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## *Mountain landscape and national identity: the Sierra de Guadarrama*

Mountains have occupied a prominent place in modern views of the landscape, and have frequently acquired the category of symbol of the distinctive features of the identity of the national communities directly related to them. This symbolic and identity valuation has been projected on some Spanish mountains, and the *Sierra de Guadarrama* offers one of the most finished and interesting examples of this.

Since its modern image was formed, in the last quarter of the nineteenth-century and the first third of the twentieth, various circles of liberal and reformist ideology, with Francisco Giner and the *Institución Libre de Enseñanza* at the head, saw in the landscape of the *Sierra de Guadarrama* a symbol of the genuine features of the history itself and of the national identity that emerged from it. The intellectuals of the *Institución* and others who incorporated and prolonged their perspective in different areas — scientific, literary or hikers, for example — understood that mountain as a national symbol, as a reliable expression of the best values and qualities of the Spanish nation. This is undoubtedly a particularly eloquent case regarding the appreciation of the Spanish mountain landscape as a symbol of national identity. And this article is dedicated to characterize and comment on that symbolic and identity valuation of the landscape of the *Sierra de Guadarrama*, linked to the liberal reformism of the *Institución Libre de Enseñanza*.

The article is part of the horizon of the studies that have been interested for some time, with geographical criteria, by the symbolic and identity dimensions of the landscape and, in particular, of the mountain landscape, and

their theoretical and methodological coordinates coincide in what fundamental with those conformed in them. Your methodological perspective can be summarized in the following terms. It has begun by characterizing the double frame of references in which the study carried out is inscribed, which refers, in the first place, to the two-way relationships established between the landscape and the national identity in the horizon of modernity, taking into account the reasons that justify them and the acting ideological ingredients, and, second, the assessment acquired, within that horizon, by the mountain landscape, considering the components and points of view that underlie its very remarkable symbolic dimension and identity.

After characterizing this double frame of references, the study has relied on the analysis and interpretation of texts of varied nature that offered, in the chronological period considered, significant considerations on the valuation of the mountain landscape as a symbol of national identity. And this has been carried out by trying to contextualize the ideas and perspectives provided by the texts studied, seeking their connections with contemporary cultural and ideological perspectives, among which the liberal and reformist perspective of intellectuals linked to the *Institución Libre de Enseñanza* played a very relevant role.

### I. THE IDENTITY DIMENSION OF THE LANDSCAPE

The landscape is not reduced to materiality, to visible and objectified form, but it needs, in order to become

so, the contest of the human gaze, which plays, as Jean-Marc Besse pointed out, a «constituent paper». It is this look that shapes the cultural dimension of the landscape, which attributes qualities, values and meanings of varied nature, which traces the connections and correspondences that bind men and societies.

These connections and correspondences often enter the field of identities. Men project ideas and feelings in the landscape, until they become an expression of their own identity, in an entity representative of the characteristic features of the corresponding societies. This produces a process of identification with the landscape that is personal and social time, and that often manifests itself in territorial terms. And one can speak of a national landscape when it can be understood as a faithful and significant representation of the keys to the collective and territorial identity of a nation.

The process of conformation of nationalities that took place in the western world since the beginning of the nineteenth-century, after the fall of the ancient regime, offers very eloquent examples in that sense. The real and symbolic expression of the identity of peoples and nations was seen in the landscape. Modern societies have often made the landscape an extremely important factor of identity, and have relied on it to characterize and affirm the collective entity itself, until turning it, as François Walter warned, into «the sensitive representation of the feeling of national belonging».

But the landscape not only expresses the identity of social and national groups and the territories related to it, but also, in the opposite direction, acts as a factor that contributes to shaping those identities. Hence, the landscape has often also played an important role in the framework of ideological and political ideas and aspirations of the most varied nationalisms. These movements, which have sometimes appeared within the previously consolidated European nations, have shown a clear tendency to see in the landscape, on the one hand, the expression of the claimed social and territorial identities, and, on the other, a factor that it can help to precisely identify and reinforce the presence of these identities. Spain offers, in this sense, some eloquent cases, among which is, for example, that of Catalan nationalism.

## II. THE SYMBOLIC ASSESSMENT OF THE MOUNTAIN LANDSCAPE

The assessment of the landscape as an identity key has found one of its favourite places on the mountain.

Paraphrasing Numa Broc, it can be said that the mountain's identity valuation is an «exalted form» of the landscape's identity assessment. The mountains are a true landscape canon, or, as Ruskin would say, «the beginning and the end of all natural scenery.» The modern vision of the landscape discovered in the mountain an outstanding set of values of varied nature that were immediately related to those that were supposed to define the identity of the societies and of the corresponding nations. The connection between landscape and national identity thus found a particularly significant manifestation in the case of the mountain landscape.

The modern assessment of the mountain shows at the same time a rational dimension and a sentimental dimension. Science and feeling are the pillars on which the new way of seeing the mountain is built, of assessing its qualities and of interpreting the degree of relationship and representation with respect to national identity that can be attributed to these qualities. Inasmuch as the mountains were understood as the most finished expression of the order of nature, science saw in them the most straight path to get to know the genesis of that order and the keys of the concrete forms with which it was shown in each case.

But the modern appreciation of the mountain landscape also has a sentimental dimension also remarkable, which translates the keys of the corresponding cultural and aesthetic horizon. In addition to observed and studied, mountains are at the same time imagined and felt, and both aspects, the rational and the sentimental, are part of the modern way of understanding and valuing them.

The mountain not only provided a privileged point of view to understand the order of nature, but also allowed access to the highest expression of the values and meanings that this natural order entailed. The mountain becomes the best symbolic image of the natural qualities —freedom, silence, purity, harmony, eternity, austerity, greatness, majesty, etc.— to which those who ascended to its summits referred, and who transcended strictly natural to be projected on the corresponding collective and national entities. So the values of the mountain, the qualities and meanings of the natural order that it represents exemplary, refer directly to the values of the human groups related to it.

## III. THE SIERRA DE GUADARRAMA, SYMBOL OF NATIONAL IDENTITY

The modern vision of the *Sierra de Guadarrama* began in the nineteenth century. Some of the travellers

who toured Spain in the first half of the century already provided a modern image of that landscape, inscribed in the aesthetic horizon of romanticism. After that initial moment, it was Francisco Giner de los Ríos and his collaborators from the *Institución Libre de Enseñanza* who starred in the true modern discovery of the landscape of the *Sierra de Guadarrama*.

The vision of the landscape promoted by Francisco Giner, clearly stated in his article entitled «Landscape», published in 1886, refers to the horizon of modern geographical landscape initially conformed by Humboldt and extended later in the nineteenth century geography by authors such as Reclus, geographers who influenced both clearly in the points of view of Giner and the *Institución Libre de Enseñanza*. With that landscape perspective of geographical sign they were able to overcome the aesthetic limits of the previous romantic images of the landscape of Spain and to propose a way to understand it more wider and complex, at the same time worried about explaining and understanding it.

That new vision of the Spanish landscape promoted by Giner and the *Institución Libre de Enseñanza* was closely related to their ideology and aspirations. The values and meanings that they attributed to the landscape are inseparable from their thought and beliefs, inscribed in the coordinates of a liberal and progressive reformism. The landscape image thus formed part of his imaginary, of the set of representations that symbolically expressed the conception of the world that surrounded them and the possibilities of improving it. Hence, there was a clear connection between his vision of the landscape of Spain and his patriotic orientation, with his interest in defining the keys to national identity, the distinctive features of the history and character of the Spanish people. His way of seeing and valuing the landscape comprised a clear intention of national affirmation, of searching for the distinguishing marks of the Spanish national identity.

Giner and the *Institución* proposed a new image of the Spanish landscape, a new way of approaching it and understanding it. And they paid particular attention to Castile and, within it, to the *Sierra de Guadarrama*, which became their favourite landscape, the one most frequented by them, in which they discovered a set of remarkable natural, historical and cultural values, and who attributed a very high symbolic meaning. They saw in this landscape a national symbol, a valuable symbolic representation of one's own history and culture.

In his writing of 1886, Giner attributed to the landscape of the *Sierra de Guadarrama* some qualities — inner strength, greatness, nobility, dignity, austerity,

character and poetic way of being— that corresponded to the qualities that the intellectual circle of Giner and the *Institución Libre de Enseñanza* considered own, distinctive, of the Castilian and Spanish people. The landscape of the *Sierra de Guadarrama* expressed the characteristic qualities of the wider Castilian landscape, of which it was a part, and these qualities corresponded faithfully with those that the historiographical perspective of the Giner and the *Institución* circle attributed to Castile —and, more specifically, to the medieval Castile—, and that, through the Castilian historical leadership, contributed decisively, according to that same perspective, to conform the Spanish cultural and national community.

These correspondences between the qualities attributed to the landscape and the features that were considered characteristic of the own history and of the cultural and national identity resulting from it, based the meaning of the image of the *Sierra de Guadarrama* offered by Giner and, in general, by the intellectual circle of the *Institución Libre de Enseñanza*. The landscape thus acquires historical significance, helps to identify the characteristics of the past itself and its collective, national result. In the historiographical horizon of Giner and the *Institución*, debtor of the ideas of Herder and Krause, interested in discovering, under the surface of external or official history, the internal history or intra-history of the Spanish people, which is identified with its character or psychology, the landscape plays an important role: like art or literature, it helps to discover the intra-historical characterization of the Spanish people, the most genuine traits of their spirit and their cultural tradition.

Within the identity assessment of the landscape of the *Sierra de Guadarrama* promoted by Giner and the *Institución*, there were some specific places that acquired a special symbolic meaning. So it happened, in natural terms, with *Peñalara*, the highest peak of the *Sierra de Guadarrama*, which had a very remarkable importance in that sense. If, in natural terms, *Peñalara* could be interpreted, following the geologist Macpherson, as the oldest and most resistant portion and the centre of clustering of peninsular geological history, it could also be seen at the same time, in cultural terms, as the symbolic expression of the most old and resistant and the centre of grouping of the history of Spain. *Peñalara* thus became the most outstanding exponent of the symbolic value of the *Sierra de Guadarrama*, of its quality of representing symbolically the values that were considered proper to the national history and the collective identity conformed in it.

And something similar happened also, in historical and cultural terms, with the *Cartuja del Paular*, located in the very heart of the *Sierra de Guadarrama*, in the high valley of Lozoya and next to *Peñalara*, which became a true realm of memory, an important symbolic element of the historical vision —and of the consequent national conception— of the intellectual circle of Giner and the *Institución Libre de Enseñanza*.

This way of understanding the landscape of the *Sierra de Guadarrama* entailed another important idea, directly related to the affirmation of the correspondence between the values of the landscape and the values of the social collectivity. Insofar as the existence of parallels between some values and others was accepted, it could be thought that knowing the former was a way of understanding the latter, and of furthering the awareness of participating in them, and of belonging to the national

community supported on them. Knowing and appreciating the landscape was an effective means of promoting patriotism, of nurturing the consciousness of belonging to a historical and national community.

The image of the *Sierra de Guadarrama* formed by Giner and the *Institución Libre de Enseñanza*, with its symbolic and identity dimensions, exerted a remarkable influence on other cultural perspectives. The projection of that image, with the affirmation of the correspondences between natural values and national values that it entailed, and with the consequent conviction that approaching the nature of the landscape was a patriotic enterprise, which fed the consciousness of belonging to the historical and cultural community, had a considerable echo in people interested in the *Sierra de Guadarrama* belonging to the world of science, art, or mountaineering.