

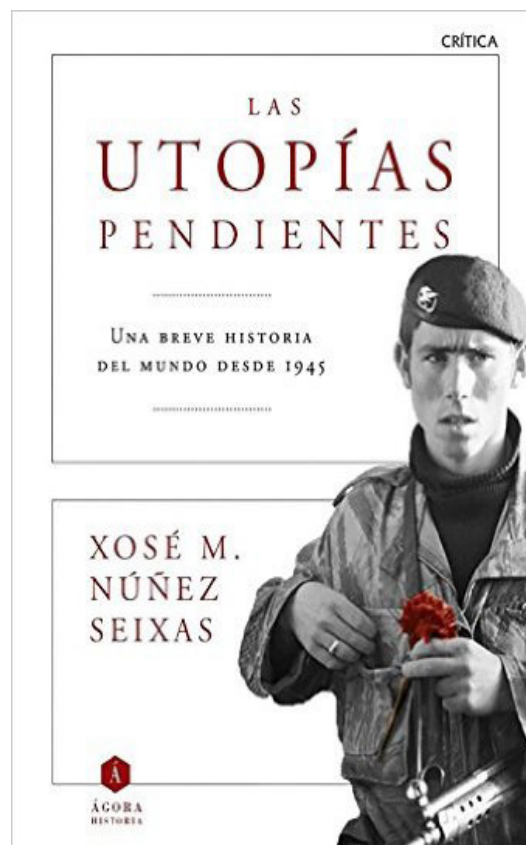
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REVIEW

THE PENDING UTOPIAS. A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE WORLD SINCE 1945

*Author: NÚÑEZ SEIXAS, Xosé Manoel. Barcelona. Editorial Crítica 2015.
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In the past five years important changes have taken place in the international context; telling the story of these changes as a whole, with their medium and long-term origins, is the main thrust of *Las utopías pendientes* (The Pending Utopias) with a view to explaining a complex and multi-faceted reality. This work by Xosé Manoel Núñez Seixas sets out to provide an up-to-date and detailed account of the present-day world since the end of the second world war, written and approached from a global perspective influenced in its different aspects by world history.¹

Núñez Seixas (Ourense, 1966) received a doctorate in contemporary history from the European Institute of Florence for his thesis on *The problem of nationalities in the Europe of the inter-war period*. Later he developed his academic career in the University of Santiago de Compostela (USC), where he has been full professor since 2007. He has been professor of 19th and 20th century European history at the Ludwig-Maximilians-University of Munich (Germany) since 2012). His research has focused on key considerations in the history of nationalisms, the socio-cultural history of war and violence and migration studies.² He currently lectures on International Security at postgraduate level at the USC and CESEDEN.³

The Pending Utopias offers us a well-woven account, which unravels the complicated international relations of the past decades, explaining the current global political and social context through different and useful keys enabling us to understand how the present-day reality came about. It moreover provides a detailed analysis of the different post-war societies, with special emphasis on the western world, although without entirely excluding Asian, African and/or Latin-America societies.

The eminently didactic nature of the work does not detract from its analytical interest; on the contrary, the text recounts with profuse clarity some of the most interesting debates of the last decades, together with up-to-date interpretations of political science and an exhaustive account of the succession of the events that have shaped our economic, political and social arena.

This explanation of reality involves a perspective that goes beyond the classic boundaries of contemporary world history manuals or histories *of the present time*. With the masterful use of a whole range of new analytical approaches used in scientific literature drawn from a large variety of social science fields, the complexity and the interrelations shaping our immediate historical context are examined. The title of the work is a good example of this; throughout the book the author uses some of the post material utopias that guided the ideological and social innovations of the second

1 MANNING, Patrick. *Navigating World History: Historians Create a Global Past*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

2 <http://hispona.org/miembros/xose-manoel-nunez-seixas/>.

3 www.posgradoseguridad.com.

half of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century as a homogenising vehicle of his discourse. By exposing and dissecting the role of nationalisms and the different political conceptions of confused realities of identity, of the memory of war and collective violence as the pivotal axis around which contemporary societies are forged or broken, of the feminist revolution and of its role as catalyst of political change and economic progress, or of the apparition and expansion of man's concern for his physical and natural environment, Núñez Seixas is capable of reconstructing and analysing in detail the routes that combined to shape the world as we know it today.

This volume, written by a social scientist with an extensive and broad trajectory embedded in academic relations with a large disparity of international intellectual currents, represents a magnificent opportunity to introduce the general public -or one without any specific historiographic specialisation- to the work of the historian as a scientific analyst of our immediate reality.

For experts in peace and conflict in general, Núñez Seixas' work could become a key manual in the realm of security and defence studies, capable of facilitating the understanding of complex processes, usually dealt with from a narrower viewpoint. This multi-faceted quality of the work, which places it in the tradition of so-called *world history*, makes it of special interest for all analysts desirous of acquiring knowledge of the basic aspects of a geopolitical context determined by a wide spectrum.

It surpasses traditional political accounts which are so often lacking in depth or complexity of analysis –despite the extent or detail of their accounts- and allows one to comprehend and establish a useful conceptual map of the always complicated interrelations and *dependent paths*.⁴

The role of the new social movements and their *post material demands*, the role of memory in overcoming the cold war rifts in central and eastern Europe, or that of intellectual and strategic constructions that allowed the world to maintain peace in the context of *MAD* will not be viewed by the reader in the same light after undertaking the acute and comprehensive analysis proposed by the author.

The capacity to establish connections between apparently diverging processes favours the understanding of our present-day reality from a multi-faceted viewpoint that goes beyond the usual a priori and *short-termism* in the work of numerous analysts.

In this sense, an analysis and confrontation between past and present of the new emerging states and the old powers poses certain future options that constitute reasoned proposals for some of the central axes around which national and international realities

4 MAHONEY, James; SCHENSUL, Daniel. "Historical Context and Path Dependence," in GOODIN, Robert E.; TILLY, Charles. (Eds.) *Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Analysis*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, pp.454-471.

will be built in the coming years, but without falling into the trap of presenting us with unrealistic prospective proposals.

The very topical nature of the work also is of special interest. Recent events such as the attacks of January 2015 in Paris, the recent advances of the DAESH, the medium-term repercussions of the incorrectly named Arab Spring, the role of competitive authoritarianism as an alternative to liberal democracy,⁵ the economic repercussions of large economic investments in Brazil, the political fall-out from the economic crisis of 2008 in the countries of southern Europe, etc. form part of the tale and the interpretation of Núñez Seixas. It is obvious that a work of these characteristics has to have gaps, but the lack of more detailed references to the Sahel, or to events with a key impact on international relations such as WikiLeaks do not detract in the least from its interest.

The kaleidoscopic view which the author presents of our recent past undoubtedly offers us an interesting starting point for an analysis of our environment, and a review of our forecasts using a long-term vision: from the present towards the past in order to understand the future.

5 LEVITSKY, Steven; LUCAN, A.Way. "Elections Without Democracy: The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism", *Journal of Democracy*, 2002, 23, 2, pp. 51-65.