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Ana Fernández-Cebrián. *Fables of Development: Capitalism and Social Imaginaries in Spain (1950-1967)*. Liverpool UP, 2023.

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Abstract

Review of Ana Fernández-Cebrián. *Fables of Development: Capitalism and Social Imaginaries in Spain (1950-1967)*. Liverpool UP, 2023, x + 210 pp.

Keywords

Spain, Franco, capitalism

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A boy formally dressed in a cardigan and a tie holds a peculiar gift—a rocket with the cockpit window open, revealing an image of baby Jesus. This photograph merges imaginaries of the two *cielos*: the imperialistic conquest of space and the Catholic heaven. Featured on the cover of Ana Fernández-Cebrián's *Fables of Development: Capitalism and Social Imaginaries in Spain (1950-1967)*, the image serves as a compelling gateway to the book. *Fables of Development* examines the cultural mythologies propagated in 1950s and 1960s Spain to expose the contradictions between state capitalism and Catholicism. These mythologies emerged amidst the transition from post-war autarky to a market economy. Franco's National Catholicism was founded upon an overt hostility towards materialist ideologies (capitalism, communism). Consequently, this transition of the national economic model entailed an ideological juggling that was both settled and contested in the public sphere through what Fernández-Cebrián terms "fables of development."

Fables of Development studies cultural artifacts produced at the time of Franco's political arrangements to reinforce Spain's Catholicism and to promote capitalism. The 1953 Concordat with the Holy See solidified the Church's power. Simultaneously, the dictator's strategy to position his regime as anti-communist garnered support from the United States, which facilitated Spain's integration into the capitalist orbit and entry into the United Nations. Eventually, the 1959 Stabilization and Liberalization Plan made Spain fully embrace the free market doctrine. Fernández-Cebrián emphasizes the key intellectual role of Opus Dei and the Navarra School in this process, which can be seen as the realization of Ramiro de Maeztu's old dream: reconciling Catholicism and capitalism.

Methodologically, the book leverages Derrida's conceptualization of fable within a robust range of Marxist, structuralist, and critical theories to scrutinize the midcentury fables of development. An impressive contribution is its extensive—and fun!—corpus, comprised of photographs, comics, novels, films, newspaper clippings, kiosk literature, political speeches, rumors, vignettes, and serial radio dramas, among other primary sources. It combines the analyses of archival rarities, such as the photograph of the baby Jesus in a rocket mentioned above, with incisive reexaminations of well-known masterpieces.

Fables of Development unfolds in two parts. The first, "Dreamworlds of Development: Cold War Imaginaries in Franco's Spain," consists of two chapters analyzing the fables spawned by Spain's new stance in the Cold War, whereas the second part, "Providential Capitalism," focuses on the working through of class anxieties. Chapter 1, "Fables of Intervention," offers a captivating exploration of the mid-century surge in UFO sightings, interpreted as a reflection of the

apprehensions and ambitions stirred by foreign intervention against the backdrop of Spain's end to geopolitical isolation. Fernández-Cebrián offers a fresh perspective on Luis García Berlanga's seminal film, *¡Bienvenido Mr. Marshall!* (*Welcome Mr Marshall!*), the epitome of the fables of intervention. She contextualizes it within an exuberant corpus of popular culture artifacts that at times expressed anxieties regarding potential alien invasions, and at times held dreams of a more fair and just society on a distant planet. The chapter delves into the paradoxical coexistence of Catholic theology and imperialistic aspirations for cosmic domination within the Spanish public consciousness, embodied in the juxtaposition of traditional Marian apparitions with a boom in Martian sightings.

Chapter 2, "Fables of Outer Space," expands these analyses by focusing on how science fiction expressed collective desires and concerns about development. It explores military utopias depicted in the serial radio drama *Diego Valor* and the graphic novel series *La saga de los Aznar* (The Aznar Saga). Furthermore, it examines the inner tensions of the regime by exploring the Falangist literature of Tomás Salvador, which challenged from a fascist position the emergent technocratic ideals of the new Catholic capitalism. The chapter concludes with the perspective of playwright and UFO enthusiast Antonio Buero Vallejo, who considered ufologists as modern-day Quixotes exposing the flat realities of everyday life in Francoist Spain while also exploring democratic imaginaries.

The second part of the book, "Providential Capitalism," is structured by two chapters that scrutinize the reshaping of theological ideals like charity and grace. Chapter 3, "Fables of Chance," focuses on the National Lottery, raffles, and prize drawings. Fernández-Cebrián's examinations show that the lottery became the perfect conduit between the Catholic notion of providence and the capitalist concepts of randomness and the invisible hand of the market. José Luis Sáenz de Heredia's film *Historias de la radio* (Radio Stories) is examined as a prime example of the sacralization of chance. In contrast, Juan Antonio Bardem and Luís García Berlanga's film *Esa pareja feliz* (The Happy Couple) and Juan Goytisolo's narrative *Fiestas* (Festivals) are depicted as explorations into the cruel realities behind the faith in chance miracles to attain comfortable life conditions. These authors portray working-class characters seeking solace and potential economic relief through participation in *tómbolas* and similar raffles. However, their aspirations are thwarted both by the illusory nature of luck in a capitalist regime and by the eventual imposition of public order by the dictatorship.

Chapter 4, "Fables of Grace," examines the redefinition of charity as a mechanism of exclusion and a profitable investment. The chapter challenges the myth that the welfare state in Spain began under Franco. It reveals how, by offering only charity to the vast majority, the dictatorship perpetuated its dependency and exclusion from decision-making processes, thereby promoting a market economy benefiting pro-Franco elites and the limited middle class. Moreover, Fernández-

Cebrián explores internal critiques within Catholicism against the capitalist reinterpretation of Catholic doctrine. The chapter examines the exploitative use of children through charity and the adoption of a technocratic language within religious orders in the popular films *Marcelino, pan y vino* (*Miracle of Marcelino*) and *Sor Citröen*, respectively. It also delves into the portrayal of carnivalesque banquets as radical critiques of charity in the acclaimed films *Plácido* by Luis García Berlanga and *Viridiana* by Luis Buñuel. Finally, it analyzes Juan Marsé's novel *La oscura historia de la prima Montse* (*The Dark Story of Cousin Montse*) as a depiction of how the new technocratic rulers exploited charity to advance their careers and gain power.

In conclusion, *Fables of Developments* places us within the realm of fable, aspiration, mythology, and delirium to unpack and challenge the notion of the mid-century "Spanish miracle." It is a very Benjaminian book, delving into the significance of these dreams for the circulation of capital and the establishment of a consumer society. Cultural studies demonstrate an emancipatory methodology here, aiming to fulfill their utopian aspiration of understanding the anxieties and desires of classes denied access to public space and overt expression. Through the analysis of their visions of aliens, dreams of aid descending from the sky, the purchase of a lottery ticket, or the constraints imposed by charity, the book offers a fresh perspective on the dictatorship. It also encourages us to continue using the power of fables to hear subaltern voices of the past and to imagine possible futures.

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