



Sites of Violence and Memory in Modern Spain: From the Spanish Civil War to the Present Day ed. Antonio Míguez Macho.

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In this anthology, historian Antonio Míguez Macho (Univ. of Santiago de Compostela) and nine other contributors revisit locations where, first, the rebel side in the Spanish Civil War (1936–39) and later members of the Francoist regime (1939–75), committed atrocities against their Republican/loyalist enemies. These include both sites that have been memorialized, mostly in the last few decades, as well as others lacking any historical contextualization. The collection's main thesis is that the process of memorialization has been patchy at best. No specialist in the history of the Spanish Civil War and subsequent dictatorship will disagree.

Though relatively young, editor Míguez is a leading expert on Francoist political repression and its memory.¹ He has recruited mostly young scholars to write for his anthology, some still at work on doctoral dissertations.

Under Míguez's direction the volume's contributors concentrate on the nature, extent, and location of the rebels' violent actions. In his introduction, he points out the most glaring proof of the Francoists' atrocities—hundreds of mass graves holding the remains of murdered Republicans. The writers of the ensuing articles identify and describe specific venues of killings, tortures, rapes, and other atrocities. These include Civil Governors' administrative buildings, bullrings, abandoned or razed prison grounds, and concentration camps. The idea is to link memories to various places, though a majority are concentrated in Galicia and Andalusia, where most of the essayists are based. This innovative approach results from the editor's keen interest in Public History, something rare among his Spanish colleagues. In the process, the authors frequently describe terrible episodes or make analyses that do not spare the reader the cruelty of the events and processes described. Take, for example, the excerpt from the opening chapter:

The arrests were followed by military summary trials with no guarantee of any kind for the defendants that resulted in severe sentences: from life imprisonment to the death penalty. Meanwhile, many of the detainees were removed from prison to be killed on the outskirts of towns and cities, against cemetery walls. In the summer of 1936, the appearance of corpses in roadside ditches was a daily occurrence. Many of the victims were buried in mass graves. The climate of terror that prevailed was intensified by the beatings, humiliations and purges that expelled hundreds of thousands of people from their jobs. Under military authority, and in collaboration with state security forces and squads, the practice of violence was carried out by various military units, chief among them the Falange (the Spanish branch of the fascist Party) [sic]. (4–5)

An array of studies published since the early 1980s have familiarized scholars with the nature and scope of rebel/Francoist repression. This knowledge has filtered from academia into Spanish society in general, thanks to films and books devoted to the topic. The situation of museums and

1. His earlier work includes *The Genocidal Genealogy of Francoism: Violence, Memory and Impunity* (Toronto: Sussex Acad Pr, 2016).

memorials is, however, very different. There is no general museum of the Spanish Civil War in the country, although it has recently been announced that one will soon open in Teruel. There are, however, a few scattered smaller institutions dedicated to explaining specific battles. Too many noteworthy places tell unsuspecting passersby nothing of what happened there. The commemoration of spaces is highly irregular throughout the country, more common where progressive local or provincial governments have been in place longer. For these, the anthology could almost be used as a Public History guide.

Alongside its many merits, the book has two serious faults. One is the poor quality of its English translation. (The chapters were very likely written in Spanish and then translated.) Some of the translations make no sense or convey something differing from what the authors intended. For instance, there is no such a thing as a “Spanish branch of the fascist Party” (see above).

Still more problematic is what the book omits to say. Despite its title, most of the book’s chapters ignore or downplay the elephant in the room: atrocities committed by the Republicans. (The excellent chapter by Erik Zubiaga Arana is the sole exception.) There is no attempt to integrate such repression into a convincing larger narrative. Granted, the Francoists used Republican repression for nearly forty years to hide their own heinous crimes; in reality, they murdered three of their opponents for each of their own losses. Of course, they erected monuments only to their own “martyrs,” ignoring Republican victims or insulting their memory.

What should democratic Spain be doing to honor the memory of nearly fifty thousand conservatives killed, often in the most atrocious circumstances, by the loyalists? Should it ignore them as the country is currently doing with the tendentious monuments dedicated to them by the Francoist regime? This is a vital question for two reasons. The first is humanistic: most of these conservative or pro-Franco people were killed, like the Republicans, because of their ideas or social roles, not criminal actions. They were murdered, not executed, under orders of a legal court. The second reason is political and sociological: millions of Spaniards identify with conservative victims because of family ties, tradition, or ideology. Are they to be excluded from the official memory of the war as the Francoists did with their Republican counterparts?

Sites of Violence and Memory in Modern Spain has many merits, but its title belies its content, which is mostly limited to the Republicans’ experiences and memories. The conflict in Spain was a civil war, with two sides that left a legacy of divided memories and political identities all too present in today’s society. A democratic country should not leave the interpretation of sites evoking Republican violence to fascists, demagogues, and populists. Yet, this is precisely what is happening.

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