

## Interiority, Subject, Authority: Conversions and Counter-Reformation in the Construction of the Modern Subject (16th-17th Centuries)

### INTRODUCTION

*Ecclesia de occultis non iudicat*: one may trace a history of modern subjectivity running from this old motto of the Roman Church to the *tribunali della coscienza*, the capillary mechanisms of social control studied by Adriano Prosperi. It is a history that arises from the tensions between the collective dimensions of institutions and the social construction of subjectivity, and the emergence of the ‘subject’ as a singular product charged with agency. Research into this history has proven to be a central component in the study of European Modernity. Over a century and a half ago, Jacob Burckhardt, in his book *Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (1860), highlighted that one of the key transformations giving meaning to the new period was the emergence of the sense of individualism, understood as both a personal disposition as well as an understanding of the world and its societies. Since that time, the rise of the modern subject and of the forms of individual subjectivity have become an essential chapter in the story of how modernity developed. Proof of this is the fact that it is precisely 20th-century post-modernism, the school of thought most critical with the foundations of the modern age, which considered the death of the individual to be one of the crucial steps in order to overcome the preceding paradigm. Along these lines, anthropologists have offered the “dividual” conception of personality in traditional societies as a counterpoint to the modern model. All of this serves to demonstrate that the reflection surrounding the ways in which modern subjectivity is constructed is a prerequisite to any approach to the transformations that have characterised history since the sixteenth century. It is for this reason that this topic is one of the core targets of our research project, aimed at studying the intellectual and cultural transformations resulting from the processes of forced conversion in early modern Iberia, a project whose results include the present monographic study.

One of our first steps in this process was to organize a seminar titled, “Interiority, Dissimulation, Authority,” held on 9 June 2015 at the Centro de Ciencias Humanas y Sociales (CSIC, Madrid). The main result of this seminar was to confirm that the sociocultural situation of the Iberian Peninsula between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries exhibited unique aspects that enriched the debate on the construction of the forms of modern subjectivity.

We therefore decided to propose the publication of the present monographic volume in order to explore how these forms of construction of subjectivity fit within the context of the transformations arising in early modern Iberia. In particular, we wished to focus on the phenomena of dissimulation, the development of mechanisms of control and authority, and the resulting uncertainty between external practices and interiority, as these phenomena in turn led to the proliferation of doubt and, ultimately, to the development of forms of philosophical scepticism.

The volume brings together a series of studies that approach the processes described above by addressing the construction of subjectivity and interiority during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. While our goal is to offer a wide-ranging perspective that allows for the nuances of these phenomena to be considered, the overarching aim is to dissolve the oppositions between the individual and collective dimensions. Rather than a simple description of changes in subjectivity, we hope to propose an actual explanation for the social and cultural connections of these processes.

The book opens with two articles that deal directly with the problem of the construction of modern subjectivity, starting with the traditional narrative that ties the awareness of interiority to the rise of European modernity. In the first of these two articles, Fernando Rodríguez Mediano and Carlos Cañete focus on the figure of one of the most radical sceptics in the sixteenth-century Hispanic world, Portuguese-born António Lopes da Veiga. Based on his self-representation as a “lone man at the Court”, the figure of Lopes da Veiga poses the problem of scepticism from the perspective of the awareness of a clear separation between the external and the internal, and the difficulty in arriving at forms of truth hidden beneath layers of appearance. The central philosophical reference for this problem is of course the work of Descartes, and his proposed use of consciousness as the foundation for a programme of knowledge. To a certain extent, Lopes da Veiga connects the Spanish world with the philosophical problems of seventeenth-century Europe. His work enables us to better understand an intellectual milieu that bred a form of sceptical thinking which was to enter the realms of politics, literary theory and courtly sociability, among others. The other article, by Sluhovsky, tackles the problem of the relationship between modernity and subjectivity based on the issue of confession. He thus works

from within an intellectual tradition stretching back to classics such as Jean Delumeau, and fundamentally Foucault, who first established this connection between, on the one hand, forms of introspection and control of subjectivity, and on the other, the rise of modernity. The sacrament of confession is a central vantage from which one may understand a number of processes having important legal, political and moral implications. These range from the creation of the forum of the conscience as the locus of moral judgement, to the distinctions between sin/crime and law/conscience, which are, as shown by Paolo Prodi and others, crucial in order to explain the emergence of the modern political and legal realm. Sluhovsky shows us how confession is an ambivalent sacrament: while on the one hand it is connected to forms of controlling the conscience, on the other it affirms conscience's capacity for moral judgement. The great depth of the moral debates in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries indicates the centrality of this problem in the modern period's crisis of conscience.

Of course, the construction of the conscience as a moral agent has, among other implications, that of establishing the criterion for judging the conscience morally and legally. How can one pass judgement on another's interior domain, on their conscience? How can a criterion be established to determine whether one's external practices are in conformity with an internal authority such as the conscience? Poutrin's article addresses this issue using the late sixteenth to early seventeenth-century documentation of the Tribunal of the Roman Rota, examining how legal categories were established based on the interpretation of external signs. The article raises the crucial problem of how to judge the sincerity of consent in cases such as marriage or baptism. The issue of baptism obviously poses a major problem, laying bare the limits of sacramental effectiveness. In cases such as modern Spain, which saw the forced conversion of numerous populations, the sincerity of these conversions became a fundamental political, theological and ideological quandary. The modern Spanish Inquisition, founded precisely in response to the problem of the mass conversions, offers invaluable material with which to study the construction of modern interiority in a number of ways. On the one hand, the documentation illustrates the "anthropological" aspect of the inquisitorial trial, highlighted in classic studies by authors such as Carlo Ginzburg. The significance of the inquisitors' actions is twofold: they not only carry out an inquiry on the prisoner, but also assign meaning to the information collected in this inquiry. The hermeneutical difficulty that inquisitorial texts pose for historians is well known, along with the difficulty in establishing beyond a doubt to what extent the Inquisition imposed its own interpretative categories on the reality it was judging. This issue is the subject of Fowler's article, which studies how the Spanish Inquisition dealt with *alumbradismo*, and how its conception of the phenomenon was constructed upon the definition of heresy. Through an analysis of the Edict of Grace is-

sued in Seville in 1623, Fowler studies how the Inquisition defines a form of spirituality whose central feature is the expression of an inner spirituality that is able to access the sacred without the aid of mediators. Thus, the work of the Inquisition helps us to understand how the category of orthodox/heterodox is applied to forms of inner religiosity.

The category of *alumbrado* is especially important in the orthodox definition of forms of inner spirituality in modern Spain. The recurring way in which this label appears in Inquisition trials, until at least the eighteenth century, indicates the persistence of the problem of how to integrate forms of inner experience into institutional religiosity. Roulet analyses this issue within the framework of nuns' convents. The norms of the convent provided a somewhat contradictory model of subjectivisation: the destruction of one's personal identity was combined with techniques of spiritual introspection and, at the same time, with practices that publicly exposed the nuns' intimate sphere. The need to be modest, to subdue personal subjectivity through strict obedience, while at the same time correcting and punishing both themselves and fellow nuns, gives rise to a dynamic whereby shared forms of subjectivity are constructed collectively in the heart of the convent community, with its logic of interpersonal relationships and forms of political hierarchy.

The political dimension of subjectivity constitutes, as we know, several of the fundamental political categories of the European baroque, which regarded dissimulation as one of the basic forms of courtly politics. Patiño-Loira addresses this problem through a study of the terms *privanza* (favour) and *privado* (favourite). The political literature of the baroque period saw in the figure of the *privado* a set of political practices that surpassed the semantic field of friendship, overflowing into the most complex conceptions of sincerity and deceit, transparency and opacity, trust and exploitation. The way in which the *privado* gains access to the king's secrets, the way the two relate through the intimacy of friendship, the way the subjectivity of both figures is formed through this relationship, are topics that Patiño-Loira explores in the "Tacitist" brand of political literature, which had to face the pressing issue of *raisons d'état* in a Europe where, as we have mentioned, the moral and legal world was in the process of reconfiguring itself around the definition of the division between social norms and the forum of the conscience.

Surely these articles do not exhaustively cover all the ways of studying the problem of the relationship between subjectivity and modernity, but they do offer a number of lines of analysis, and to a large extent connect the Hispanic world with the problem of the birth of the modern subject in Europe. There is, of course, a wealth of recent literature that seeks to understand the Counter-Reformation as part of this European modernity, or at least to understand how the societies of southern Europe dealt with the same processes as the societies of the Protestant Reformation. As addressed by Bodian in the article which closes this book, historiography has at times understood

Spain's presence in modernity in terms of a lack or a negation. In this representation of Spain as a politically and ideologically closed-off society, any form of Spanish modernity can only be detected in the model figure of *Marrano* subjectivity. An important current in contemporary historiography has come to regard the *Marrano* as the model of a subjectivity that has not been assimilated by the dominant and repressive ideology, and which has therefore been forced to retreat inwards. The *Marrano* would therefore represent the counter-model to an open and assimilating society. Bodian studies the foundational role of Américo Castro's work in this historiographical trend, and points out this current's influence on nineteenth-century orientalism. Particularly, she examines the field's essentialist categories, which for example attributed specific cultural or psychological traits to "the Semites," or, rather, to an ideal "Semitic" model which had nothing to do with the experience of real-life Jews. This genealogy of *Marrano*-centric historiography thus reveals the trend's essentialist character and points out, to a certain extent, the problems with a unidirectional interpretation of the process of constructing the modern subject.

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*Fernando Rodríguez Mediano*  
*Instituto de Lenguas y Culturas del Mediterráneo y Oriente Próximo-Spanish National Research Council.*  
*e-mail: fernando.rmediano@cchs.csic.es*  
ORCID iD: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9432-6946>

*Carlos Cañete*  
*Instituto de Lenguas y Culturas del Mediterráneo y Oriente Próximo- Spanish National Research Council.*  
*e-mail: carlos.canete@cchs.csic.es*  
ORCID iD: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9714-0899>

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