

Anderson, Peter: *The Francoist Military Trials. Terror and Complicity, 1939-1945*. London: Routledge 2009. ISBN: 978-0-415-80006-8; x, 219 S.

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From the end of the Spanish Civil War in 1939 to 1945, Francisco Franco's dictatorship killed more than 50.000 people. These deaths were caused above all by informal death squads and sentences of military courts. The political power – at those times a military power – approved the death squads as a sort of local devolution of power, with the mission of applying justice. However, most of the victims were shot after military trials. Established as early as November 1936, when the war was still at its beginning, military trials were a key piece in the construction of the discourse of the Nationalists as victims of a Communist menace. From this point of view, Franco didn't appear as a rebel. Instead he and his forces seemed to be saving the country from a red-mason-Jew conspiracy. Probing this conspiracy was the task of the military tribunals, „a juridical monstrosity“ in Peter Anderson's words.

Peter Anderson researches the role of these tribunals in the process of „social cleansing“ achieved by Francoism in the years immediately after the war. He begins by examining the violence in Spain since the end of the 19th century, presenting the roots of the conflict, the military tradition of intervention in politics and the army's special juridical status. He then analyses the general violence in the Civil War. This introduction (parts I and II) gives a good overview both on the pogrom-like and on the organized massacres, which characterized the war. It can be recommended for both under-graduate and graduate courses. Even though Anderson doesn't forget to examine both republican violence and Nationalist crimes, such an overview doesn't bring any new information for specialists but repeats the topics of „two sides“ and „two different kinds of violence“. There were different kinds of violence indeed, but more than two. Explaining the fighting requires more than the concepts of „Republicans“ and „Nationalists.“

Anderson also examines the general features of the military tribunals. They were „emergency procedures“, although they lasted many years and even the last people killed by Franco in 1975 (several left-wing terrorists) were judged by military tribunals. In such tribunals, the „defence counsel only gained notice of the case once the prosecuting authorities had fully prepared their brief“ (p. 54) and they had only four hours for preparing defence. As Anderson puts it, the trials often lasted just three minutes. The prosecutor needed only to produce simple allegations, negative witness accounts weren't proofed, positive ones often weren't allowed or attended.

Denunciations played an important role in this system. Until 1941 they were possible anonymously. The part on this topic is the strongest in Anderson's book. Focusing on a relatively small region (around the town of Pozoblanco, in Cordoba), he is able to describe very accurately the mechanisms of revenge, mobilization and grass-root support for the rising dictatorship. There was a real desire coming from above for realizing a retributive justice, purging „red crimes“ and rewarding the „loyal ones“ for their sufferings. People were eager to speak about their tortments and to prosecute their former tormentors. As Anderson writes: „The evidence in the Pozoblanco area suggests that this febrile climate created by the war and fostered by the new regime led many to identify very strongly with both Franco's rhetoric about suffering and his demands for punishment.“ (p. 80) There were so many people claiming real or presumed damages that Anderson states that „the practice of denunciation brings out the importance of this collaboration between state and society because, perhaps more than any other factor, denouncers made the military trial system tick“ (p. 81). From the evidence exposed by Anderson, local Falangists and their akin pressed people (for example widows) to charge presumed offenders. Nevertheless voluntary denunciators were easily found.

The system of the military trials had a life of its own. Anderson proves convincingly how even when right-wing local elements tried to defend an individual against the charges for

„supporting the rebellion“ (a diffuse accusation that involved siding with the loyalists in any form), courts would condemn him or her to harsh sentences. An important characteristic of the system was precisely the high number of petitions and claims for mercy that the military courts received. Neighbors' protection of prosecuted rightists during the war should be repaid in this way and many people understood this. But usually the military courts didn't comply.

Andersons' book is a brilliant exposition of Franco's social cleansing, focused on a case study. This has its virtues: we understand very clearly the tangible consequences of political prosecution. But for a problem as complex as the military trials it probably might be better to take a broader, e.g. comparative, approach. The recent opening of Spanish military archives – thanks to the „Law of Historical Memory“ – is an invitation for more researchers to carry on in this way.

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