



CONAHCYT



INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCCIÓN

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INTRODUCTION

Verónica Zárate Toscano

This is the third volume of interviews between historians that I offer readers so far this century.¹ I am punctually keeping the appointment that seems to have been established to publish a series of conversations every ten years with the aim of making known the historiographical production of fellow historians from different parts of the world. The title of the book makes explicit the intention of giving a voice to some colleagues who have played a leading role in the development of historiography and have contributed to the updating of knowledge of the past.²

When I thought of this topic, I had two approaches in mind. Firstly, I could not miss the opportunity to continue the dialogue with colleagues whom I had known for a long time and with whom I frequently exchange my research progress as I closely follow their trajectory and discoveries. On the other hand, due to different circumstances, I had the opportunity to get closer to other social scientists from different geographical areas, whose vision of history, the theories they profess, their interests, their contributions enrich my historiographical approach in a remarkable way, as will, I trust, that of the future readers of this work. incorporated

As this idea of interviews accompanies me permanently, it seems that I walk around, tape recorder in hand, looking for participants, and this idea is not very far from reality because since 2017 I started to locate my interlocutors. In September of that year, during the Assembly of the International Committee of Historical Sciences CISH, held in Moscow, Russia, I had a long conversation with Pim den Boer, which initiated this third stage. The following year, I took advantage of Dominique Kalifa's visit to Mexico City as a visiting professor at the Instituto de Investigaciones Dr. José María Luis Mora, and we spoke in September 2018.

I had intended to continue the work during the CISH congress to be held from 23-29 August 2020 in Poland. But in March of that year, we began to experience a global crisis caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. This coronavirus gave rise to a bitter pandemic that affected the entire planet and confined us for many months. After the initial shock, we gradually realized that we would have to continue our academic activities in confinement and learned new methods

¹ In 2004 I published *Una docena de visiones de la historia. Entrevistas con historiadores americanistas*, and in 2014 *Diálogo con historiadores. Reflexiones en torno al tiempo, el espacio y la memoria*.

² There are several books and some journals, printed in Mexico, which have published interviews with Anglo-Saxon, French and Mexican historians. However, the ones incorporated here are not included in these works, and, if they were, the questions and approaches have different intentions and answers. See Olivera, Rueda and Espejel, *Historia e Historias*, 1998; Domínguez Michel, *Profetas del pasado*, 2011; Morales and Coudart, *Escrituras de la Historia*, 2016 and Mendiola, *Diálogo con historiadores*, 2017. Also included in this group are those by Carlos Marichal in *Boletín de Fuentes* and in *América Latina*, 1991-1992; and those by Alicia Salmerón and Elisa Speckmann in *Boletín del Instituto*, 1998-2000.

to maintain - and even increase - communication outside the boundaries. But as far as the holding of large events was concerned, and in accordance with health recommendations, it was necessary to postpone the five-yearly meeting for a couple of years.

The CISH congress was finally held in August 2022 in Poznań, Poland. And as on previous occasions, it was once again a melting pot where it was possible to bring together such diverse colleagues, both from near and far, so I did not hesitate to take the opportunity to talk to some of them: Catherine Horel, Matthias Middell, Radikobo Ntsimane, Tomasz Schramm, Radhika Seshan and Sanjay Subrahmanyam. Although Eliana Dutra, Robert Frank and Edoardo Tortarolo had also attended the congress, it was not possible to make appointments with them at that time, so I conducted the conversations in February and July 2023, taking advantage of the technology that has become part of our everyday tools. I also benefited from this medium to gain insight from two colleagues from the south of the continent, Décio Guzman and Esteban Buch, so I spoke with them in January 2023. And finally, I took advantage of their stays in Mexico to interview Kapil Raj and Miguel Rodríguez, in October 2022 and January 2023 respectively. These were the limits of the selection, arbitrary, varied, circumstantial, but I am convinced that I have brought together fifteen specialists who have made significant contributions in their fields.

I have mentioned the CISH several times, so I consider it pertinent to clarify the reason for this insistence. Since the beginning of the present century - and even before - I have been an active member of this association and became president of the Mexican Committee of Historical Sciences. This gave me the opportunity to participate in the assemblies, meetings of the nominating committee and congresses held in Amsterdam (Netherlands), Budapest (Hungary), Tampere (Finland), Jinan (China), Rome (Italy) and Poznań (Poland). And at these meetings I established and strengthened ties with many colleagues, who brought me into their intellectual networks. I also maintained close contact with those who have, at different times, been members of the Bureau. In the previous book, one third of the interviewees fell into this category. In the present volume, the percentage is similar. I include Pim den Boer and Robert Frank, Vice-President and Secretary General of the Bureau from 2010 to 2015. Catherine Horel is president, Eliana Dutra vice-president, Edoardo Tortarolo secretary general and Matthias Middell an advisory member of the Bureau who will remain in office until 2026. In addition to heading this important grouping of historians, each of them represents a historiographical trend of enormous importance. I have given them a voice not only to speak about the CISH but also about their historical work in their respective fields of influence.

In order to prepare the interviews, it was necessary to leave my comfort zone, that is to say, the historiographical production of the regions and themes with which I am familiar, and to discover, not without astonishment and with great intellectual curiosity, the historical problems that each of them had tackled and which, I recognize, were far removed from my lines of research but which, as I got to know them, became extremely important to me. So, as a way of establishing a dialogue with them, I immersed myself in readings on regions, methodologies and new themes. And when, in response to my questions, they recounted details and processes, I confirmed the importance of making them known in spheres other than their own. And in doing so, I have immersed myself in this trend that connects histories from different points and

inserts them into a globalized history. There are themes that are transversal in this book, and I have induced the interviewees to give their opinion. It is not for nothing that I was able to talk to those who have proposed concepts and methods such as connected histories and globalization, as will be evident from reading the extensive bibliography that is a valuable testimony to their scholarly work.

The preparation of the interviews involved, as far as possible, the compilation of the references of the historiographical production of each one. The questions were planned based on the readings. Of course, they were not closed questionnaires, but the order and content of the questions were linked to the answers, following the thread of the conversation, although it was also possible to modify the strategy and change the subject in response to a reaction from the interviewee. The exercise of interviewing implies a great effort of concentration to listen to the answer and at the same time to think about what the next question might be. But it is true that the interviewer is the one who guides the conversation and, as a means to cover as many topics as possible in the time allotted for the conversation, sometimes the possibility of going deeper into some of the topics discussed is sacrificed. These interviews are not about statistics or trends, as in a survey. They are individual stories that are made public as a way of sharing points of view, experiences, emotions and thoughts. It is not a sociological approach with a certain distance between the questioner and the respondent, but with bonds of closeness and solidarity. The atmosphere in which I conducted the interviews made evident the complicity and interaction with the interviewee with whom I already had a personal and professional relationship, but also with those with whom I did not - yet - have a friendship. I found my interlocutors willing to answer all kinds of questions, few of them personal and almost all of them academic, and not forgetting the political issues, the academic centers and the country they come from. We cannot overlook the fact that they are historians who are themselves actors or even victims of the stories they tell, especially when they have been affected by dictatorial regimes.

The questions have been planned in search of answers to certain questions that have motivated me since the first book, with the consequent evolution. In short, they seek to make known the historiographical work of the interviewees and the ways in which they have approached the subjects of their interest, the sources used, the theoretical support, the theoretical-methodological proposals they have constructed. They are also aimed at revealing the way in which they have shared the results of their research, both for specialized readers and for the general public. And finally, I ask them about the intervention they have had in the training of human resources at different levels.

But the questions also lead them into areas that are of particular interest to me. In the pages of the book, Pierre Nora and *Les Lieux de mémoire* circulate profusely. Two thirds of the interviewees were deliberately encouraged to talk about him and his work because they had had direct contact with Nora, attended his seminars, dealt with him as an editor at Gallimard, or simply because they were aware of his approach and had used it to apply it to their own research.

Since I was a doctoral student and came across the proposal of *Les Lieux de mémoire* or places of memory, I have immersed myself in reading not only the texts that make up the original volumes of the French work, but also the applications that have been made in other parts of

the world, going beyond the frontiers of Nora's original idea. And, with its variants, I have adopted it as a guide for my own research and have reported some of the results. So far this century I have been accumulating material to write a book on the places of memory in Mexico, and precisely at the Poznań congress, I organized a round table to submit an advance to the consideration and criticism of colleagues from different latitudes. Three of the interviewees commented on my text and several others alluded to that session in the interviews.

But beyond that, during a stay in Paris, on June 27th 2023, I had the honor of meeting and talk with Pierre Nora himself, and of giving him the afore mentioned essay in which I give an account of how his theoretical-methodological proposal has gone beyond the French national framework on which his proposal is centered. In addition to receiving very enriching comments, I also directed the conversation to the subject of the interviews. Before my visit, to prepare the ground, I had left him a copy of the second book I had published. I was not able to conduct a proper interview with him, although I would assume that he would have granted me one, as I did not know want to break the cordiality by placing him in front of a tape recorder during our first meeting.

He has not only dealt with the places of memory but has also sought the complicity of some of his colleagues in order to make known what he has called “Ego-history”. In a book published in 1987, Maurice Agulhon, Pierre Chaunu, Georges Duby, Raoul Girardet, Jacques Le Goff, Michelle Perrot and René Remond sought to become historians of themselves.³ As Nora himself explained at the presentation of the book, they responded to a request from him to contribute to the elaboration of the genre of Ego-history. He did not expect texts born out of objectivity, but in which the work they had done was made present, leaving behind impersonality and acknowledging the link they had had with their objects of study. The texts were not to be “neither falsely literary autobiography, nor unnecessarily intimate confessions, nor abstract profession of faith, nor attempt at wild psychoanalysis, wholly personal and disinterested”. They were simply to explain the relationship between the history they made and the history that made them.⁴

I do not intend the interviews included here to be equated with these essays in Ego-histories because of the way they were conducted. That experiment had already been carried out by Jean Meyer a few years ago in Mexico.⁵ But, in the case of my books, the questions - tape recorder in hand or open zoom microphone - and the immediate answers do not seem to allow much time for reflection. That option was available to those who received Nora's instructions to talk about themselves in a piece of writing of limited length, having the possibility of consulting personal

³ Nora, *Essais d'ego-histoire*, 1987.

⁴ Nora, *Essais d'ego-histoire*, 1987, p. 7. Nora, *Une étrange obstination*, 2022, p. 217. Nora acknowledged that this exercise had been imitated by the aspirants to the “habilitation”, who had to accompany their theses with an account of their intellectual journey.

⁵ In 1993, Jean Meyer did a similar essay in Mexico with Antonio Alatorre, Luis González, Miguel León-Portilla, Alfredo López Austin, Edmundo O'Gorman, Octavio Paz, Luis Villoro and Silvio Zavala. *Egohistorias. El amor*, 1993. Enrique Florescano and Ricardo Pérez Monfort carried out a similar exercise with 28 historians and completed the book with profiles of another 16 to make “a compendium of the ways of thinking and writing history practiced in the twentieth century”. Florescano and Pérez Monfort, *Historiadores de México*, 1995.

archives and delving into one's own memory. What they do is demonstrate that history, as Nora himself acknowledges, is not a career or a curiosity, but a reason for being and for living, and the need to inscribe one's own existence in a reflective continuity.⁶

In my case, I didn't give them much time for reflection. An email, a WhatsApp message, a phone call or a meeting in a congress hallway served to arrange an appointment on a day, time and place nearby for a talk in front of a tape recorder. Of course, I explained my intentions and objectives. And when the time came, they answered my questions freely and according to what occurred to them at the time. As we had agreed that I would send them the transcribed and annotated versions for their approval, I sent the texts, and they were accepted almost without opposition. However, there were a few cases where, when they read it, they felt like filling in the gaps or elaborating on their answers. The spontaneous interview became, through the intervention of the interviewees, more structured and more like an Ego-history text than a conversation between friends and colleagues. They included very complex disquisitions and language as if it were a magisterial lecture, or finally a detailed and exhaustive description of some process. There were those who could not pass up the opportunity to include, in footnotes, most of their published work, duplicating what I had originally included in my proposal. In these cases, a real negotiation was necessary to try to arrive at a scholarly but fresh text close to the first version and in which inaccuracies were corrected. It goes without saying that the opinions expressed in this introduction and in the notes are my own; for obvious reasons, those expressed by the interviewees are respected and respectable.

Written verbatim in the first instance, the interview was slightly modified by my intervention as editor to add punctuation for the sake of readability. I also took on the task of adding footnotes to include the references of the works mentioned in the conversation or some brief information on people, places and events. I consider that the changes introduced do not detract from the authenticity of the testimony. However, voice, pronunciation, intonation, gestures and body posture are not always reflected in the texts collected here. But they are a projection of the interviewee, they reflect his or her state of mind, which is often conditioned by the place and time when the interviews were conducted. The hustle and bustle of cafés and restaurants to take advantage of a free moment in the agenda contrasted with the enveloping silence in the living room of our house or the office at the Instituto Mora. And very different is also the atmosphere created in an interview on one of the platforms that connect us with audio and video, erasing the kilometers that separated us.

Each interview has its own time, which is not the reading time, but I believe that, in the end, the objective of sharing the voices of these fifteen exponents of historiography was achieved. The editing does not go against the content, but the punctuation turns a talk into black characters on a white background, or whatever combination is used when reading them on a computer. These pages reflect the uniqueness of each one's life, but at the same time they have in common with the others the sharing of the profession of historians.

⁶ Nora, *Une étrange obstination*, 2022, pp. 210-211.

The interviews were conducted in different languages, which were not always the mother tongues of either the interviewees or me, but they were the middle ground that allowed us to communicate. So, I was able to converse with the French in their native language, but also with a Dutchman and a Pole. English allowed me to communicate with a German, a South African, two Indians and an Italian. In the case of the Brazilians, we managed a combination that allowed me to ask questions in Spanish and receive answers in Portuguese. Another Indian insisted that we could do the interview in Spanish, and finally I used my mother tongue to interview an Argentinean and a Mexican.

The recording of each interview lasted an average of one hour. It was then transcribed using two methods. One was the traditional one, listening to what the recorder recorded and typing what was caught on the electronic assistant. The other took advantage of the possibility offered by a program called *Transkriptor*, which, although not 100% accurate, was an important aid for a first writing that could be checked later. For the translation I used specialists in some cases, and in others I relied on another program, DeepL, which is also reliably effective. And I took special care not to lose too much in the translation.

The bibliography accompanying the interviews is in two parts. The first obeys the rules established by the Mora Institute for the way notes are placed -which I am not convinced by, nor do I agree with- which only allows some information to be included at the foot of the page and, to complete them, it is necessary to resort to a bibliography at the end of the interview. Some of the questions I asked are directly related to certain works of the interviewee's authorship or refer to the subjects they have worked on and on which they have published. That is why, in the notes, part of their production appears, and the complete references are included, together with all the references to works mentioned or supporting works, in what is called "Bibliography of the interviewees". However, it does not cover most of the publications to which they have devoted their efforts, and so the so-called "Supplementary Bibliographies" have been compiled. These have been constructed based on the *curricula vitae* provided by the interviewees and supplemented with exhaustive searches on the internet, on the websites of the institutions where they work or even on their personal pages. I also made direct enquiries, as far as possible, in libraries in both the old and the new world, or at least checked the online catalogues of those listed at the end of this introduction.

To move beyond the sometimes-limited frame of the printed book with almost exclusively local circulation, horizons have changed. During the confinement by the Covid-19 pandemic, institutions and publishers, but also students and professionals, put digitized versions of books online, as bookshops and libraries had closed, putting millions of books out of circulation. Once the lockdown was over, some of these pages were closed, but others remained, allowing an increasing number of texts to be consulted online. But, in addition, article 56 of the General Law on Humanities, Science, Technology and Innovation issued in Mexico on May 8th 2023 establishes that all information derived from humanistic research activities will invariably be open access. In other words, books published in public centers are made available to readers on the Internet. In the case of this book, it is published in the repository of the Mora Institute. This will allow, in this particular case, to take advantage of the repository and the electronic format to share the interviews in the original language in which they were conducted. This will give

the interviews a wider reach and will also allow the interviewees themselves to help disseminate them among their colleagues and students in their respective countries. And by being online at the URL <https://doi.org/10.59950/IM.129> they will become searchable from any corner of the world with access to the internet.

An important complement to the interviews is the image I include of each of them. I took these pictures at the time and place where I conducted the interviews or on other occasions when I have spent time with my colleagues. The selection did not always please them at first, but, for my strong reasons, they eventually accepted them.

Time has passed since the first interview I did for this book and the moment it reaches the reader. The situation has changed, so that some of the views would perhaps be different today. During this period Dominique Kalifa ceased to be among us, so the interview published here is a humble tribute and another way to keep his memory alive.⁷ In addition, the world situation has changed, so that some of the opinions might be different today. And, above all, we have survived the tragedy of the Covid-19 pandemic that changed the way we see the world and ourselves, and changed the way we research, publish, teach, communicate. But what has remained is the interest, since the first book, in reading directly their ideas on the wide range of topics that could be attractive and thought-provoking for those interested in doing research in the historical disciplines. This new book is not just about Mexicanists or Americanists. The first included a dozen foreigners specializing in the study of different aspects of these latitudes. In the second, I continued in this vein, but began to include colleagues who did not focus their studies on America. And in the third, Americanists have become a minority compared to those who study distant spaces and even go beyond the frontiers of our imaginary.

Following the structure used since the first book, I have arranged the interviews in strict alphabetical order in a spirit of democracy and neutrality. Likewise, following the characteristics of the other two books in this series, no final reflection is included because I believe that it will be up to the readers themselves to draw their own conclusions from their reading and their own interests.

By virtue of their content and characteristics, I believe that each interview can have a life of its own, i.e. it is up to the reader to decide whether to read the whole book or to select one or the other interview and read it in isolation. For this reason, in the footnotes, you will find information that is repeated in several of the interviews when a certain character, place or event is mentioned. The purpose of this repetition is to standardize the information and keep the data related to each interview concentrated, rather than referring to another note in another chapter that may be far away in the space of the book.

What is clear is that in this third book I have managed to bring together diverse voices and interests. The historical practice of the interviewees has led them to insert themselves, for example, in the global history that crosses physical and geographical borders and finds shared cultural, economic and political traits in the farthest corners of the world. The phenomenon of globalization has generated an interest among social scientists in conducting transnational research, in connecting histories that have elements in common and, at the same time, are rep-

⁷ I am grateful to his daughter Adele for authorizing the publication of the interview and Dominique Kalifa's photo.

representative of local identities. And this is evident in the opinions expressed by the participants in this adventure aimed at broadening knowledge about ways of doing history. That is why I believe that this book, like the two previous ones, will become an essential reference tool for history professionals and students who are training in this discipline to approach different schools of thought and historical schools. I have no doubt that it will also be of interest to a wider public, eager to read about the way in which, outside our borders, research, teaching and the dissemination of history are carried out. By learning about these practices, members of society - inside and outside our geographical space - will be in a better position to learn about the past as well as the present.

In addition to the interviewees, of course, this book has benefited from the support and assistance of several people. I am deeply grateful to the readers who read early versions of the text with such care and attention. Their suggestions and comments made this book as much better as possible. Brenda Aguilar, Michaël Da Cruz, Nicolás Jaramillo and Berenice Ramírez Lago made transcriptions and translations of seven interviews from French, English and Portuguese. The rest of the transcriptions and translations were done by me with the help of useful applications. Araceli Leal Castillo, in addition to transcribing the recordings into Spanish, helped me with the critical apparatus and answered editorial questions, even after hours. Paulina Ocampo helped me with the bibliography. Eduardo Flores Clair, besides reading, commenting and suggesting, shares my life and is my loving accomplice.

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