

Features

The New Spaniards;Paperbacks;Nonfiction;Books

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THE NEW SPANIARDS

by John Hooper, Penguin, Pounds 10.99

Pounds 9.89 (free p&p)

Whether as expatriates or holidaymakers, most of us know Spain a little. Few of us know it a lot. That reflects its size and geography, but also its complexity. With what Hooper calls its "invented capital in the dead geographic centre", Madrid, Spain is many countries and nations -although they are called provinces -in one.

This is a history and study of Spain and Spaniards from the Civil War of 1936 39 up to now. Through a thematic structure, Hooper explores the complexities and contradictions that enable and bedevil the modern Spain. It is an extraordinary story. "In less than half a century, a predominantly rural, agricultural society has been transformed into a mainly urban and technological one. A dictatorship has become a democracy."

Although clearly an Hispanophile, Hooper is balanced and not uncritical. He addresses the difficult issues, such as the "deeply embedded" division of Spanish women into the "stereotypes of whore and mother". His challenges to puerile individualismo, the especially egocentric Spanish form of individualism, are clarion, and his dry, droll humour is a regular delight. "As late as the Eighties, almost the only Spanish company with a truly global presence was the Chupa Chups lollipop firm." Exemplary for its clarity, concision and straightforward prose, this is accessible, perceptive, applied history at its best. Everyone with any interest in Spain, and its future in our shrinking world, should read this book.

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