

John Hooper, *The Spaniards: A Portrait of the New Spain*, Middlesex: Viking, Penguin Books, 1986. Pp. 283. £10.95.

If, as Stanley Payne remarked, the Franco regime is the most thoroughly studied dictatorship in the world, then the post-Franco democracy in Spain will break this record. The number of studies, memoirs, and journalistic accounts of what is commonly known as the *Transición* is simply overwhelming. One would have thought that ten years after the Caudillo's death enthusiasm would have subsided. This does not seem to be the case, if only because publishers are eager to keep their newly found bonanza alive. It is not at all accidental that Planeta, one of the most dynamic and prosperous publishing houses in Spain, has this year once again awarded its widely advertised two million peseta prize to yet another book on the *Transición*.

As can only be expected, a great deal of this output consists of raw material, instant accounts, and surveys that would certainly serve later, more balanced analyses of the last exciting decade of Spanish history. However, some valuable studies have appeared in recent years, such as José María Maravall's political and sociological analysis of the 'transition', Raymond Carr's and Juan Pablo Fusi's joint work (another Planeta prize), the excellent biography of Adolfo Suárez by Gregorio Morán, and a number of others.

This book by a Fleet Street journalist is unique in that it does not fall back on the same old topics rehashed *ad nauseam* in previous works. It is not a summary of political or economic history, nor is it the usual mix about the 'character' of the Spaniards, as its title might perhaps suggest. John Hooper is a most perceptive, knowledgeable and intelligent writer who has produced an interesting book on the meaning of the *Transición* in the everyday, real life of the Spaniards. Throughout, it is informative without being dull or repetitive — no mean achievement considering the plethora of works already published on Spanish life in the last decade.

The book is a mosaic of the various aspects of contemporary Spanish society. It surveys the major reforms in the legal system, the attempts of the new regime to beat the bureaucracy's legendary capacity to resist change, and its very limited success in shifting the burden of taxation away from the shoulders of the lower income groups. The book also looks at the transformation of Spain into a society of owner occupiers with its attendant moderating influence upon radical politics. John Hooper also provides us with an orderly description of Spain's labyrinthine system of education and its latest reforms. He rightly points at the curious reverence for education at every level of Spanish society and the way this is reflected in the proliferation of People's Universities and 'serious' TV programmes, so extremely popular among the Spaniards. The author's description of Spain's welfare system underlines its archaic weaknesses, such as its failure to eradicate preventable diseases, or to secure unemployment benefits for the millions of jobless; but it also points at some of its surprising achievements: Spanish old age pensions are the highest in Europe after Sweden, and infant mortality in Spain in the early 1970s was lower than in Britain and the USA.

Hooper also introduces a much needed sense of proportion to the evaluation of cultural life during the *Transición*. The Western media's ecstatic description of the *movida Madrileña* as the expression of the greatest cultural dynamics to be found in any European capital is somewhat misplaced. True, Madrid sometimes seems to be gripped by art fever as people queue for hours to see an exhibition. But this happens in a country where the level of artistic promise is not very high. In the land of Plácido Domingo and Victoria de los Angeles opera has still a long way to go to match Western achievements; the same can be said of orchestral music in a country that has produced great soloists. Rock bands have mushroomed, but it is uncertain whether they have made meaningful contributions to the art. The film industry of democratic Spain has produced some exciting works by directors like Saura and Bardem, but the theatre is still hampered by the fact that very little worth staging has been written in the last generation.

The Voltaireian concept that regimes can shape the behaviour and even the character of nations is not automatically applicable to democratic Spain, if only because the new regime has absorbed and legitimized essential features of the political culture of Francoism, such as a lack of public debate, the absence of a critical sense among the political class, a spirit of authoritarianism, and even a certain contempt for civic and human rights. Surprising as it may seem, an issue as important as the elaboration of the Constitution – arguably the most liberal in western Europe – was debated behind closed doors, thus completely barring public opinion from the process.

It is too much to say that democracy has produced 'a new kind of Spaniard' as the author maintains. Much of the misapprehension of 'Europeans' about the 'new Spaniard' stems from a somewhat deficient knowledge of the old one. Does, for example, the ostentatious display of pornographic reviews in every kiosk and the crowded 'S' cinemas and sex shops throughout the country really indicate a 'sexual revolution' in the life and habits of Spaniards? Indeed, the author quotes inquiries that have shown the poverty of the sexual life of Spanish women, a far cry from the romantic, passionate myth of Carmen. The Spaniard's religiosity is clearly declining, but is this a direct result of the new democracy? The economic and social changes of the Francoist 'boom' may have had more to do with that (just as they, rather than democracy, as the author rightly asserts, are accountable for the increase in the crime rate). And even so, the attendance at Mass is still higher than in most European countries: the Church, as Cardinal Tarancón is quoted as saying, is still a 'sociological reality' in Spain.

However, this reality is not necessarily undemocratic. More than half the country's practising Catholics voted for the Socialists at the 1982 general elections. If the myth about the Spanish anti-social individualism was ever real, it is now being replaced by a spirit of *convivencia*. That democracy in Spain has survived the move to a federal state – a move described in very fine chapters in the present book – is perhaps the major test of *convivencia* so far. It shows that rather than the 'character', it is the sociological basis of extremism which has been changed beyond recognition by development, and perhaps also by a democracy that works.

SHLOMO BEN-AMI  
Tel Aviv University