech which, according to Nicolás Estévanez, "los entusiastas liberales de aquella generación que tuvo tantos vitores para Espartero... sabía de memoria". ¹⁴ There were special theatre performances and widely-supported subscriptions for the widows and orphans of the defenders of Bilbao. City after city named a street or square after the battle. On February 6, 1837, every church in Spain celebrated a special mass for those had died and priests discussed the battle in their sermons. The next month, Antonio García Gutiérrez's *El sitio de Bilbao* debuted in Madrid: it ended with a member of the militia shouting "¡Viva la libertad! ¡Viva Espartero!", perhaps the first voicing of a pairing that would last decades.

1875 noted the "mucho que se ha divulgado el acto de condecorar VE al Rey con la banda de la Gran Cruz de San Fernando". Espartero Archive (26), 1871-486

¹¹ The classic study of fame is Leo Braudy, *The Frenzy of Renown*, (New York, 1986). Also Edward Berenson and Eva Gioli, *Constructing Charisma: Celebrity, Fame and Power in Nineteenth Century Europe*, (New York, 2010), and Simon Morgan, "Academic 'Pseudo-Event' or a useful concept for historians?", *Cultural and Social History*, 8,2011, 95-114.

¹² Lucy Riall, *Garibaldi: Invention of a Hero*, (New Haven, 2007), p. 13

¹³ Luis Garrido Muro, "El Nuevo Cid: Espartero, María Cristina y el Primer Liberalismo Español, 1834-1840", PhD thesis, (Universidad de Cantabria, 2012), p. 119. He even compares Luchana and Espartero of the Duque de Rivas' classic Romantic play, *Don Alvaro, o la fuerza del destino*. What follows is based on Garrido Muro, pp. 115-8. See also Pedro Díaz Marín, "La Construcción de Espartero antes de su Regencia, 1837-1840", *Cuadernos de Ilustración y Romanticismo*, 14, 2006, pp. 301-27.

¹⁴ Nicolás Estévanez, *Fragmentos de mis memorias*, (Madrid, 1903), p. 53

Espartero was later named commander in chief and it was in this role that he brought the war to a successful conclusion with a negotiated peace - and the wonderfully theatrical “embrace of Vergara” - on August 31, 1839. News of the end of the war turned Madrid into “una completa fiesta durante dos semanas”, and the rest of the country followed as soon as it heard.¹⁵ This was Espartero’s peace and it made Espartero the most famous, admired, and beloved person in the country, the Pacificador de España as he came to be known. In the year following Vergara, Espartero reached “una altura desconocida para cualquier de sus contemporáneos. Medallas conmemorativas, procesiones con su retrato a cuestras, toda clase de obsequios, poemas en su honor, felicitaciones de todas las instancias, coronas de oro... Toda la nación parecía estar rendida a los pies de su pacificador”. The Espartero cult touched even ordinary aspects of daily life: men adopted his “stubble” look and carried silver cigar cases with his image on them and children would be dressed “Espartero style” for special occasions.¹⁶

That was 1840. Soon after came the turmoil of his Regency, which split the Progressives, generated a fierce press campaign against him and ended in 1843 in a military revolt and exile.¹⁷ His return to power following the Revolution of 1854 was no less brief and no more successful, and after it he continued to be a divisive figure, especially among Progressives. In spite of all this, Espartero retained his fame and his following. In part this was due to the efforts of the branch of the Progressives, headed by Pascual Madoz and, until he decided that General Prim was a better bet, Victor Balaguer, which continued to see Espartero as their leader.¹⁸ But only in part. The Espartero cult had much greater reach than did the still notable-based political formations of Spanish liberalism. Espartero, like Garibaldi, was “genuinely ‘popular’ in that his appeal stretched beyond an

¹⁵ Garrido Muro, “El Nuevo Cid”, pp. 15-23

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 95-96, 564-65

¹⁷ Pedro Díaz Marín, “Espartero en entredicho. La ruina de su imagen en las elecciones de 1843”, *Ayer*, 72, 2008, pp. 185-214. This analysis is based on the press, so that the extent to which Espartero’s image was “ruined” would be restricted to a rather narrow range of Spaniards.

¹⁸ On Pascual Madoz see Francisco Javier Paredes Alonso, *Pascual Madoz, 1805-1870: Libertad y progreso en la monarquía isabelina*, (Pamplona, 1991), and on Victor Balaguer, Joan Palomas i Moncholí, *Víctor Balaguer: renaixença, revolució i progres*, (Vilanova i la Geltru, 2004). Espartero’s great *Progresista* enemy was Salustiano Olózaga. See Isabel Burdiel, “Salustiano Olózaga: la res más brava del progresismo” in Manuel Pérez Ledesma and Isabel Burdiel, eds., *Liberales eminentes*, (Madrid, 2008), pp. 77-124. As one of the “profesionales en la órbita progresista”, Balaguer played a major role in creating the cult of Prim during the War of Africa in 1859-1860, a cult which was created in much the same way as the original Espartero cult. See Albert García Balanyà, “Patria, plebe y política en la España isabelina: la Guerra de Africa en Cataluña” in Eloy Martín Corrales, ed., *Marruecos y el colonialismo español, 1859-1912*, (Barcelona, 2002), p. 38.

elite intellectual readership and reached a broader literate public” – and a not-so-literate public. The same kinds of “cheap and easily accessible textual and visible material” which fed the Garibaldi cult fed Espartero’s. And the two cults were also similar in being “largely a collaborative effort” which the fans had a role in constructing.¹⁹ Finally, like Garibaldi, Espartero remained alive long after he retreated from active public life. Indeed both men retired to relatively remote locations: Garibaldi to Caprera and Espartero to Logroño. This long afterlife distinguished Espartero from other heroes of Spanish liberalism like Rafael de Riego and Juan Prim, both of whom gave their lives for the cause and could be made into secular saints in a way the long-lived Espartero could not.²⁰

The two cults were different in one significant respect: once it had been created, the survival of the Espartero cult was driven more from below than from above. It was manifested in cheap books and images, but the existence of these products was less a result of political programming than of market demand, itself the product of oral tradition, often at the family level. What follows uses a variety of sources, but especially the letters Espartero received from people from across Spain, to determine the mechanisms of Espartero’s ongoing fame and popularity in the 1860s and 1870s and his role as Spain’s first modern political celebrity.²¹

¹⁹ Riall, *Garibaldi*, pp. 17-8. On the importance of the consumer in constructing celebrity see Berenson and Gioli, *Constructing Charisma*, pp. 10-13 and Morgan, “Academic ‘pseudo-event’”, p.99.

²⁰ John Horne, “Masculinity in politics and war in the age of nation-states and world wars, 1850-1939”, in Stefan Dudink, Karen Hagemann and John Tosh, eds., *Masculinities in Politics and War. Gendering Modern History*, (Manchester, 2004), p. 28. The same could be said, on the other side of the political spectrum, for “Nuestro joven héroe”, Diego de León, the dashing general Espartero had executed in 1841 for participating in a failed coup against his Regency. The glorification of de León was accompanied by the vilification of Espartero. See María Zozaya Montes, *El casino de Madrid: Ocio, Sociabilidad, Identidad y Representación Social*, (Tesis, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 2008), pp. 165-71

²¹ There are, of course, limitations to these letters as a source. Almost by definition, they were written by people who admired Espartero and cannot be considered as representing the views of all Spaniards. Also, the letters came from people who were literate, although the orthography of many suggests that the writers’ skills were limited. Some letter writers belonged to urban middle classes, or even elites, for example Santiago López Pelegrín who was a politician and, among other things, author of a book about bullfighting. Even so, the letters do begin to provide “the direct evidence needed to probe popular attitudes and motives” which John Breuilly has called for in the study of popular nationalism. “What does it mean to say that nationalism is ‘popular’?”, in Maarten Van Ginderachter and Marnix Beyen, eds., *Nationhood from Below: Europe in the Long Nineteenth Century*, (New York, 2011) p. 24. Espartero’s papers remain in the possession of his descendants who generously gave me access to them.

Family Traditions

Oral tradition was a crucial vector for maintaining Espartero's fame. Perhaps the oldest form of oral culture in Spain is the *romance*, or folk ballad which emerged in the late 14th century out of the earlier *cantares de gesta* and continued to be created into the 19th century. Along with other forms of popular poetry, *romances* were also produced in cheap printed formats, part of the *literature de cordel*, the collection of the *romances* in the late 19th century, described them as "breve poema épico-lírico which was sold, hanging from a string, by street vendors."²² Contemporary events, and especially military conflict, were one of the *romance's* staple topics, and Espartero was the subject of at least one which was recorded in three different versions by folklore collectors working in the province of Leon in the second decade of the 20th century. After a victory which cost many of his men's lives, Espartero is moved by the suffering of a wounded soldier, first to send him "un cirujano francés" and then, after the wounded man dies:

El Espartero echó carta al ospital
Que asta el mismo campo santo
Le bayan a acompañar
Con músicas y tambores
Hasta ayudarle a enterrar
Ahora digamos todos
Viba, viba nuestro General.²³

Oral tradition within families played a particular role in sustaining the Espartero cult. In November 1868, Joaquín Mariano de Lobera described himself as 50 years old and having served under Espartero in the past; he was now "casado y con familia hoy me dedico a la educación de ésta, también los inculco los principios liberales de que tanto ejemplo ha dado el pacificador de España". Santiago López Pelegrín wrote that his "buen padre", who had been a friend of Espartero's, "nos enseñó a pronunciar desde muy niños, [su nombre] como el nombre santo y y respectable por ecselencia, como una especie de Providencia para nosotros sigue siendo hoy, y será siempre para mi

²² Andrew M. Beresford, "The poetry of medieval Spain", in *Cambridge History of Spanish Literature*, (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 87-8; Joaquín Álvarez Barrientos, "Eighteenth-century poetry", in *ibid.*, pp. 324-5.

²³ "General Espartero", 014006-0001A; Archivo Fundación Ramón Menéndez Pidal, Madrid

y para todos los míos, el nombre augusto del héroe”. A few months later, another admirer wrote that “Muy niño todavía mis padres me enseñaron a pronunciar el nombre de Espartero con el entusiasmo y veneración que se merecía el hombre que aseguró la libertad en nuestra querida España”.²⁴ A José María López y López wrote from Sevilla in 1875 that, “niño aun” he had sent Espartero saint’s day congratulations ten years before, “obteniendo una respuesta que conserve como uno de mis gratos recuerdos de la infancia”. The passing years “no han borrado de mi corazón el afectuoso respeto que heredé de mi padre hacia la persona de VE, en quien veo no solo al ilustre caudillo que supo poner termino a la Guerra de los siete años, sino también al constante defensor de nuestras libertades”.²⁵

Republican politician and future President of the First Republic Emilio Castelar, who was born in 1832, had similar memories. In a speech to the Constituent Cortes in March 1869 recalled that “Yo me acuerdo siempre de cuando en las noches de Navidad estaba en el hogar al calor de la lumbre, acompañado de mis padres, y cuando la lluvia azotaba los cristales, me contaban aquella Guerra gigante y me decía, “Bendice hijo mío, al general Espartero, porque ha vencido la Guerra y nos ha dado la paz”. Nor could Castelar, who was also Professor of History at the University of Madrid, fully shake these childhood lessons. In that same speech he said that Espartero was one of only three generals in European history who had been able “to ally democracy with monarchy”; the other two were Lafayette and Garibaldi.²⁶

²⁴ Joaquín Mariano de Lobera (Cádiz) to Espartero, 19 Nov. 1868, Espartero Archive (16-1868-77); Santiago López Pelegrín to Espartero, 11 Nov. 1868, Espartero Archive (16-1868-68); Pascual M. Estan... (Villena) to Espartero, 30 April, 1869, Espartero Archive (17-88)

²⁵ Espartero Archive (26) 479

²⁶ Emilio Castelar, *Discursos parlamentarios*, vol. 1 (Madrid, 1877), p. 235, 233. In an earlier speech, he described Espartero as “la paz en la sociedad; la libertad en la política; el representante de nuestras más gloriosas tradiciones históricas... y al mismo tiempo era tan sencillo en sus gustos, y en sus costumbres tan virtuoso que el pueblo, al mirarle, se veía a sí mismo; de suerte que este hombre extraordinario podía llamarse con razón la muchedumbre coronada”. Ibid., p. 146. Castelar was far from being alone among republicans in admiring Espartero. During the campaign to elect the Cortes Constituyentes that would write the new constitution, Fernando Garrido said that “aunque no defienda la forma republicana, es para nosotros republicano...y digno de ser el primer magistrado de la República Española”. The “Cincinato español” was too great a figure to put on a throne, “solo la gran misión de un Washington es digno en nosotros de ofrecerle y en él aceptar”. *El Cronista*, December 31, 1868

Another form of transmission of the Espartero cult through families was naming. At the start of his biography of Juan Prim, Pere Anguera claims that his subject's fame was greater and longer lasting than Espartero's, as the latter only "se refleja en una inusitada abundancia de Baldomeros".²⁷ Deriving from Germanic words for brave and famous and entering Catholic naming practice after a 7th century martyr in Lyon, Baldomero was far from a common name in Spain.²⁸ While we lack overall statistics on how often the name appeared and whether it became more commonly used after the time Espartero became famous, there is evidence in the letters he received of people naming their children after him. One Baldomero Martínez, from Mahón, wrote in January 1868 that his deceased father had been "fiel y adicto a la causa de VE". This Baldomero was an opera singer and he was going to dedicate his upcoming debut concert, as was tradition, to "la persona que más aprecio y respeto... En atención a estar dedicada la function, al Excmo Sr. Duque de la Victoria, el Teatro estará iluminado y puesto su retrato el en lugar preferente". (He included a poster for the event as well as a photograph of himself.)²⁹ Benito Ferrer wrote from Sevilla that he had been planning to visit Espartero in Logroño, a considerable journey at the time, but had been unable to because his son, Baldomero, was ill.³⁰

Images

Images were an important support for Espartero's ongoing fame. Nicolás Estévanez (1838-1914), the son of a military officer whose political sympathies were between Progressive liberalism and republicanism, recalled that his father's study had "no había más adornos que los retratos de Voltaire, Quintana, Zurbano, Espartero, Mazzini and Garibaldi".³¹ But possession of an image of Espartero was particularly true for the lower classes. Publisher Benito Hortelano described his decision to publish a "cheap" biography of Espartero in 1848 as a commercial operation motivated by his observation of his ongoing popularity among the lower classes of Madrid: "Algunos retratos

²⁷ Pere Anguera, *El General Prim: Biografía de Un Conspirador*, (Barcelona, 2003), p. 7. By contrast, Anguera says, decades after Prim's death, Oscar Wilde would casually mention him in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. This is a very different kind of fame from the one being discussed here.

²⁸ This may help explain why Espartero chose to be known as Baldomero, which was actually his middle name. San Baldomero's day in the *santoral* is February 27, which was Espartero's birthday. According to the Instituto Nacional de Estadística's padrón de nombres continuo, as of January 2012, Baldomero ranked 406 on the list of men's names in Spain.

²⁹ Baldomero Martínez to Espartero, 23 Jan. 1869, Espartero Archive, (17-45)

³⁰ Benito Ferrer to Espartero, 5 June 1869, Espartero Archive, (17-95)

³¹ Estévanez, *Fragmentos*, p. 14

malos y raquíticos que se había estampado cuando era Regente, el pueblo los buscaba como reliquias y los colocaba en la cabecera de la cama y algunos hasta los ponían luces, como si fuese la efigie de un santo”. Part of Hortelano’s marketing strategy, which was aimed squarely at “artesanos”, was to offer subscribers a “retrato de cuerpo entero”.³² In February 1854, Otway, the British ambassador to Madrid assessed Espartero’s popularity after eleven years away from active politics: “There is no doubt that the lower orders of Madrid, Saragossa and in most of the principal towns are Esparteristas... Like Napoleon in France, his portrait is universal in the huts of the poor, and his alone”. Five months later, in the midst of the revolution, the ambassador had recourse to religious imagery: “The Duke of Victory’s portrait is displayed in all the principal streets surrounded with flowers and lamps, as would be that of a Madonna”.³³ (Keeping with the religious motif, an engraving of the time portrayed a militiaman celebrating Saint Baldomero’s Day. Another proclaimed simply him the “personificación de la Libertad”). Seven years later, in July 1861, the town of Iznajar (Córdoba) was the scene of a republican revolt, known locally as the “War of Bread and Cheese”. One of the leaders, Joaquín Narváez, a distant relative of the Moderado politician Ramón María Narváez, was executed and the as part of the protest by the people of the town, “the portrait of Espartero...competed with the saints for occupying the pre-eminent place of devotion in their homes”.³⁴

A number of the letters Espartero received after the Revolution of 1868 mentioned ownership of his image and the importance it held. José María Sánchez, who had fought under Espartero during the Carlist War and then served in his honour guard during the Regency, wrote that all his friends were *Esparteristas* and “con aquellos que es su ídolo el retrato de VE y a imitación mía, le tienen erigido un altar que ocupa en sus casas el lugar más preferente”. A man from Villena, who had had learned about Espartero from his parents, had never lost his admiration for him and still hoped – “todo mi afán” –to meet him in person, requested a photograph or autograph, “para conservarlas como prendas de inestimable valor, cual un rico tesoro, guardándolas en la familia

³² Benito Hortelano, *Memorias de Benito Hortelano*, (Madrid, 1936), pp. 96-98. His strategy included dedicating it to the former National Militia and listing the author as an ex-militiaman, and distributing the instalments on Saturday afternoon, when the “artesanos” got paid and had money to spend. The project was a success: in a few days he had 8,000 subscribers and he realized 140,000 pesetas in sales in 18 months.

³³ Cited in Kiernan, *Revolution*, p. 47, fn 2; Otway to Clarendon, 22 July, 31 August, 1854, Foreign Office 72, 844, PRO

³⁴ Cited in Guy Thompson, *The Birth of Modern Politics in Spain. Democracy, Association and Revolution, 1854-75*. (London, 2009) pp. 159-60

como la joya más preciada.”³⁵ Finally, Juan Angel said that he had celebrated Espartero’s saint’s day every year since 1836 - “siempre a cido para mi el día mas dichoso del año” – and that the letter Espartero had sent in reply to him four years earlier “la alaga de más valor que tengo en mi casa, mientras viviré yo, y mis hijos, que todos profesan mis hideas, esta carta... la tengo colocada entre el cristal y la estampa del retrato de Buestro ES , y cuando hago iluminación cuantas preguntas se me asen sobre dicha carta, I que orgulloso me pongo yo”.³⁶

A letter Espartero received congratulating him on being named Prince of Vergara in 1872 combines family tradition with the importance of images. The correspondent, Francisco Javier Ygualada, recalled that in 1840 he had hosted Espartero at his home in Alcira. Now, thirty-two years later, he had:

un pie en los primeros peldaños de mi sepulcro, y antes de penetrar en la eternal mansión quisiera poseer alguno de vuestros conceptos, así como vuestra fotografía, en cambio de la que tengo el gusto de remitiros.... Si tan alta honra merezco, y si como es natural sobe vivo poco tiempo, no temáis por el uso que pueda hacerse de vuestra venerable efigie, porque solo liberales ecsisten en mi dilatada familia, y estad seguro de que será disputada por mis herederos como la mas preciada joya que pueda legarles y pasará a las sucesivas generaciones con el sacrosancto respeto que inspiran siempre los eminentes heroes de la patria.³⁷

Many of these letters illuminate a point made by Simon Morgan: “Although many commemorative objects began life as mass-produced commodities, we should remember that they did not retain this status.... through display about the person or in the home such objects attained a status of singularity and would potentially have played a part in constituting the self-identity of their owners, insofar as they identified themselves with the principles of the figures they represented. Objects and images told stories not only about the figures they depicted but also those who owned, displayed, or used them”.³⁸ Showing Espartero’s image or autograph to friends and family and passing it on to the next generation were as important as the simple act of ownership.

³⁵ Jose Ma Sánchez to Espartero, nd., Espartero Archive (17-60b); Pascual M. Estan... (Villena) to Espartero, 30 April, 1869, Espartero Archive (17-88)

³⁶ Juan Angel to Espartero, 11 Jan. 1869, Espartero Archive (17-23)

³⁷ Espartero Archive, (26) 278

³⁸ Morgan, “Academic ‘Pseudo-Event’”, p.

The last letter also points to the particular importance of items that had been touched by the great man, something which comes through elsewhere. Gregorio Fernández de Barroete, who had been a volunteer during the Carlist War, was moved by news of the visit Espartero received from Alfonso XII to adding that a reply from Espartero “añadiría una timbre más de Gloria... legado a mis hijos como recuerdo imperecedero de este veterano”.³⁹ A group of admirers from San Andrés del Palomar included a particularly emotional anecdote in a letter to Espartero to congratulate him on his birthday. As they were writing, a friend who lived nearby dropped in and said:

Ya beis, hase mas de 20 que estoy pribado de andar y me encuentro imposibilitado, además tengo doble edad mas que vosotros, vosotros bendrá un día que hiréis en Logroño a bisitar a Espartero, yo no lo podré ber pero a lo menos quisiera que nos embiase su propia firma y cada vez que la bería se me alegraría el corzaon, y dicho esto empezo a llorar, a sus lágrimas siguieron también las de todos los amigos. ¡O momento dichoso! Aquellas lágrimas afianzaba la lealtad de aquellos corazones.⁴⁰

Similarly, Angel Bellogín commented that while most of the veterans who had broken down in tears when Espartero visited Valladolid in 1856 to inaugurate the railroad were dead by September 1868, “sus hijos conservaban cual preciosa reliquia la licencia de sus padres”.⁴¹

What type of images are we talking about here? The European craze for collecting *cartes de visite* and pasting them in albums, which took off after Disderi’s invention of these small photographic portraits in 1854, did not pass Spain by. There was a “verdadera industria” producing the things and a particular kind of window shopping took hold in Madrid and Barcelona. In 1861 Ramón Mesonero Romanos claimed that people would spend hours watching the construction in Madrid’s Puerta del Sol or “en recorrer uno por uno los mil retratos-tarjeta expuestas a las puertas de los fotógrafos”.⁴² By 1856, Madrid was experiencing what Antonio Flores called “retrato-manía”:

De ese cambio recíproco [de retratos] prescinden pocas personas. Y el que no tiene amigos, como no puede prescindir del album de retratos, compra los que quiere, los que puede,

³⁹ Espartero Archive, (20) 1875-23. Espartero received at least one letter from abroad requestiong his autograph. From Frankfurt but written in French, it came in September 1878, at the very end of Espartero’s life. Espartero Archive, (20) 1878-11

⁴⁰ Espartero Archive, (23) 164

⁴¹ Bellogín, “Historia Contemporánea. La Gloriosa de Valladolid”, p. 329,

⁴² Publio López Mondejar, *Historia de la fotografía es España*, (Barcelona, 2005), pp. 51-56

porque ya nos venden a todos en pública almoneda. Solo así es posible tener el retrato de todos los reyes, de todos los sabios, de todos los artistas y de todos los fenómenos del universe. Nadie se escapa ya de ser retratado y de ser vendido.⁴³

Espartero was neither a king nor a wise man nor an artist but his portrait was one of the many that found their way onto a *carte de visite*, although the few that remain appear to have been taken after 1860, when he was twenty years older, and stouter, than the Romantic icon in Antonio María Esquivel's widely reproduced portrait.⁴⁴ These images undoubtedly helped sustain Espartero's fame, but there were other, less technologically advanced types of image that were undoubtedly even more influential.

Espartero was the subject of the *aleluya*, another long-established genre, although one which was commercialized in the 1840s. The *aleluya* originated in Cataluña, where it was known as an *auca*, in the 17th or 18th century. It became nationally known in the 1840s, after Joan María Marés moved from Barcelona to Madrid and began to produce what would be the most important series, consisting of 125. *Aleluyas* continued to be produced until the 1930s, but they were particularly important between 1850 and 1900. In its commercial form, the *aleluya* measured 30 by 42 centimetres, was printed on cheap paper, and consisted of eight rows of six crudely-drawn images, each accompanied by a small amount of rhyming text in a metre easily committed to memory. (In a country with very high illiteracy rates, keeping text to a minimum was important.) The subject matter was varied, including literary works, such foreign ones as *Robinson Crusoe*, *The Count of Monte Cristo* and *The Wandering Jew*, among them, although recent history and biography predominated. With “un fuerte aspecto didáctico” and sold by “los mismos ciegos y botoneros de la literatura popular en las corridas y ferias colgados de un palo... en pequeñas librerías o en los puestos de las plazas”, the *aleluyas* were clearly intended for a lower-class public, precisely the kind of people who were reported to have Espartero “altars” in their homes.⁴⁵ They were also cheaper than the *cartes de*

⁴³ Cited in *ibid.*, p.52

⁴⁴ In his book on the history of photography in Castilla-La Mancha, López Mondejar includes a *carte de visite* of Espartero which he dates as circa 1865. *La huella de la mirada. Fotografía y sociedad en Castilla-La Mancha 1839-1936*, (Barcelona, 2006)

⁴⁵ On *aleluyas* see Angela Birner, “Los pliegos de *aleluyas*”, in *Anthropos*, 166/7, 1995, pp. 117-20 and Jean-Francois Botrel, “La serie de *aleluyas* Marés, Minuesa, Hernando”, http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/obra-visor/la-serie-de-aleluyas-mars-minuesa-hernando-0/html/0133c1ee-82b2-11df-acc7-002185ce6064_7.html, “*Aleluyas*”, in Joaquín Álvarez Barrientos, ed., *Diccionario de la literatura popular española*, (Salamanca, 1977), pp.

visite and were diffused more widely.⁴⁶ In addition, they appealed to children, who would often cut out the images and use them as an early kind of baseball card for collecting and trading, and might even have been used in schools to compensate for the scarcity of books.⁴⁷

The *Historia del General Espartero* was number 58 in the Marés series, but there was at least one other, produced by a Barcelona publisher.⁴⁸ Marés, in fact, produced at least two, one of them serving almost as a news flash about Espartero's resignation from government in 1856. After an introduction: "Insigne será en la Historia/el Duque de la Victoria", the *aleluya* told the story of Espartero's life: there was one square devoted to his service against Napoleon and four to his years in America. With twenty-three, the Carlist War gets the most attention, including Luchana: "Muestra en Bilbao su valor/derrotando al sitiador", and Vergara: "En paz, en abrazo estrecho/el convenio queda hecho". His involvement in politics to the end of his Regency receives thirteen, including the bombarding of Barcelona in 1842: "Marcha el Duque a Barcelona/que otra vez se insurrecciona". His exile in England: "Es en Londres recibido/como varón distinguido", return to Spain in 1848 and retirement in Logroño: "Vuelve a España de paisano/y vive como aldeano", receive four images and the revolution of 1854 two: "Vuelve con pecho sincero/a gobernar Espartero" and: "Luego en nueva reacción/presenta su dimisión". The *aleluya* leaves the overall impression of a valiant and victorious soldier, a simple man who does not lust for power and sides with the people.⁴⁹

Another form of cheap publication which became important in the middle of the 19th century also helped keep Espartero's name alive. This was the series of contemporary histories and biographies dealing with the period between the Napoleonic invasion and the Moroccan War of the

24-26. On the politicizing potential of another type of visual product aimed at ordinary Spaniards during the War of Independence, see Luis Martín, "¿Queréis recorder el Dos de Mayo?' Estampas populares de la Guerra de la Independencia", in C. Domange, ed., *Sombras de Mayo*, (Madrid, 2007), pp. 321-344.

⁴⁶ An inexpensive *carte de visite* might cost 2 *reales* while 500 *aleluyas* could be purchased for 32 *reales*, a fraction of the price. López Mondejar, *Historia de la fotografía*, p. 52; Botrel, "La serie de aleluyas", fn 16. Aleluyas were produced in editions of 5,000 and many went through multiple editions.

⁴⁷ Pedro C. Cerrillo Torremocha, Jesús María Martínez González, eds., *Aleluyas: juegos y literatura infantil en los pliegos de aleluyas españoles y europeos del S. XIX*, (Toledo, 2012), pp. 39-44; Antonio, Martín, "Las Aleluyas, primera lectura y primeras imágenes para niños en los siglos XVIII-XIX. Un antecedente de la literatura y la prensa infantil en España", <http://pendientedemigracion.ucm.es/info/especulo/numero47/aleluya.html>

⁴⁸ Both can be found on the website of the Fundación José Díaz;
<http://www.funjdiaz.net/aleluyas1.php?t=Espartero>

⁴⁹ The *aleluya* produced in Barcelona starts slightly differently, "De la España Gloria/ Duque de la Victoria", and ends before the Revolution of 1854.

early 20th century which formed part of the Spanish “bibliothèque bleu”.⁵⁰ Between 16 and 40 pages in length, these books were often adapted from longer volumes intended for elite audiences. With numerous editions published in Barcelona, Madrid, Palma and Reus, Espartero was the most popular individual subject in what Botrel describes as a second rate subaltern history. As the prologue to the 1851 edition of the *Historia del General Baldomero Espartero* explained, it was written “con mesura, con comedimiento, sin pretensiones, y de una manera sencilla” for “lo que se llama el verdadero pueblo, para esos que no tienen grandes medios para hacerse de libros más voluminosos”, and was intended “a ilustrar al pueblo español dándole a leer las vidas y hechos de los hombres que más se han distinguido en nuestra época para que con la lectura de estos hechos aprenda y estudie la fisonomía de los tiempos azarosos que corremos”.⁵¹ The purpose was to narrate:

los sucesos que marcaron la carrera de este célebre caudillo que tantos días de gloriadiera a su Patria en los momentos que la ignorancia y la superstición la atacaban con feroz empea para privar de su naciente libertad.

El general Espartero habrá cometido faltas, porque ningún hombre es tan impecable que deje de cometerlas durante un trancurso de una carrera sembrada de escollas y peligros como es la de la política; pero de todos modos el general Espartero tiene un corazón grande y magnánimo, y sus deseos, estamos ciertos, han sido los de hacer la felicidad de su país, y tal vez lo hubiera conseguido sino hubiese rodeado de malos consejeros, y no hubiese un partido poderoso válidose de los medios mas extraordinarios para derrocarlo.

The subject was “los hechos consumados de nuestra revolución” in which Espartero had played such an important role, “sin comentarios de ninguna especie, tanto porque no nos tache de parciales, como porque en ninguna manera queremos incurrir en censura.”⁵²

⁵⁰ The following is based on Jean François Botrel, “Las historias de cordel y la historia del tiempo presente en la España del siglo XIX”, in *Roman populaire et/ou roman historique*, (Lleida, 1999), pp. 51-64 and “Les ‘Historias de Colportage’: Essai de catalogue d’une Bibliothèque Bleue espagnole (1840-1936)”, in *Les Productions Populaires en Espagne, 1850-1920*, (Paris, 1986), pp. 25-62. According to Botrel, the book was published in Madrid in 1847, 1847, 1858, 1866, 1874 and 1879

⁵¹ *Historia del General Baldomero Espartero, Duque de la Victoria y de Morella*, (Madrid, nd). As the story ends with Espartero living in Logroño after his return to Spain in 1848, it is probably the 1851 edition.

⁵² Ibid.

In contrast to this large number of cheap, popular biographies almost no full-length biographies intended for a more sophisticated and affluent readership were published in these years. There had been a flurry of books during and immediately after Espartero's Regency, but Hortelano's 1848 effort mentioned above would be the last one for many years.⁵³ Indeed, it would appear that between 1848 and 1868, when Espartero once again became a public figure, only one such biography appeared, Pedro María Hidalgo's obscure 420-page *Espartero : su historia y la de la guerra entre Don Carlos María Isidro de Borbón y su sobrina Doña Isabel II*, which was published in Leon in 1866.⁵⁴ The book is an ardent defence of Espartero, claiming that even previous positive biographies had not fully recognized his accomplishments, "atribuyéndolos a la Fortuna, como si esta Diosa del paganismo estuviera enamorada de este mortal Soldado". Such an explanation could not satisfy "a una inteligencia elevada, a una razón sólida y nutrida, a un espíritu varonil", and in five chapters of highly unequal length: student (4 pages), soldier (312 pages), Regent (62 pages), "elevado" (6 pages) and "caído" (13 pages), Hidalgo argued that Espartero's success came not from luck but from his own qualities. Written in complex language, the book was completely without illustrations.⁵⁵

Writing to Espartero

As already mentioned, with the exception of the revolutionary *bienio* of 1854 to 1856, Espartero spent virtually his entire life after returning from his British exile in 1848, more than thirty years, living Logroño where his wife had her lands. This quiet life as a "hacendado riojano" was what Espartero honestly wanted: in many of the letters he wrote to his wife Jacinta during the Carlist

⁵³ For a brief discussion of some of these, see Marie-Hélène Soubeyroux, "Histoire et mémoire au XIXe siècle: Étude de quelques biographies du Général Espartero", in Jacques Soubeyroux, ed., *La biographie dans le monde hispanique: XVIe-XXe siècles*, (Saint Etienne, 2000), pp. 143-56.

⁵⁴ According to José Alavrez Junco, the *gallego* poet and author Benito Vicetto (1824-1874) published a biography of Espartero, although I have not been able to find any trace of it. José Alvarez Junco, *Las Historias de España*, (Madrid, 2013), p. 319.

⁵⁵ Pedro María Hidalgo, *Espartero : su historia y la de la guerra entre Don Carlos María Isidro de Borbón y su sobrina Doña Isabel II*, (Leon, 1866), pp. I-II, 6. The website of the Fundación Sancho el Sabio has a digital version of the book: <http://www.memoriadigitalvasca.es/handle/10357/1102>.¹⁹ A lawyer, Hidalgo had served as a juez de primera instancia and Presidente del Consejo provincial de Leon. He was also author of *Práctica criminal: Procedimiento en las causas de contrabando y defraudación*, (Leon, 1847). Hidalgo served as a deputy in the Asamblea Nacional in 1873 and later wrote a pamphlet, *Vindicación de la asamblea republicana disuelta por la fuerza del ejército a las órdenes del señor Pavía Capitán General de Madrid en la madrugada del 3 de enero de 1874*, (Leon, 1874). In July 1873, a particularly difficult moment for the Republic, he wrote Espartero begging him to speak out, as only he "puede aun movernos a todos por un resorte mágico y salvarnos del naufragio". Espartero Archive, 19-1873-19.

War he expressed his wish “bolber a ver mi casa de la que no quisiera separarme pues no deseo más que vivir en ella sin más mando de ninguna clase”.⁵⁶ Even so, it may well have acted as “inspired separateness”, a technique of “enhancing their stature by making themselves scarce” used by some European “celebrities and charismatic leaders”.⁵⁷ Ildefonso Antonio Bermejo, who had written a novelized life of Espartero in 1847, pointed to this in his history of the revolutionary years 1868 to 1874:

¿Y á qué ha debido esto el duque de la Victoria? A su voluntario ostracismo, á su perseverancia en vivir alejado de los afanes de la política. Escoja una fórmula para salir de apuros en lances apretados, así como Espartero tiene escogida la suya, y con la cual le ha ido muy bien. Con un cúmplase la voluntad nacional ha tenido el conde de Luchana baluarte fuerte y bien artillado contra todos los que han querido sacarle de su retraimiento. Cuanto mayor ha sido su aislamiento, más ha crecido su popularidad; cuanto ménos ha permitido que se use de su nombre, más se ha levantado su importancia; cuanto mayor ha sido su modestia, más ha aumentado su fama, y cuanto menor ha sido su ambición, más se la ha buscado. Si el general Espartero, en su estado valetudinario, se hubiera convertido en jefe militante de bandería, capitán de alguna facción batalladora, elemento de pelea, arma de reyertas entre intrigantes de piso bajo; si hubiera consentido en que su nombre hubiera sido bandera de perturbaciones, seguramente habría tenido la suerte desdichada que le cupo al duque de Montpensier; pero como hizo todo lo contrario, llegó el caso hasta de que la nación consultara su voluntad en la vacante del Trono.⁵⁸

Whether this staying above the fray was a conscious strategy or not, Espartero’s separation from public life did not make him inaccessible to his supporters nor remove him from their memory. As the letters discussed so far make clear, they did not hesitate to write to him. This was not simply a function of the extraordinary circumstances created by the Revolution of 1868; they had been writing him for years and continued to do so almost up to his death, a correspondence which created the “intimacy at a distance” described by John Thompson and which, to paraphrase

⁵⁶ Espartero de Jacinta, 8 July, 1837, Espartero Archive

⁵⁷ Berenson and Gioli, *Constructing Charisma*, p. 12

⁵⁸ Bermejo, *Historia de la interinidad y guerra civil de España desde 1868*, (Madrid, 1875), pp. 178-9

Edward Berenson, “reveal[s] the importance [Espartero] had assumed in the mental worlds of a great many [Spanish] men and women”.⁵⁹

The largest number of letters – and later telegrams as well - came around February 27, Espartero’s birthday and Saint Baldomero day. In 1864, José Fayas, from Barcelona, wrote on behalf of himself and his son, Baldomero”, while Mariano Gil y Alcayde, from Barcelona, proclaimed that “Querer a VVEE es más que el premio gordo de la lotería...(que viva 100000000000 años, y lo mismo la Duquesa),” Ramón Miret, also from Barcelona, wrote that he had decided to celebrate Espartero’s birthday in 1866 “esponiendo e iluminando el retrato de VE al que dará una serenata la música de uno de los cuerpos de milicia ciudadana”. He also asked Espartero to accept “el retrato de este su apasionado”.⁶⁰ In 1871 Espartero even got a birthday telegram from a group of “presos políticos”.⁶¹ Some people, like F. González de la Vega, wrote every year: “siempre con motivos de sus días le Saluda y jamás perderé esta costumbre”.⁶²

Espartero’s birthday could even be connected to current events. In 1873, with Spain living under the First Republic, which had been proclaimed only sixteen days before his 80th birthday, a group from Málaga wrote that without Espartero’s exploits, “tal vez hoy no brillaría en España el sol divino de la República”.⁶³ That Espartero had always been and remained a firm monarchist was, it seemed, irrelevant.⁶⁴ Five young “ardientes partidarios de la libertad y la democracia” recalled Luchana and Vergara which had saved Spain “del cruel absolutismo que aun destruye nuestras moradas y asesina a nuestros hermanos con verguenza de la civilización, de la razón y del derecho”.⁶⁵ In 1876, a number of residents from Pedro Muñoz, in Espartero’s native Ciudad Real, wrote that they had received news of “la derrota y entrega de varios batallones Carlistas” and had “visto con gusto que coincide tan agradable noticia con el cumple años de S.A.”. Santiago García

⁵⁹ John B. Thompson, *The Media and Modernity*, (Stanford, 1995), pp. 219-20; Edward Berenson, “Charisma and the Making of Imperial Heroes in Britain and France, 1880-1914”, in Berenson and Gioli, *Constructing Charisma*, p. 39. The original quote refers to the French colonial hero Hubert Lyautey.

⁶⁰ Espartero Archive, (23) 187, (23) 331, (25) 1866-422

⁶¹ Espartero Archive, (21) 1871A-20

⁶² Espartero Archive (25) 1866-427

⁶³ Espartero Archive, (26) 358

⁶⁴ Espartero’s was a name which had become detached from any specific program or position to “float free from its political moorings” as Lucy Riall has written about the cult of Garibaldi, and could be appropriated for a variety of political causes. *Garibaldi*, p. 390

⁶⁵ Espartero Archive, (26) 363

Santa Olalla, who described himself as an 84 year old priest who had spent 21 years as a canon of Seville cathedral, wrote that “ahora mayor que antes” the celebration of Saint Baldomero day “debe sostenerse... que bien puede caracterizarse de Nacional. Hoi vuelve a respirar la Patria cuando empieza a disiparse, a paso largo, el mal de una guerra fratricida”. Spain he said, should thank God that “nos haya deparado ahora caudillos entendidos y valerosos, que imitando a VA pongan fin a tan injustificable rebelión”.⁶⁶ Some letters made reference to Alfonso XII’s visit to Logroño in February 1875. For example, the Sociedad de Milicianos Veteranos del año 1823 of Barcelona thanked him for being “el campeón constante de nuestras libertades patrias” and noted that Alfonso XII, “nuestro joven y legítimo monarca” had done the same in visiting him and giving him “un fraternal abrazo”.⁶⁷

Some correspondents sent poems in Espartero’s honour. Miguel Planas and his friends composed the following “a pesar de la triste calamidad que estamos atravesando por la carestía de trabajos.”

A ti soldado baliente
 Del progreso adicto amigo
 Benimos umildemente
 A decirte con cariño
 Lo que nuestro pecho siente.
 Del dia de tu patron
 Olbidarnos no podemos
 Mira, haun que entre afliccion
 Estamos, hoy te ofrecemos
 Ruda felicitasion.
 Oras de jubilo y gloria
 En ella te deseamos
 Separa hoy de tu memoria...
 Por lo mucho que te amamos
 A los que envidian tu historia
 Regojiste este dia

⁶⁶ Espartero Archive, (26) 519, 515

⁶⁷ Espartero Archive, (26) 470

---- que a tu luz nada empaña
Es justo que la alegría
Reine en ti, pues toda España
Oy siente gran melodía ⁶⁸

Antonio Martínez also sent a poem in 1864 to show that “ni el tiempo ni mis desgracias de familia pueden mitigar el afecto entusiasta que siempre os he profesado y profesaré”. In his reply, Espartero write that “[h]a gustado tanto su composición poética, que muchos amigos han sacado copia”. ⁶⁹

Others described celebrations organized for the occasion. These could be modest activities involving an individual and a group of family members or friends. For example, in 1864, twenty-three men from Cambrils (Tarragona) “reunidos como todos los años para celebrar con un banquete vuestro santo patrón bajo vuestro retrato y el de SM cuyo trono tan dignamente supiste defender, asegurando la libertad de nuestra patria”, wrote to wish Espartero long life. Another group, in Figueras, had “un espléndido y entusiasmado banquete en celebridad de tan fausto día” during which the toasts were especially lively “tanto por su patriotismo como de poder librar el vino” from Espartero’s own production, “honor que a pocos cabe”. ⁷⁰

These celebrations could also be more elaborate affairs that engaged much of the population of a town or village, as in Utiel in 1870. It began at eight the previous evening when “se iluminó el pueblo espontáneamente” and the playing of the “retrete” brought “un inmenso gentío” into the square. Then:

vuestro retrato apareció a las puertas de la casa consistorial en medio de un respectable guardia de honor compuesta de las clases del batallón de voluntarios que lleva vuestro nombre. Un ¡Viva Espartero! Salió de aquella multitude que se repitió mil y mil veces. La banda del batallón tocó vuestro himno... y en medio de las más ardorosas aclamaciones fue ostentándose vuestro retrato por las principales calles de la población.

⁶⁸ Espartero Archive (23) 164. For other poems see (23) 268, 289

⁶⁹ Espartero Archive, (23) 113

⁷⁰ Espartero Archive, (23) 1854-1864-268

The band played in the square until midnight to crowds who gathered around bonfires. At 9 the next morning, Espartero's portrait, guarded by members of the volunteers, was displayed on the balcony of the town hall. This was followed by mass and then a communal lunch, after which an "ejército... de pobres mendigantes, en su mayor parte forasteros", were fed. When they had finished eating, the poor "intuitiva y espontáneamente" started a dance. When evening fell, the "retrete" was sounded again and Espartero's portrait was withdrawn from its place of honour.⁷¹ The following year, the mayor of Valls (Tarragona), sent Espartero a congratulatory telegram to let him know that the "Ayuntamiento, guarnición y pueblo" had celebrated his saint's day and that "se ha plantado con el mayor festejo el Arbol de la Libertad que V.E. tan heroicamente ha defendido con la espada y consolidado con sus virtudes".⁷²

Espartero's mailbox would also fill as December 24 approached, as many wrote to recall the great victory of Luchana. In 1871 "el Bilbaino" Arturo de Marcuartu "felicitá con todo corazón ... al Vencedor de Luchana, al pacificador de Vergara" while from Alba de Tormes (Salamanca), "Carabineros y Guardia Civil" congratulated "el Pacificador de España por la memorable batalla de Luchana".⁷³ In 1874, Eusebio Perera wrote, "Como en otras ocasiones" to remember Luchana, "su más legítimo triunfo", and to let Espartero know that he had written an article for *La Iberia* "con el patriótico fin de rendir justo y merecido tributo de gratitud y admiración a todos los héroes que en ella tomaron parte".⁷⁴ Thirty-seven years after the battle, Emilio Castelar, then President of the Republic, would send a congratulatory letter.⁷⁵

There was also at least one ongoing institutional remembrance of Luchana: an annual ceremony organized by the municipal government of Bilbao. In 1875, the mayor, Felipe de Uhagón, sent the following telegram:

En este momento en que siguiendo noble y piadosa costumbre regresan del templo el ayuntamiento las autoridades civiles y militares la representación del ejército de la marina y de la milicia ciudadana los ilustres veteranos de la Guerra de los siete años comisiones las corporaciones y clases y un pueblo inmenso de dar gracias al todopoderoso por la insigne muestra de su protección que dispuso a esta villa hace 39 años, el Alcalde presidente en

⁷¹ Espartero Archive, (25), 1855-392

⁷² Espartero Archive, (21), 1871-A5

⁷³ Espartero Archive, (21)1871B-33

⁷⁴ Espartero Archive, (20) 1874-33

⁷⁵ Emilio Castelar, *Correspondencia de Emilio Castelar, 1868-1898*, (Madrid, 1908), pp. 381-2

nombre de todos cumple con orgullo el indecible satisfacción personal el deber tradicional de saludar al venerable repúblico y egregio soldado de la patria y de la libertad de cuyo glorioso instrumento se sirvió la fortuna aquella jornada por siempre memorable para salvar los derechos de una Reina niña abrazando a la par nuestras instituciones modernas y los intereses de la civilización.⁷⁶

Luchana could also serve for other purposes, such as the publishing project proposed to him in 1875: “Espartero en Luchana y Cervantes en Lepanto, son dos glorias que se enlazan, no solo por el brillante de los hechos sino por ser estos llevados a cabo por dos españoles valientes, honrados y virtuosos”. What is most interesting is the implication that Espartero was the better known of the two; while he was already one of Spain’s “preclaros hijos”, wouldn’t remembering the name of Cervantes also “ha de asomar el entusiasmo”?.⁷⁷

His birthday and the anniversaries of Vergara and Luchana were all annual events, but Espartero’s admirers also wrote on specific occasions, such as when Amadeo I bestowed on him the title Prince of Vergara in January 1872. For Cosme Ceperuelo, even this title was insufficient recognition of what all Spain owed to the “pacificador del mundo”. (He also requested a reply, “puesto que la firma de VA es para mí una herencia”.) Francisco de A. Planas Casals expressed his wish that the Progressives would once again rally around Espartero, “Unido y compacto es digno de su nombre, del contrario va por el lado hecho trizas”, and concluded by asking whether Espartero had received his letter of December 24 congratulating him on the 35th anniversary of the “memorable noche de Luchana”. Miguel Subiran Capucha, who signed himself “El Beterano del año 1823”, wrote in lieu of his making the pilgrimage to Logroño; his “abanzada edad de 76 años cumplidos y enfermo... no me permiten ponerme en camino como lo an hecho mis compañeros beteros de Zaragoza y Madrid”.⁷⁸

Some of these letters favourably contrasted Amadeo’s action with the way Espartero had been treated before. A correspondent from Madrid wrote: “¡A cuantas reflexiones no se presta esta distinción hecha por un Rey que hace un año ha venido de tierra extranjera! Lo cierto es que ha venido a recompensar con muestras de sumo aprecio al héroe de nuestras discordias civiles que acaecieron hace mas de 32 años.” Francisco Javier Ygualada, from Valencia, lamented that it was a

⁷⁶ Espartero Archive (21) 1877-03.

⁷⁷ Espartero Archive (20) 1875-027

⁷⁸ Espartero Archive, (26) 244, 266, 282

foreign prince who had recognized Espartero's contributions while "íngratas situaciones puramente españolas no haya hecho justicia a vuestros nuna bastante ponderados merecimientos".⁷⁹ The 80-year-old, retired general clearly had a lot to offer this novice monarch of still-uncertain legitimacy.

Conclusion

This discussion arose out of the specific question of how Espartero managed to remain so famous for so long after his public life had ended and to locate it in the merging historiography of celebrity. It has used a variety of sources, images, *aleluyas*, *romances*, cheap publications and, above all, letters Espartero received from across the country, to argue that this phenomenon was largely, albeit not exclusively, driven from below and to locate it in the emerging historical discussion of celebrity.

This study also connects to a number of larger issues in European history in general and the history of Spain in particular. The study of heroes such as Espartero has become an important concern for historians of nationalism and of the newly-emerging liberal public sphere, although less in Spain than elsewhere.⁸⁰ The persistence of the cult can help address Maarten Van Ginderachter and Marnix Beyen's question about what the nation "mean[t] to ordinary people". It also illustrates the autonomous activity which could "construe a national identity out of elements that are not always scooped out to them by the elite" that they suggest was an important part of European nationalism: "did ordinary people reject the national canon as it was presented to them and fashion their own national heroes and narratives?"⁸¹ Espartero was precisely such a hero, sustained from below long after most of the liberal elite had written him off as politically irrelevant. Indeed, for many Spaniards, and for a long time, Espartero would be *the* embodiment of the liberal - and even the democratic - nation.

⁷⁹ Espartero Archive, (26) 273, 278

⁸⁰ Riall, *Garibaldi*; Robert Gerwarth, *The Bismarck Myth: Weimar Germany and the Legacy of the Iron Chancellor*, (New York, 2005); Edward Berenson and Eva Gioli, *Constructing Charisma: Celebrity, Fame and Power in Nineteenth Century Europe*, (New York, 2010), Edward Berenson, *Heroes of Empire: Five Charismatic Men and the Conquest of Africa*, (Berkeley, 2012); Zsuzsanna Lada, "The Invention of a Hero: Louis Kossuth in England", *European History Quarterly*, 43, (2013), 5-26. See also the July 2009 special issue of *European History Quarterly* on hero cults and the nation which includes an article by John Tone on Agustina de Aragón. On Spain see María Cruz Romeo Mateo, "Héroes y nación en el liberalismo progresista", in J.L. Ollero, *Sagasta y el progresismo liberal en España* (Logroño, 2003); Irene Castells et al, eds., *Heroínas y patriotas. Mujeres de 1808*, (Madrid, 2009) and Adrian Shubert, "Women Warriors and National Heroes: Agustina de Aragón and her Indian Sisters", *Journal of World History*, 23, June 2012, pp. 279-313. Curiously, much of this work on Spain has been about *heroines*.

⁸¹ Maarten Van Ginderachter and Marnix Beyen, "General Introduction", in Van Ginderachter and Beyen, eds., *Nationhood from Below: Europe in the Long Nineteenth Century*, (New York, 2011), pp. 8, 14

The persistence of the Espartero cult also provides insight into the particular role of military men in liberal nation building, marking the full fruition of what Robert Hocquellet and Stéphane Michonneau describe as the “processus... long et heurté” which started with the War of Independence and matured during the *Trienio Liberal*, a process which radically changed the image of military officers and allowed them to become liberal heroes, “d’incarner una certaine idée de la nation libérale”.⁸² The political role of military men connects to questions of gender roles, and especially concepts of masculinity, in the new liberal society of 19th-century Spain. María Sierra has reminded us of the importance of honour for men in politics and that “[s]er valiente constituiría una de las garantías” of achieving it, while in her discussion of democratic masculinity Florencia Peyroux has explored Democrats’ understanding of the democratic man. He was “el ciudadano, que se definía idealmente como un individuo autónomo, dueño de su razón, de su voluntad y de su destino, libre y digno, buen trabajador, participativo y vigilante, implicado en la vida pública y dispuesto en todo momento a tomar las armas por la patria y por la libertad” as well as someone who displayed “una conducta ejemplar”, with austerity as a particular virtue, in both his public and private life. If, as she claims, this ideal of the male as head of the family also applied to the government, then who better to preside over the national family than Espartero, especially as he got older and could be seen as a true patriarch?⁸³ To what extent did his power of attraction derive from the way in which he embodied the virtues of the liberal – and even democratic- male family? These were precisely the qualities emphasized in the petitions calling on the Cortes Constituyentes to proclaim Espartero king. He was, they proclaimed, “el Pacificador de España”, “el Héroe de Luchana”, “el Patriarca de nuestras libertades”, the “personificación de la Soberanía Nacional”, “Cincinato de nuestra edad moderna” and the “Genuina representación de la idea del siglo”. He was also a model of virtue, something which had immense weight in the aftermath of the scandalous behavior of Isabel II and her court. He was also “el modesto retirado de Logroño”, “el Gran Coloso de virtud, abnegación y patriotismo” and the embodiment of “las virtudes del liberalismo, desinterés

⁸² Richard Hocquellet and Stéphane Michonneau, “Le heros de guerre, le militaire et la nation”, *Mélanges de la Casa de Velásquez*, 38, 2008, p. 105

⁸³ María Sierra, “Política, Romanticismo y Masculinidad: Tassara (1817-1875)”, *Historia y Política* 27, enero-junio (2012), pp. 221-2; Florencia Peyroux, “Familia y Política. Masculinidad y Feminidad en el Discurso Democrático Isabelino”, *Historia y Política*, 25, enero-junio 2011, pp. 168-9. See also Gracia Gómez Urdáñez, “The Bourgeois Family in Nineteenth Century Spain: Private Lives, Gender Roles and a New Economic Model”, *Journal of Family History*, 30, January 2005, pp. 66-85, which is based, ironically, on the personal correspondence of Espartero’s great political rival, Salustiano Olózaga. The key work on masculinity is R.W. Connell, *Masculinities*, (California Princeton Press, 2005).

y moralidad probadas” .⁸⁴ These same tropes: his success as a general and his role as the “pacificador”; his unflagging championing of liberty; and his personal qualities, particularly his honesty, modesty and lack of ambition, echo through the letters Espartero received after the revolutionary uprising of September 1868.⁸⁵

Such a focus on gender can also help explain one of the issues that has long bedeviled 19th-century Spanish – and Latin American – history: the figure of the *caudillo*. In an important article, Jaime E. Rodríguez O has suggested that the political importance of military men such as Riego, Itúrbide and Santa Anna – and I would add US presidents Andrew Jackson , William Henry Harrison and Ulysses S. Grant, as well as Espartero – derived from their being some of the best known and widely celebrated people in their societies, “figuras carismáticas que captaban la imaginación popular”.⁸⁶ Rodríguez O does not discuss ideas of masculinity but these surely also played a role in the making of the *caudillos*. As successful military men at a time when “many aspects of modern masculinity were forged in the nexus of politics and war” and “the interrelated nature of politics and war in modern history can not be properly understood if we do not take into account masculinity’s part in maintaining their relation”,⁸⁷ it is only logical to suggest that Espartero’s ongoing popularity owed a lot to the way in which he embodied prevailing ideas of liberal and democratic masculinity.

This brings us to perhaps the major question in historiography of 19th-century Spain: to what extent was there a shared national identity and where did it come from? The long-standing concern with the deficiencies of the Spanish state and the belief that it had produced an inadequate nationalization, especially when compared to an idealized French model, has more recently given way to a focus on culture and society and on non-state, non-elite, and regional or local agents of nationalization. This new historiography has produced a very different picture, one in which, as Fernando Molina and Miguel Cabo Villaverde describe it, “the chronology of Spanish nation

⁸⁴ Legajo 229, Archivo del Congreso de los Diputados, Madrid. These same tropes: his success as a general and his role as the “pacificador”; his unflagging championing of liberty, and his personal qualities, particularly his honesty, modesty and lack of ambition, echo through the letters Espartero received after the revolutionary uprising of September 1868.

⁸⁵ There are hundreds of these letters in Espartero’s private papers.

⁸⁶ Jaime E. Rodríguez O, “Los caudillos y los historiadores: Riego, Itúrbide and Santa Anna”, in Manuel Chust and Victor Mínguez, eds., *La Construcción del héroe en España y México (1789-1847)*, (Valencia, 2003), p.335

⁸⁷ Stefan Dudink and Karen Hagemann, “Masculinity in Politics and War in the Age of Democratic Revolution, 1750-1850”, in Dudink, Hagemann and Tosh, eds., *Masculinities in Politics and War*, p. 7

building has changed substantially. The nation now appeared as a catalyst of popular affective and mobilizing loyalty earlier than was thought”.⁸⁸ This analysis of the strength and persistence of the Espartero cult is very much in this methodological vein and supportive of its revisionist interpretation. If anything, with its emphasis on oral tradition and the agency of ordinary Spaniards, it pushes it even further.

Finally, this research is part of a biography of Espartero and would not have been done outside of that context. It is, in a modest way, part of the renewal of biography and illustrative of the potential of what has come to be called biographical history. The power of this approach, writes Isabel Burdiel, lies in “su capacidad para demostrar que el estudio de una trayectoria individual es una manera posible... para abordar problemas históricos sustanciales e iluminarlos con una nueva luz”.⁸⁹ Along with nationalism, the role of *espadaones* in Spain’s liberal revolution, has long been one of those historical problems. As this study of the powerful and persistent Espartero cult makes clear, Espartero’s role in the construction of Spanish liberalism went far beyond his actions on the battlefield or in political office. In the same way, it owed much less to Espartero himself or to the political elites who created him as a hero than it did to all those Spaniards, that “coro de voces”,⁹⁰ - and chorus is the appropriate word - who wrote to him, who adorned their homes with his images, who bought *aleluyas* and cheap biographies, who kept alive *romances*, and who told stories about him to their children.

⁸⁸ Fernando Molina and Niguel Cabo Villaverde, “An Inconvenient Nation: Nation Building and National identity in Modern Spain. The Historiographical Debate”, in Van Ginderachter and Beyen, eds., *Nationhood from Below*, p. 66.

⁸⁹ Isabel Burdiel, “Historia política y biografía más allá de las fronteras”, *Ayer*, 93, 2014, p. 62

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 64