

**Sammelrez: Spanischer Bürgerkrieg**

Kalyvas, Stathis N.: *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2006. ISBN: 0521670047; xviii, 485 Seiten

Beevor, Anthony: *The Battle for Spain. The Spanish Civil War 1936-1939*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson 2006. ISBN: 0297848321; xxxiv, 526 S.

Romero Salvadó, Francisco J.: *The Spanish Civil War*. London: Palgrave Macmillan 2005. ISBN: 0333754360; xxv, 268 S.

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The first two books under review here fall very much in the tradition of English-language writing on the Spanish Civil War, and, as is customary, both begin with seemingly obligatory historical background. It is not until p. 95 of Romero's relatively slim volume that the reader is finally told the story of the military coup of July 1936. Using chapter titles such as „The painful road to modernity“ and „Old Spain“, the author effectively turns the history of the civil war into the story of Spain; the conflict serves as a microcosm of Spain's painful road to 'modernity'. The emphasis is on causes, origins, and outcomes rather than the nature of the conflict or, indeed, the nature of civil war itself.

The books were written for different audiences: Romero's is aimed at the text-book market and offers a very competent synthetic account that is soundly based on recent historiography and reflects his usual interest in international affairs. Anthony Beevor's latest blockbuster, on the other hand, is aimed at a much wider audience, and has captured much public attention since it was first published in Spanish in 2005. A highly engaging, vigorous narrative, it contrasts with Romero's book even while, in some ways, mirroring it. Both texts are conventionally framed, making much use of familiar set-pieces. Romero's discussion of the factionalism of the Republican side (pp. 136-42), for example, while cogent and well handled, depends on presenting the Barcelona street-fighting of May 1937 as the explanatory set-piece of the Re-

publican narrative. Indeed, the author provides only fourteen pages on the internal history of the Republic after the May Days before we reach the end of the road for the Republic in a section horribly entitled „Curtains“. Beevor's set-pieces are used as literary rather than as analytical devices. Stories such as that of the siege of the Alcázar of Toledo (pp. 122-4) allow the author to present anecdote and personal detail in a way designed to illuminate the human drama—and tragedy—of war. Thus, the story of Unamuno's reaction to Millán Astray's legionary war cry „Viva la muerte“ shows his heartbroken isolation as well as the perspicacity of his response: „you will win but you will not convince“ (pp. 100-1). Such vignettes add to the narrative drive of the book, even though they are extremely well known.

Neither Beevor's nor Romero's account contains much that is unfamiliar to Hispanists in terms of narrative or political explanation. „The Battle for Spain“ is, however, notable for battlefield analysis, which dominates much of the book. This is undoubtedly its greatest strength, not least because military history is poorly served in the historiography of the Spanish civil war. But it is not simply a question of filling gaps. Beevor is genuinely illuminating on Republican strategy and paints a vivid picture of its shortcomings, exploring the commanders' insistence on dramatic grand offensives and arguing persuasively that a better policy would have been that of defensive war. His work is thus a valuable corrective to the many histories of the Civil War that foreground diplomacy and statecraft but ignore strategy.

Beevor's book makes systematic use of material from Soviet archives and also relies heavily on German military evidence and, to a lesser extent, the British National Archives. But no Spanish archives have been consulted and the book shows no firm command of recent historiography. The debt to Spanish historians is acknowledged—and the chapters on Franco's victory and repression could not have been written without their work—but the literature is top-sliced and the analysis often relies on standard works by foreign scholars. The effect of this rather skewed source base is to shift the explanatory frame-

work outside Spain. Interestingly, however, the same can also be said of Romero's work, though this is entirely based on a thorough reading of the, largely Spanish, historiography.

For Beevor, the Communists are the clear villains of the piece. On p. 299, for example, we are told that the failure of the Aragón campaign was met with „Stalinist paranoia“ that blamed „a ‘Trotskyist’ fifth column“, even though some were now beginning to recognize that „communist direction of the war effort was destroying the Popular Army“. Similarly, we are told of „the Communist Party's plan to take over the Popular Army“ (p. 127). The analysis of the military failings is astute; the political explanation for it much less so. How 'Stalinism' relates to Spain is far from clear, and the depiction of the Spanish Communist Party as Comintern stooges (pp. 256-8) is hard to square with the complexity and fluidity of Popular Front politics in Spain, which are left largely unexplored. While Romero's analysis of the PCE differs fundamentally from Beevor's and is, indeed, much more concerned with their internal support and position within the Popular Front coalition, he too looks outside Spain for explanations as to the course and outcome of the war, claiming, for instance, that in 1938 „the mounting defeatism which Republican governments had to confront was not so much a result of their policies but of the strength of international forces ranged against them“ (p. 151) and, similarly, that it was Munich rather than the battle of the Ebro that „accelerated the end of the war“ (p. 170).

The naivety of Beevor's political analysis is compounded by his romanticized depiction of the anarchists (e.g. pp. 106, 110-14, 295-6), who serve as the counterpoint to the communists. Little attention is paid to the socialists, despite the pivotal role that divided party played in the Popular Front. Indeed, the socialist landworkers' union, the FNTT, is never mentioned, which may account for both the exaggeration of anarchist strength and the erroneous assertions that UGT collectives were weak or nonexistent in eastern Andalucía (pp. 105, 463 footnote 100). More surprising is the failure to integrate material from many grass roots studies of the anarchist collectives

and militias that demonstrate the shortcomings of these institutions even when these works (by, for example, Julián Casanova, Aurora Bosch and Michael Seidman) are listed in the bibliography. In contrast to Beevor's other works—notably his outstanding 'Stalingrad'—little attention is paid to the experiences of ordinary men; much more is paid to the top down concerns of military commanders and political parties. Certainly, the rosy picture of anarchist collectives (pp. 110-14)—undermined only by the policies of central government and the lack of forethought of the militias—cannot be sustained by the actual experience of many of them.

Beevor's descriptions of Spanish anarchism are sometimes reminiscent of contemporary libertarian accounts that looked to convey the excitement of anarcho-syndicalist revolution.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, his account of the Spanish Church repeats the images of inquisitorial fanaticism and feudal greed (e.g. pp. 4-5, 23, 82-83), made familiar by contemporary pro-Republican propaganda, even though these owe far more to myth than to fact. One is reminded of Gerd Rainer Horn's observation of foreigners in revolutionary Barcelona and how their understanding of events was mediated by symbolic representations.<sup>2</sup> Yet, the same associations occur in Romero's book, who also persistently describes the Spanish church as „medieval“ (e.g. pp. 131-2, 191, 234 footnote 23) even though he is hardly a foreigner. But despite their obvious lack of analytical purchase, such superficial symbolic associations continue to set the narrative patterns of Civil War in ways that few historians would care to admit.

It is thus ironic to read „journalists fall back on clichés, rather than investigate what lay behind the ferocity of the war“ (p. 81) at the start of Beevor's chapter on revolutionary violence. The very title of this chapter—„The Red Terror“—is a cliché, as is the structural framing that opposes it to the following chapter, predictably entitled „The White Terror“. Beevor thus highlights the essential

<sup>1</sup> E.g. Gaston Leval (pseud. Pierre Piller), *Collectives in the Spanish Revolution*, London: Freedom Press, 1975.

<sup>2</sup> Gerd Rainer Horn, *The Language of Symbols and the Barriers of Language: Foreigners' Perceptions of Social Revolution (Barcelona 1936-1937)*, in: *History Workshop Journal* 29 (1990), pp. 42-64.

difference between spontaneous revolutionary violence—Red—and repressive, officially-sanctioned violence—White—but the contrasts are boldly painted and some of the detail simply wrong. Discredited stories such as that of people being thrown into the Ronda gorge are repeated as fact (p. 86) and there is an unfounded and sentimental suggestion that priests „who had taken as much trouble over burying the poor as the rich were often spared“ as were industrialists „with a reputation for dealing fairly with their workforce“ (p. 83).<sup>3</sup> Romero's information is more accurate but the same narrative tropes colour his account: „unlike the Republic's hot and spontaneous terror, that which was carried out by the insurgents was cold and calculated“ (p. 111). The hyperbolic term he uses to encompass both experiences is „apocalypse“, which perhaps conjures up an appropriate sense of chaos and confusion—though it threatens to overstate it—but which offers no explanation for it. Ultimately, and as their respective accounts of revolutionary violence show, both these books on the Spanish Civil War are concerned with narrative rather than analysis. And as Beevor is easily the more gifted storyteller, his account is the more successful, despite the rather misleading nature of some of his material.

For a reader looking for insight rather than narrative, Stathis Kalyvas's „The Logic of Violence in Civil War“ will be welcome. Civil war is comparatively under-theorised—certainly when compared to related concepts such as revolution or genocide—and Kalyvas's work pushes forward our understanding of both the nature and the mechanisms of civil conflict. This is in part because of the robustness of the research base: at the heart of the book lies a detailed study of the Greek Civil War, which includes a detailed micro-historical study of the Argolid (pp. 246-329) based on archival investigation, oral history, and fieldwork. The methodology is essential for among Kalyvas's main conclusions is that civil war brings about a „privatization of politics; less a transgression of social ties and more their full, though perverse, expression“ (p. 363). In conflicts with ill-defined frontlines, where the enemy is uncertain and civilian involvement high, denunciation is a key

weapon. Though who is being denounced and to whom varies over the course of a civil war, depending on the extent of the control whichever group wields over the local area at any one time, the denunciations themselves are based on personal relationships rather than on impersonal hatreds. Motivations to violence are thus quotidian and the form that the violence takes is largely indirect: far more people are involved in denouncing than in killing.

The explanations for civil war violence thus focus on local communities where, to put it bluntly, the incentives for malicious denunciation (i.e. indirect violence) rise dramatically during the conflict. This contrasts markedly with accepted narratives of civil war that have pre-existing ideological cleavages determining both the extent and the brutality of the violence. Thus, in Republican Spain, revolutionary violence was brought to the pueblos by hard-line militia columns, searching out class enemies. But, as municipal studies are now making clear, such enemies had to be pointed out by their neighbours: the visiting militiamen had no idea who they were. The experience of local violence may have turned these petty rivalries into impersonal hatred—there is some evidence for this from denunciations in the early years of the Franco regime—but they do not originate as such.

The idea of ideological cleavage has been reinforced in recent years by the current historical taste for cultural representations and, in particular, constructed 'others'. Kalyvas's study thus works against some established trends in historical writing. He pays little attention to symbolic or ritualized violence, even though this undoubtedly features in civil wars, notably in religious massacres. But, while the ways in which priests were killed in Spain in 1936 were profoundly patterned by the rites of Baroque Catholicism, the symbolism does not explain why the massacres occurred, as a comparison with Mexico, where the extent of anticlerical violence

<sup>3</sup> John Corbin, *Truth and Myth in History: An Example from the Spanish Civil War*, in: *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 25 (1995), pp. 609-625; Julio de la Cueva Merino, *Religious Persecution, Anticlerical Tradition and Revolution: On Atrocities against the Clergy during the Spanish Civil War*, in: *Journal of Contemporary History* 33 (1998), pp. 355-69.

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was very much lower, suggests. The causality of civil war violence rests in the confused and contingent circumstances of contested power, fought for at the most local of levels.

The solidity of Kalyvas's methodology reveals this as detailed fieldwork in the Argolid illuminates the nature of civil war violence and so allows him to test his conclusions at the micro level. For while the importance of the local municipality is widely recognized, scholars have been much less successful in reconstructing it. Extra-legal violence leaves few records; in the aftermath of civil war, most people are reluctant to talk. However, having established his theory of selective violence through a comparative discussion of civil war (pp. 1-171), and reinforced it with a game theory model sensibly presented as a discrete chapter (pp. 172-209), the empirical evidence from Greece that makes up the final section of the book, allows the author to test his own hypotheses in a powerful piece of triangulation.

It is, admittedly, not the easiest book to read. The prose is often dense, the chapter conclusions sometimes schematic, and most historians will find the game theory in chapter 7 decidedly daunting. However, those who persevere will be rewarded. The first section provides a convincing and all-too rare comparative discussion of civil war that demonstrates its brutality even while demolishing many of the most familiar arguments used to explain that brutality. Less attention is paid to why some civil wars—notably postcolonial ones—are more brutal than others, but this kind of differentiation is not the purpose of the book. Instead, Kalyvas carefully builds up a theory of selective violence, demonstrating its difference from indiscriminate violence, which encourages resistance and so fails to consolidate territorial control.

Historians are often wary of political science's predictive models but they will recognize this picture of localized, intimate violence, where allegiances shift according to who is in command and the extent of that command. There is undoubtedly still work to be done on how and when villagers change sides, loyalties fade or disintegrate, and ties of kin or friendship are subordinated to self-interest. Indeed, this is an area where historians, whose arguments are grounded in speci-

ficities, have much to contribute. But as Kalyvas also shows, civil war is a phenomenon that maintains its characteristics across both space and time. If scholars now write the stories of particular conflicts in terms of local circumstances, shifting allegiances and individual agency, and abandon the tired narrative clichés of ideological cleavage and 'great causes', our knowledge of both civil war and civil wars will be much enhanced.

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