Citation for published version:
Marco, J 2020, 'Rethinking the Postwar Period in Spain: Violence and Irregular Civil War, 1939–52', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 55, no. 3, pp. 492-513. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022009419839764

DOI:
10.1177/0022009419839764

Publication date:
2020

Document Version
Peer reviewed version

Link to publication

Marco, Jorge. / Rethinking the Post-War Period in Spain: Violence and Irregular Civil War, 1939-1952. In: Journal of Contemporary History. 2019. (C) The Authors, 2019. Reprinted by permission of SAGE Publications.

University of Bath

Alternative formats
If you require this document in an alternative format, please contact:
openaccess@bath.ac.uk

General rights
Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy
If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Download date: 10. Oct. 2026

Rethinking the Post-War Period in Spain:
Violence and Irregular Civil War, 1939-1952

Jorge Marco (University of Bath)

> "We believed that with our Crusade we were achieving peace, but you, however, know that we have been at war for ten years"[1]

In a remote Spanish village dozens of left-wing peasants are arrested by the Civil Guard (rural militarised police force). After several days in jail the guards choose six and order them to board a truck. An hour later the six peasants lie dead in an isolated area, having been murdered. Hundreds of kilometres away the Civil Guard arrest three young peasants in an Andalusian village. They spend the first night in the Civil Guard post. The next morning they are driven away in a car. Their families fear that they have been killed. However, the Civil Guard have taken them to a factory on the outskirts of the village where they are tortured throughout the night. The following morning they are handed over to the Regulars, the much-feared army units composed of soldiers from the Spanish colony in Morocco. The soldiers tie them to horses, dragging them along a rocky path before stoning them. Finally, the dying youths are finished off with a bullet in the head. The villagers see that the path is covered in blood and mutilated body parts. The parish register records them as "shot by the Civil Guard".

A specialist on the subject would say that these two massacres probably took place at the start of the Civil War, between summer 1936 and spring 1937. However, the first case described occurred on 18th November 1947 and the second between 20th and 22nd April 1950; eight and eleven years, respectively, since the supposed end of the Civil War. In both cases the victims were relatives or collaborators of anti-Francoist guerrillas.[2] The reason for this chronological

---

[1] Francisco Franco's speech on the 10th anniversary of his rise to power, 1st October 1946, in: *La Vanguardia*, 2 October 1946, 3

[2] Josep Sánchez Cervelló (ed.), *Maquis. El puño que golpeó el franquismo. La Agrupación Guerrillera de Levante-Aragón* (Barcelona 2003), 229; Interviews with Eduardo Triviño, Virtudes Martín and Rosario Triviño, in: David Baird, *Between Two fires: Guerrilla war in the Spanish Guerrillas* (Frigiliana 2008), xix, 69-70, 160, 168-170, 176-177

confusion is the predominance of certain archetypes of violence against civilians in studies of the war and postwar period in Spain. The predominant interpretation of the violence in the Spanish Civil War is that there were two main phases. The first, between July 1936 and spring 1937, can be characterized by the brutality shown by the Francoist troops to the civilian population, especially that shown by the Regulars and the Spanish Legion, steeped in the culture of colonial warfare, and by the extrajudicial murders carried out by the forces of law and order and paramilitary groups. The second phase, from spring 1937, involved the transformation of 'hot-blooded terror' into bureaucratic terror meted out by the military courts.[3]

The main focus of studies on the repression of the 1940s has been centred on the analysis of what Franco's dictatorship called the purging of responsibilities for the crimes committed during the war and hinders the chronological identification of the two massacres described. Academic researchers correctly point out that the postwar violence was not simply a matter of settling old scores, as in Western Europe after the Second World War (WWII), but a continuation of the policy of political cleansing initiated at the start of the war.[4] The problem is that studies have tended to analyse the different instruments of institutional violence employed against the losing side: military courts, massive imprisonment and various types of economic, work-related, social and cultural repression; without considering other logics of violence.

Both approaches reinforce the idea of a slow but steady transformation of 'hot-blooded terror' into 'cold-blooded terror', that is, the progressive institutionalization of the violence. This interpretation creates certain difficulties in the analysis of the violence between 1936 and 1952. Firstly, local studies show that in areas where the coup succeeded in July 1936 and in zones occupied by Francoist troops in the first phase of the war, the institutionalization of the

---

[3] Julián Casanova, 'Rebelión y Revolución', in Santos Juliá (coord.), *Víctimas de la Guerra Civil* (Madrid 1999), 159-177; Francisco Espinosa, 'Julio de 1936. Golpe de Estado y plan de exterminio', in Julián Casanova (coord.), *Morir, matar, sobrevivir. La violencia en la dictadura de Franco* (Barcelona 2002), 86.
[4] Javier Rodrigo, *Hasta la raíz. Violencia durante la guerra civil y la dictadura franquista* (Madrid 2008), 48; Peter Anderson, *The Francoist Military Trials: Terror and Complicity, 1939–1945* (New York 2010), 53; Gutmaro Gómez Bravo and Jorge Marco, *La obra del miedo. Violencia y sociedad en la España franquista, 1936-1950* (Barcelona 2011), 61-69

violence was not a linear process but also showed some regressions. Secondly, it does not consider the persistence of the massacres in occupied zones between 1937 and 1939.[5] Finally, it avoids or reduces to merely anecdotal the systematic perpetration of massacres in the 1940s, such as those described above.

I would argue that two logics of Francoist violence operated in 1940s Spain within a common programme of political cleansing. The application of one logic or the other depended on the attitude of the vanquished to the defeat of the Republican Army: resignation or resistance. The logic of the violence inflicted on the defeated enemy was channelled by the institutions. Those classified as irredeemable were sentenced to death by military courts and executed. Those regarded as redeemable underwent a long process of isolation, punishment and forced conversion, which many did not survive. In contrast, the logic of counterinsurgency employed against the rebellious enemies, although employing instruments such as military courts and the prison system, utilized a wide variety of brutal practices and massacres against both civilians and combatants.

Since a full analysis of the violence of the 1940s must integrate both logics it is necessary to problematize the concept of postwar in Spain. Although 1st April 1939 marked the end of trench warfare it was not the end of the Spanish Civil War, rather, as the wife of a guerrilla fighter explained to her grandson, the "great war" was followed by the "little war".[6] From a military viewpoint the armed conflict was transformed from a conventional civil war between two regular armies into an irregular civil war[7] in which the dictatorship fought scattered groups of guerrilla fighters and an invisible network of their civilian supporters. In geographical terms, the war moved from open battlefields to isolated areas of

---

[5] Julio Prada, *La España masacrada: la represión franquista de guerra y posguerra* (Madrid 2010), 193-194; Ángela Cenarro, 'El triunfo de la reacción: fascistas y conservadores en Teruel', in Julián Casanova, et. al., *El pasado oculto. Fascismo y Violencia en Aragón, 1936-1939* (Huesca 1999), 187-188; Manuel Ortiz Heras, *Violencia política en la II República y el primer franquismo* (Madrid 1996), 298-307.

[6] Andrew Cowan, 'The Guerrilla War against Franco'*, European History Quarterly*, 20 (1990), 227; Jorge Marco, 'States of War: "Being Civilian" in 1940s Spain', in Helen Graham (ed.), *Interrogating Francoism: History and Dictatorship in Twentieth-Century Spain* (London 2016), 159; Interview with José Murillo (guerrilla fighter) in Alfonso Domingo, *El canto del búho. La vida en el monte de los guerrilleros antifranquistas* (Madrid 2002), 203

[7] On military concept of Conventional and Irregular Civil Wars, see: Stathis N. Kalyvas, 'Warfare in Civil Wars', in Isabelle Duyvesteyn and Jan Angstrom (eds.), *Rethinking the Nature of War* (Oxon 2005), 90-91

the mountains and clandestine fighting in the cities. From this military perspective, the case of 1940s Spain bears close similarities to those of the Polish Civil War (1942-1948), the Greek Civil War (1946-1949) and other irregular wars in the Baltic countries (1944-1953), the Ukraine (1944-1953) and Romania (1944-1962). Indeed, events in Spain were far more similar to these cases than to the post-war periods of the other Western European countries.[8]

When it is possible to classify an irregular armed conflict after a war as an irregular war? We need to address this question because the persistence of some erratic traces of armed struggle after the general cessation of hostilities in civil, colonial and international wars is a common phenomenon. Sometimes, these small skirmishes are merely the last embers of an extinguished conflagration.[9]. In other cases, the outcome is the opposite: the end of a war favours the multiplication of the armed actors, new economic interests and disputes over the control of territory and, as a consequence, a clear increase in violence and casualties.[10] When the main actors persevere with the same political goals, the irregular armed conflict continues over time, rebel groups and state forces are mobilized to a significant degree and there is intense violence with large numbers of casualties, it is not possible to define this armed conflict as a simple post-war skirmishes or post-war violence. Instead, we should understand it as an irregular war. These features were all present, to a greater or lesser extent, in all of all the cases indicated above, including the Spanish one.

---

[8] On this point I disagree with Kalyvas, who draws a comparison between the Greek and Spanish cases with reference to the period between 1936 and 1939 in Spain, without considering the period of irregular war. Stathis N. Kalyvas, 'How Not to Compare Civil Wars: Greece and Spain', in Martin Baumeister and Stefenaie Schüler-Springorum (eds.), *"If you tolerate this…": The Spanish Civil War in the Age of Total War* (Frankfurt 2008); Anita J. Prazmowska, *Civil War in Poland, 1942–1948* (New York 2004), 143-159; Alexander Statiev, *The Soviet Counterinsurgency in the Western Borderlands* (Cambridge 2010), 97-138; Doru Radosav, 'Rezistenţa anticomunistă armată din România între istorie şi memorie', in Ruxandra Cesereanu (coord.), *Comunism şi represiune în România. Istoria tematică a unui fratricid national* (Iaşi 2006)

[9] Richard White, 'Outlaw Gangs of the Middle Border: American Social Bandits', *The Western Historical Quarterly*, 12-4 (1981); Michael Fellman, *Inside War: The Guerrilla Conflict in Missouri During the American Civil War* (New York, 1989), 231-247

[10] Heidrun Zinecker, *Violence in Peace: Forms and causes of postwar violence in Guatemala* (Frankfurt 2006); Sarah Zukerman Daly, *Organized Violence after Civil War: The Geography of Recruitment in Latin America* (New York 2016)

Academic studies have, with very few exceptions, avoided the logic of counterinsurgency due to the anti-Francoist guerrilla movement generally being considered as a secondary and peripheral phenomenon.[11] In this article I will show that the violence employed against the rebellious enemy, on the contrary, dramatically affected the day to day life of a large part of the rural population during the 1940s. In fact, the logic of counterinsurgency preserved the brutality and massacres of civilians initiated in 1936 for more than a decade. I will also show that the logic of counterinsurgency deployed a new repertoire of violence which spread terror to even the most remote parts of the rugged Spanish countryside.

Victims of the Irregular Civil War in Spain

On 1st April 1939 the Francoist army announced from its general headquarters that, having achieved their 'final military objectives (…) with the Red Army captive and disarmed (…) the war is over'.[12] Two days later they declared "Spain is still at war with both its internal and external enemies".[13] The rhetorical use of the word 'war' in this slogan refers to the continuation of the policy of political cleansing started in 1936, now to be directed at those recently defeated. Consequently, around one million people were interned in concentration camps, prisons and forced labour camps,[14] while, at the same time, the military courts became much more active. The magnitude of this process of repression resulted in the formation of the first armed self-defence groups by republican soldiers who refused to give themselves up at the end of the conventional war and ex-combatants who had managed to escape from concentration camps. These were to become the precarious basis for the future

---

[11] Secundino Serrano, *Maquis. Historia de la guerrilla antifranquista* (Madrid 2001), 14, 17-18

[12] 'Parte oficial de Guerra', *ABC*, 2 April 1939, 1

[13] Slogan transmitted by Radio Nacional de España on 3 April 1939, published in: *La Vanguardia*, 4 April 1939, 1

[14] Javier Rodrigo, *Los campos de concentración franquistas. Entre la Historia y la memoria* (Madrid 2003), 221; Edurne Beaumont and Fernando Mendiola, 'Batallones Disciplinarios de Soldados Trabajadores: castigo político, trabajos forzados y cautividad', *Revista Historia Actual*, 2-2 (2004), 35; *Anuario Estadístico de España 1946-1947*, Vol. II (Madrid 1947), 1240-1

guerrilla movement. In 1946, when Francisco Franco declared that Spain had been at war for ten years, his use of the word 'war' lacked the rhetorical quality of 1939.[15]

The most recent studies estimate that at least 20,000 people were killed by Franco's dictatorship during the 1940s, the majority sentenced to death by the military courts.[16] However, these figures do not include the hundreds of deaths caused by counterinsurgent violence, which are notoriously difficult to identify. The dictatorship employed three main methods to exterminate their rebellious enemy: combat, massacres and military courts. Both combatants and civilians were amongst the victims. However, as in all wars, particularly those which are irregular, the numbers are open to debate. According to official sources, the number of deaths directly attributable to the irregular war between 1943 and 1952 was 3,433, comprising 2,489 combatants (of whom 2,173 were guerrilla fighters and 307 members of the regime's forces) and 953 civilians killed by guerrilla groups.[17] However, the records of the Civil Guard show lower numbers of both combatants and civilian victims.

In these statistics, not all the dead guerrilla fighters were included, for which there are five principal reasons: 1) data was only collected for the period between 1943 and 1952, omitting deaths occurring between 1939 and 1942; 2) it is estimated that between 15% and 20% of guerrilla member deaths in some regions between 1943 and 1952 were not officially registered,[18] 3) these statistics are based on a total of 5,560 guerrilla fighters. However, several local studies have found a much higher number of guerrilla fighters, raising the estimated total to between 6,000 and 7,000, many of whom died in combat or were killed extrajudicially[19]; 4) guerrilla fighters executed by a military court were not included; and 5) nor were

---

[15] *La Vanguardia*, 2 October 1946, 3

[16] Paul Preston, *The Spanish Holocaust: Inquisition and Extermination in Twentieth-Century Spain* (London 2012), vi

[17] Francisco Aguado, *El maquis en España* (Madrid 1975), 246-247

[18] Moreno, *La resistencia*, 685-686

[19] Aguado, *El maquis*, 246; Francisco Moreno, *Historia y memoria del maquis. El cordobés Veneno, último guerrillero de La Mancha* (Madrid 2006), 231-233

the 129 guerrilla fighters killed during Operation Reconquest of Spain[20] in 1944.[21] Consequently, I estimate that between 3,000 and 3,500 guerrillas were killed between 1939 and 1952, mainly in combat or extrajudicially, with few executed by a military court.

It is more difficult to determine the number of civilians killed during the irregular war. With regard to civilians killed by guerrilla groups, in Asturias and Córdoba 52 and 20 more cases, respectively, have been identified than are recorded in the official statistics.[22] Since the Civil Guard figures exclude data from 1939 to 1942 this pattern is likely to be repeated in other regions, although as the guerrilla carried out more personal attacks in Asturias than anywhere else, the overall figure would probably not increase greatly. Nonetheless, at least 1,000 civilians were killed by the resistance.

To determine the number of civilian victims of the dictatorship's repression during the irregular war is even more complex. According to Civil Guard statistics, 19,444 civilians were arrested and tried for collaboration with the anti-Francoist guerrilla groups between 1943 and 1952, although they indicate that the number of go-betweens (members of the civilian population who helped the guerrilla fighters) may have been three or four times that of those arrested: between 60,000 and 80,000.[23] The Brigada Politico-Social (political police) admits to having arrested 8,324 people involved in clandestine political organizations between 1946 and 1951, of whom around 7,000 must have been involved, directly or indirectly with the anti-Francoist guerrilla movement.[24] However, these official figures at national level do not fit with those at provincial level. For example, only in the province of Toledo, 5,349 people accused of collaboration with the guerrilla groups and clandestine organizations were arrested between 1941 and 1948, while,

---

[20] Military operation led by the Spanish Communist Party in October/November 1944 to liberate from France a small territory in Spain. The main goal was to settle the headquarters of the Communist irregular army.

[21] Serrano, *Maquis*, 135

[22] García Piñeiro, *Luchadores*, 651; Moreno, 'La represión, 394

[23] Eduardo Munilla, 'Consecuencias de la lucha de la Guardia Civil contra el bandolerismo en el periodo 1943-52', *Revista de Estudios Históricos de la Guardia Civil*, 1 (1968), 55; Aguado, *El Maquis*, 247, 250

[24] Comisaría General Político-Social, Dirección General de Seguridad, *La actividad político-social clandestina en España durante 1951*, enero de 1952. Fondo Contemporáneo. Ministerio del Interior. Microfilm 53,077 (Archivo Histórico Nacional)

in Asturias, military courts tried around 5,000 people for clandestine activities and crimes against state security.[25]

These figures serve to illustrate the level of mass arrests of those civilians who supported the anti-Francoist guerrilla movement or formed part of the anti-Francoist opposition, but, how many died as a result of their involvement? Franco's dictatorship passed two specific laws to repress the guerrilla movement: the Law of State Security in 1941 and the Law-Decree of Banditry and Terrorism in 1947.[26] Both enabled the courts to sentence thousands of go-betweens (and guerrilla fighters) to prison or death. However, most civilians were killed in massacres, particularly during the period known as 'the three years of terror' between 1947 and 1949.

The official records provide no data for the number of civilians killed by the dictatorship for collaborating with the guerrilla, with one exception: in the province of Granada, the Civil Guard admits to having killed 201 go-betweens, of whom 95% died between 1947 and 1952.[27] The opposition in exile presented the Assembly of the United Nations with a list of 588 anti-Francoists identified as having been killed by the dictatorship between 1st January 1947 and 5th August 1948. More than 90% were peasants accused of collaborating with the resistance. Of these, 517 died in massacres or under torture, while 71 were executed having been sentenced to death by a military court.[28] To establish the definitive number of civilians killed by the dictatorship during the irregular war is difficult as the perpetrators took steps to hide their crimes by not registering the deaths, falsifying the cause of death or declaring the victims as missing persons.

---

[25] Moreno, *La resistencia*, 688; García Piñeiro, *Luchadores*, 996.
[26] Ley para la Seguridad del Estado de 29 de marzo de 1941, *Boletín Oficial del Estado*, 11 April 1941, 2,434-2,444; Decreto-Ley de 18 de abril de 1947 sobre represión de los delitos de bandidaje y terrorismo, *Boletín Oficial del Estado*, 6 May 1947, 2,686-2,687
[27] Eulogio Limia*, Informe General del proceso seguido por el problema del bandolerismo en la provincia de Granada*, Agosto de 1952, 86, Movimiento Guerrillero, Caja 105, Carpeta 3/2 (AHCCPCE)
[28] 'Ante la Asamblea de la ONU en París denunciamos la guerra implacable que Franco hace al pueblo español', *Mundo Obrero*, 132, 28 August 1948, 1-2

However, basing my estimate on recent research at regional level,[29] I believe this would be between 2,000 and 3,000 civilians.

To conclude, the number of deaths directly related to the irregular war in Spain between 1939 and 1952 must be between 6,500 and 8,000, with an even division between civilians and combatants. Of these, around 5,000 to 6,500 were victims of the dictatorship. These figures are significantly lower than those from the irregular wars which took place after WWII in the Ukraine, Lithuania and from the Greek Civil War.[30] In this sense, the Spanish case bears closer similarities to the Poland, Latvian, Estonian and Romanian irregular wars, waged between Communist states and anti-Communist partisans groups.[31]

From Conventional to Irregular Civil War

The Spanish Civil War was a constant learning curve for the Spanish military, which lacked the knowledge of its European counterparts, with experience in the First World War (WWI). Spanish military leaders were seasoned veterans in the colonial war of Morocco, which had allowed them to develop a wide repertoire of brutal tactics.[32] However, this grounding was insufficient in the context of a modern war. For this reason, they needed to learn new strategies and tactics. They would also need to make use of technologies which were practically unknown in Spain. This lack of knowledge was shown during the first months of the war, between July and October 1936, when a primitive war of columns developed, which pitted small infantry units, with no heavy weaponry, against each other.[33] Expert advice from foreign military

---

[29] José María Azuaga, *Tiempo de lucha. Granada-Málaga: represión, resistencia y guerrilla, 1939-1952* (Salobreña, 2013), 449-451, 457, 596-597, 1,023-1,060; Moreno, *La resistencia,* 574; García Piñeiro, *Luchadores*, 1,002

[30] Grzegorz Motyka, Tomasz Stryjek, Rafał Wnuk, Adam F. Baran, *Wojna po wojnie. Antysowieckie podziemie w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej w latach 1944–1953* (Gdańsk-Warsaw 2012), 115, 292; José María Faraldo, *La Europa clandestina. Resistencia a las ocupaciones nazi y soviética, 1938-1948* (Madrid, 2011), 245, 249; Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge 2006), 249

[31] Motyka, Stryjek, Wnuk, Baran, *Wojna po wojnie,* 168-189, 292; Andrei Miroiu, Romanian Counterinsurgency and its Global Context, 1944–1962 (London, 2016), 36-37, 40, 75

[32] Sebastian Balfour, *Deadly Embrace: Morocco and the Road to the Spanish Civil War* (Oxford, 2002), 286-298

[33] Gabriel Cardona, 'Las operaciones militares', in Manuel Tuñón de Lara, et. al, *La Guerra Civil Española. 50 años después* (Barcelona 1985), 206; Gabriel Cardona, 'Rebelión militar y Guerra Civil', in Santos Juliá

advisors, the placing of each army under a single command and the massive arrival of heavy weaponry from Germany, Italy and the Soviet Union slowly transformed the war: from the initial symmetric nonconventional warfare to conventional civil warfare from spring 1937 onwards.[34] From then until April 1939, the war was fought between two regular armies on the battlefield, using the power of modern artillery by land, sea and air.

The defeat of the regular Republican Army did not signify the end of the internal armed conflict but a second military transformation of the war. After 1st April 1939 Franco's dictatorship had to confront an enemy that was much weaker, less numerous and completely isolated, but, at the same time, extremely elusive. As one of the most senior officials charged with eliminating all resistance in Spain admitted, the irregular civil war in the 1940s was "a cold, silent war in which", unlike a "regular campaign, (...) the enemy was hardly seen".[35] This new kind of war posed a challenge to the Spanish military which, like its Western counterparts, had an extremely limited knowledge on guerrilla warfare in 1939.[36] Later, WWII and various colonial wars would give the French, British and North American armies the experience necessary to formulate a new doctrine of counterinsurgency in the 1960s.[37]

In this context, was the Spanish military influenced by modern forms of totalitarian counterinsurgency implemented by the German and Italian armies

---

(coord.), *República y Guerra en España, 1931-1939* (Madrid 2006), 235-238; Gerald Howson, *Arms for Spain: The Untold Story of the Spanish Civil War* (London 1998), 28-30

[34] Gabriel Cardona, *Historia militar de una guerra civil. Estrategia y tácticas de la guerra de España* (Barcelona 2006), 122; Cardona, 'Rebelión, 246-247; Yuri Rybalkin, *Stalin y España: La ayuda militar soviética a la República* (Madrid 2007), 45, 59-96; Josep María Solé and Joan Villaroya, *España en llamas. La guerra civil desde el aire* (Madrid 2003), 9-10; Howson, *Arms*, 231. On the military concept of asymmetric nonconventional warfare, see: Kalyvas, 'Warfare, 92. On the Spanish case: José Luis Ledesma, 'Qué violencia para qué retaguardia o la República en guerra de 1936', *Ayer*, 76-4 (2009), 94-95.

[35] Eulogio Limia, *Reseña general del problema del bandolerismo en España después de la Guerra de Liberación*, 23 de julio de 1957, 30. Movimiento Guerrillero, Caja 105, Carpeta 3/2 (AHCCPCE)

[36] M. R. D. Foot, *SOE in France: An Account of the Work of the British Special Operations Executive in France, 1940–1944* (London 2004), 3; Jorge Marco, 'Transnational Soldiers and Guerrilla Warfare from the Spanish Civil War to the Second World War', *War in History* 26-2 (2019), 2-3, 10, 20

[37] Gabriel Bonnet, *Les guerres insurrectionnelles et révolutionnaires de l'antiquité à nos jours* (Paris 1958); Roger Trinquer, *Modern Warfare: A French View of Counterinsurgency* (Westport 2006); David Galuga, *Counterinsurgency warfare: theory and practice* (Westport 2006)

during WWII?[38] This is certainly a possibility, given that Franco's Spain, although it remained neutral in the international war, was an ally of the Axis and maintained close relations with its intelligence services. It even sent a contingent of soldiers to combat the Soviets along with the Wehrmacht.[39] However, I have not found any significant evidence of a major influence. For this reason, I would argue that the war against the anti-Francoist guerrilla movement was a small laboratory for the Spanish military, a self-learning experience. It was "a Korea in miniature", recognized a Civil Guard, which two decades later "was very useful in the fight against ETA", declared a Spanish Army General years later.[40]

Counterinsurgency in Spain led to the use of a large repertoire of techniques of repression against the armed groups and the civilians who collaborated with the resistance, which would be perfected over the next decade. During the early years the strategy was one of direct combat with the armed groups, while, from 1944, psychological warfare, the use of military intelligence and the persecution of support networks became more widely used. In the direct combat the dictatorship employed different military forces. The army directed the persecution of guerrilla groups in those zones where these had a greater presence, between 1939 and 1942, becoming more of an auxiliary force from 1943. The Civil Guard was charged with fighting the armed groups in the regions with less activity during these early stages before taking over counterinsurgency throughout the country in 1943. In addition to the army, the Civil Guard also received help from the armed police and the Brigada Político-Social (political police).[41] Further assistance was also available in the form of some 100,000

---

[38] Henning Pieper, 'The German Approach to Counterinsurgency in the Second World War', *The International History Review*, 37-3 (2015); H. James Burgwyn, 'General Roatta's war against the partisans in Yugoslavia: 1942', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 9-3 (2004)

[39] Xosé Manuel Nuñez Siexas, *Camarada invierno. Experiencia y memoria de la División Azul, 1941-1945* (Barcelona 2016)

[40] Tomás Cossias, *La lucha contra el Maquis en España* (Madrid 1956), 22; Diego Carcedo, *Sáenz de Santa María. El general que cambió de bando* (Madrid 2004), 60

[41] Limia, *Reseña*, 1; Francisco Aguado, *Historia de la Guardia Civil* (Madrid 1984), 191-192, 212; Harmut Heine, *La oposición política al franquismo* (Barcelona 1983), 432-433; Serrano, *Maquis*, 35, 79.

civilians, mainly Falangist volunteers, who, from 1945, were formed into paramilitary groups known as Somatén.[42]

Between 1939 and 1942, in those regions with low numbers of guerrilla fighters, mixed groups of civil guards, armed police and Falangists were formed to combat them. In remote villages where state forces were absent, the local authorities organized local people into paramilitary groups to pursue the guerrilla groups. By contrast, in areas with larger numbers of guerrilla fighters, such as Asturias, Ourense, Santander, Sierra Morena or Montes de Toledo, large-scale combing of the mountains was carried out by Columnas de Operaciones (operational units) and security patrols by the so-called Grupos de Limpieza (cleansing groups). Both were composed of soldiers, civil guards, police and Falangists.[43]

As the deployment of large military units to combat small highly mobile armed groups was impractical,[44] the dictatorship decided to change strategy, and, from 1942, promoted the use of smaller, more agile, military units. The Civil Guard deployed Grupos Móviles (mobile groups), Grupos de Montaña (mountain groups), small brigades and, above all, groups known as 'contrapartidas', which played an important part in the elimination of the anti-Francoist guerrilla. "Our worst enemies were the contrapartidas", the guerrilla fighter Francisco Rey Balbis commented years later.[45] These were paramilitary groups of around ten members, with a composition which varied with time. During the regular civil war and the first phase of irregular warfare, from 1937 to 1942, they were groups of persecution composed of Falangists or mixed forces of soldiers, civil guards and Falangists.[46]

From 1942 the contrapartidas were organized by the Civil Guard and named

---

[42] Interview with Ángel Hernández (Civil Guard), in Fernanda Romeu, *Más allá de la utopía: Agrupación Guerrillera de Levante* (Cuenca 2002), 89; Mercedes Yusta, *Guerrilla y resistencia campesina. La resistencia armada contra el franquismo en Aragón, 1939-1952* (Zaragoza 2003), 206; Serrano, *Maquis*, 233

[43] Fabian Mauri, *José Ramón Piñeiro. Comisario General. Brigada Social* (1998), 60; Valentín Andrés Gómez, *Del mito a la historia. Guerrilleros, maquis y huidos en los montes de Cantabria* (Santander 2008), 122; Limia, *Reseña*, 1; Heine, *La oposición*, 432-433; Serrano, *Maquis*, 35, 79; García Piñeiro, *Luchadores*, 931-933

[44] Enrique Lister, 'De la experiencia de la lucha guerrillera en España, 1939-1951', *España Republicana*, 586 (1965), 6; Heine, *La oposición*, 432-433; García Piñeiro, *Luchadores*, 931-933.

[45] V. Luis Lamela, *Foucellas. El riguroso relato de una lucha antifranquista, 1936-1952* (A Coruña 2004), 16

[46] Serrano, *Maquis*, 80; García Piñeiro, *Luchadores*, 33-35, 948

Grupos de Fuerzas del Servicio Especial (special service forces groups), becoming, in 1947, their main counterinsurgency tool. They lived in the mountains, passing themselves off as guerrilla fighters, thus creating a climate of mistrust and fear among the local population. Their function was to combine elements of psychological warfare, intelligence collection and to be the most effective strike force against the armed groups. The contrapartidas became the chief protagonists of the irregular war, carrying out massacres and other atrocities notable for their brutality. These special counterinsurgency groups, under the control of the Civil Guard, initially consisted of volunteer civil guards and local people who knew the area. However, in 1947, the latter were replaced by former guerrilla fighters who had deserted. Their knowledge of the support networks, refuges, camps and routes used by the guerrilla groups proved devastating for the resistance.[47]

The dictatorship also implemented exceptional measures in the areas with the greatest guerrilla activity, thus making these areas *de facto* occupied zones. Particularly extreme policies were introduced in Asturias, León and Galicia between 1939 and 1942, and in Teruel, Castellón, Málaga and Granada between 1947 and 1952. Here, large areas, centred on the mountains, were declared 'warzones', thus creating a "cordon sanitaire" under military control.[48] Their principal objective was to isolate the armed groups by cutting them off from their support networks. The counterinsurgency policy paid special attention to the families of the guerrillas, who provided them with food, logistics and information. In Asturias and Galicia special centres were set up for their internment, such as the concentration camp at Figueras (Asturias), where 700 women and their young children were interned.[49] Another preventive measure was the forced deportation of families to areas more than 250 km from their homes.[50] Economic repression also obliged many guerrillas' families

---

[47] *Normas reservadas para la persecución de bandoleros*, Caja 105, Carpeta 3/1 and *Normas reservadas para la persecución de bandoleros*, Caja 106, Carpeta 1/1, ACCPCE; Limia, *Reseña*, 34; Serrano, *Maquis*, 80; Jorge Marco, '"Una Corea en pequeño". Contrainsurgencia y represión de la guerrilla en España, 1939-1952', *Contenciosa*, 1-1 (2013), 8-10

[48] Heine, *La oposición*, 433; Interview with Enrique Urbano (guerrilla fighter), in José Aurelio Romero, *Recuperando la memoria* (Málaga 1997), 118.

[49] Interview with Dolores Rubio, in Fernanda Romeu, *El silencio roto. Mujeres contra el franquismo* (Barcelona 2002), 111; Gerardo Iglesias, *Por qué estorba la memoria. Represión y guerrilla en Asturias, 1937-1952* (Oviedo 2011), 150, 212

[50] Díaz, *La guerrilla*, 61-62; García Piñeiro, *Luchadores*, 892-895

to emigrate. In addition to being denied access to the labour market in their villages, their houses, farmsteads or any other properties or tools could be confiscated and burned.[51] The most common sanction for those who stayed was the requirement to report to the Civil Guard post three times a day, making it difficult for them to collaborate with the guerrilla groups.[52]

Control of the local population was not limited to the families of guerrilla fighters but extended to all the inhabitants of the area. Those who worked in the mountains (smallholders, shepherds, resin collectors, etc.) needed special authorization. Since many guerrilla groups used upland farmhouses as night-time refuges, sleeping in the mountains was also prohibited. The owners were required to hand over the keys to the Civil Guard each night. In some areas even working in the mountains by day was prohibited, with devastating effects on the local economy. A curfew from 7pm to 7am was also imposed and the Civil Guard would seal the doors of the houses to ensure that no-one was able to help the guerrillas during the night. The next morning the seal would be inspected, and, if there were any signs of it having been tampered with, the occupants would be arrested.[53] Nonetheless, in some of the most remote villages, the guerrilla fighters behaved as if they were in a liberated zone. In these cases, from 1947, the same policy as that used in Asturias and Santander in 1939 and 1940 was implemented: the forced displacement of the whole population. These displacements could be temporary or permanent, as in Acebuchal, a village in Málaga where all forty families were evicted in 1948 and only permitted to return in 1953 when guerrilla activity had ceased.[54]

Brutality and Massacres

---

[51] Azuaga, *Tiempo*, 556-557; Moreno, *Historia*, 85; García Piñeiro, *Luchadores*, 885-892; Benito Díaz, 'Tiempos de violencia desigual: guerrilleros contra Franco (1939-1952)', *Vínculos de Historia*, 5 (2016), 110

[52] José Moreno Salazar, *El guerrillero que no pudo bailar. Resistencia anarquista en la posguerra andaluza* (Guadalajara 2004), 146; Interview with Virtudes Martín, in Baird, *Between*, 167; Interview with Filomena Gómez, in Domingo, *El canto*, 176-177

[53] Díaz, 'Tiempos, 109; Interview with Ángel Hernández (Civil Guard), in Romeu, *Más allá*, 85; Interview with a neighbour from Frigiliana in Romero, *Recuperando*, 225; Yusta, *Guerrilla*, 203; Interviews with Manuel Prieto (Civil Guard) and Enrique Delgado, in Azuaga, *Tiempo*, 550-551

[54] García Piñeiro, *Luchadores*, 445; Gómez, *Del mito*, 57-61; Romeu, *Más allá*, 83, 215; Azuaga, *Tiempo*, 809; Interview with Enrique Urbano (guerrilla fighter), in Romero, *Recuperando*, 118; Interview with Aurelio Torres in Baird, *Between*, 215-220

> "We must wage war with no quarter on our enemies in the mountains until their extermination is achieved, and, since their activities are aided by accomplices, accessories and confidantes, the same system should be employed with these (...) All effective means at our disposal should be employed to ensure this."[55]

Emilio Álvarez-Arenas, director of the Civil Guard, made this emphatic declaration in an internal order of August 1941. The opposition press underlined the iron internal discipline within the Civil Guard, who expelled any member not considered sufficiently zealous in the repression of the guerrilla groups and their support networks.[56] Official documents and testimonies of civil guards have confirmed this,[57] to the point that an official would kill some ordinary civil guards for "unlimited negligence and indescribable apathy".[58] In conjunction with this discipline the Civil Guard also offered financial incentives and promotions for the death or arrest of guerrilla fighters and their go-betweens.[59] Declarations issued by the military authorities deemed the guerrilla fighters as "legal hunting trophies for all citizens".[60] These terms were typical in the internal reports of the security forces as were oral testimonies describing how dead guerrilla fighters were "dragged through the streets as if they were hunting trophies."[61]

"Fresh meat here! They've caught a mountain goat!", shouted a woman in the market on seeing some guards leading a mule carrying the body of a guerrilla

---

[55] Official instructions published in the *Boletín Oficial de la Guardia Civil*, September 1941, cited in Romeu, *Más allá*, 81

[56] 'Un capitán de la Guardia Civil castigado', *Mundo Obrero*, nº 131, 19 August 1948, 3; 'Castigo colectivo al puesto de Mora de Rubielos', *Mundo Obrero*, nº 132, 26 August, 1948, 1

[57] Órdenes, Caja 105, carpeta 3/1, Movimiento guerrillero (AHCCPCE); Romeu, *Más allá*, 87; Jorge Marco, *Hijos de una guerra. Los hermanos Quero y la guerrilla antifranquista* (Granada 2010), 255; Azuaga, *Tiempo*, 805; Interview with two Civil Guards, in Romero, *Recuperando*, 95, 292

[58] Military Trial 131,089, Files 6542 and 7849 (Archivo del Tribunal Territorial de Madrid); Miguel López Corral, 'Los fusilamientos de Mesas de Ibor', *Historia 16*, 251 (1997), 24-25

[59] Aguado, *El Maquis*, 251; Romeu, *Más allá*, 94-96

[60] Ricardo de la Cierva, in Aguado, *El maquis*, 113

[61] Comisaría General Político-Social, *La actividad político-social clandestina en España*, 3; Francisco Ruiz, *La partida guerrillera de Yatero y el movimiento guerrillero antifranquista en la provincia de Granada* (Granada 2005), 165.

fighters in the saddle.[62] This animalization of the guerrilla members was another example of the dehumanization of the 'internal enemy', a tactic which the Spanish right had been developing since the start of the 20th century and which shaped the war. This 'internal enemy' had certain ideological and class-based characteristics. Firstly, it gathered together all those who had challenged the traditional order: socialists, anarchists, communists, liberals, republicans, feminists, freemasons and peripheral nationalists. Secondly, it incorporated those who had rebelled against their traditional subaltern role, particularly urban workers and peasants. In the collective imagination of the Spanish right, this "rabble" had certain 'oriental' characteristics and were clearly racially inferior, being compared with the North African rebels who had fought the colonial troops during the first decades of the 20th century.[63] The guerrilla fighters and their support network, mainly left-wingers and peasants, were the quintessential internal enemy of the Francoists.

The high degree of brutality employed by the military and paramilitary forces in the irregular war was in keeping with the extent to which the internal enemy had been dehumanized. Some go-betweens were paraded naked through the streets carrying boards with humiliating messages while the civil guards entertained themselves by striking them or shooting at the ground to make them run. The victims were so far removed from the human condition in the eyes of the perpetrators that they could be bound and thrown into a pigsty with the pigs. This type of degrading treatment was accompanied by constant beatings which left the peasants severely injured. The reasons given for this treatment could be as trivial as the wife of a dead guerrilla fighter attempting to retrieve her husband's wedding ring before his body was buried in a common grave.[64]

This dehumanization of the internal enemy led the perpetrators to a paroxysm of violence. Many years later, a civil guard remembered how one of his

---

[62] Interview with Eduardo Triviño, in Baird, *Between*, 162

[63] Preston, *The Spanish*, 3-33; Francisco Sevillano, *La representación del enemigo en la guerra civil* (Madrid 2007), 87-105, 169-174; Xosé Manuel Nuñez Seixas, *¡Fuera el invasor! Nacionalismos y movilización bélica durante la guerra civil española, 1936-1939* (Madrid 2006), 11, 14-15, 270

[64] Marco, *Hijos*, 180-181; Interviews with Antonio Sánchez, Baldomero Torres, and a Civil Guard, in Romero, *Recuperando*, 98-99, 332-335, 343-344; Romeu, *Más allá*, 126

superiors, while they were transporting some captured guerrilla fighters, had said to him: "Look at the backs of their heads, perfect for putting a bullet in". A short time later, they were taken off the lorry and "there was a bloodbath".[65] Falangists, soldiers and civil guards trampled on the bodies after hunting them down in front of the horrified local people, to the delight of their colleagues. As described at the start of this article, go-betweens were also dragged behind horses until they were torn to pieces, a fate also shared by some guerrilla fighters.[66]

One of the techniques of repression which had the greatest psychological effect on the population was to put corpses on public display.[67] This was widely practised in the first weeks of the conventional civil war but prohibited by the military authorities in February 1937.[68] However, the nature of the irregular war led the dictatorship to reinstate it. The guerrilla groups had the advantage of invisibility, which attracted popular support and helped to mythologize them.[69] The exhibiting of corpses for days in the village square was intended to expunge these myths from the collective imagination. On occasions, even the authorities organized trips to see the body of a famous guerrilla fighter. In addition, this tactic also served to spread fear through the community. All the villagers were forced to witness the macabre spectacle of the still-warm corpses paraded around on horseback.[70] "The village was completely terrified", remembers a villager.[71] However, the civilian population maintained a wide range of social attitudes towards the dictatorship that went from frontal resistance to the most absolute adhesion. A clear example of this last case was the participation of some community members in this sinister ritual of hitting the corpses of the guerrillas, pulling their hair to show their heads and bringing lighters to burn their skin. In

---

[65] Interview with Manuel Prieto (Civil Guard), in Domingo, *El canto*, 237
[66] Marco, *Hijos*, 392; Moreno, *La resistencia*, 121, 662; Ruiz, *La partida*, 165
[67] Iglesias, *Por qué estorba*, 33-35, 189; Azuaga, *Tiempo*, 561; Moreno, *La resistencia*, 518-521; Moreno, *Historia*, 85, 121
[68] Prada, *La España*, 127-128; Espinosa, 'Julio de 1936, 107, 113
[69] Jorge Marco, *Guerrilleros and Neighbours in Arms: Identities and Cultures of Antifascist Resistance in Spain* (Brighton 2016), 170-173; Ana Cabana, *La derrota de lo épico* (Valencia 2013), 252-255
[70] Marco, *Hijos*, 392; Moreno, *La resistencia*, 662; Ruiz, *La partida*, 165; Moreno, *La Resistencia*, 121; Interview with Rosa López and Francisco Castro (Alhama, Granada) conducted by the author, Madrid, 14 December 2005
[71] Interview with two neighbours from Torrox (Málaga), in Romero, *Recuperando*, 179

this sense, these community members recovered the *rituals of collective obscenity* similar to those they used in the first months of the war in 1936.[72]

The anti-Francoist opposition claimed that, in January 1947, there had been a meeting of the leadership of the Civil Guard in which it was agreed that in the counterinsurgency war there should be no prisoners taken. The aim was to hide crimes and thus silence international criticism received in the wake of the death sentences handed out to some guerrilla fighters who had previously fought in the French Resistance. While there is no proof that this meeting ever took place, Manuel Prieto declared that, in view of the orders he had received when fighting the guerrilla groups, he suspected that Franco must have given some classified or purely verbal order to the head of the Civil Guard.[73] Even if such an order was given, it should be regarded more as an encouragement to violence, rather than to be interpreted literally, since the period between 1946 and 1949 was actually when the greatest number of go-betweens were arrested and tried by military courts.[74] However, it would be no contradiction to say that during this period there were also the most atrocities and massacres, particularly of civilians. The relatives of guerrillas and left-wing villagers were taken into the mountains to be used as human shields during the fighting. The best they could hope for was to return home badly injured after suffering a beating. Their feelings of terror would take some time to subside after being subjected to mock executions by firing-squad.

---

[72] On the plural attitudes of the Spanish population, see: Óscar Rodríguez Barreira, 'Miserias, consentimientos y disconformidades', in Óscar Rodríguez Barreira (ed.), *El Franquismo desde los márgenes: campesinos, mujeres, delatores, menores* (Almería 2013); Claudio Hernández Burgos, "Más allá del consenso y la oposición. Las actitudes de la "gente corriente" en regímenes dictatoriales. Una propuesta de análisis desde el régimen franquista", *Revista de Estudios Sociales*, 2014. Violence against guerrilla fighters´ corpses by the civil population, in: José Lora Jiménez, *Mi vida entre bandoleros* (Casiche 2001), 66-110, cited in: Gloria Román, *La vida cotidiana en el mundo rural en Andalucía oriental: Resistencias cotidianas, políticas de "consenso", control socio-moral y aprendizaje democrático, 1939-1979* (Granada 2018), 64. Social cohesion and rituals of collective obscenity in Spain in 1936, in: Bruce Lincoln, 'Revolutionary Exhumations in Spain, July 1936', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 27-2 (1985), 253-254, and Gómez Bravo and Marco, *La obra del miedo*, 70-76

[73] 'La Guardia Civil está ahíta de sangre', *Mundo Obrero*, nº 51, 30 January 1947, 3; Interview with Manuel Prieto, in Romero, *Recuperando*, 20

[74] Aguado, *El maquis*, 250

The less fortunate ones were hacked to death after having their genitals or tongue mutilated. [75]

The extent of the massacres of civilians suspected of aiding the guerrilla movement varied. There were some cases where between 10 and 30 peasants were killed, but a trickle of killings was more common: either one by one or of fewer than 10 people.[76] These massacres were eventually carried out as public spectacles. In several villages in Extremadura the Civil Guard would periodically take those suspected of being go-betweens to the bridge of Puente de Almaraz and throw them into the River Tajo. While trying to reach the riverbank they would be shot by Falangists.[77] In Asturias on 16th January 1951, the Civil Guard assembled 300 miners at the morning change of shift. They then gave a beating to one suspected of being a go-between for the guerrilla fighters, finishing him off with a bullet as he lay dying.[78] There were also cases of the bodies of go-betweens being put on public display, as described by the civil guard Manuel Prieto, who exhibited three corpses "to serve as a warning to the people".[79]

However, the majority of the massacres of civilians took place far away from the public eye. The Civil Guard and the contrapartidas usually arrested peasants or removed them from prison and took them to an outlying area where they were killed. Official reports generally covered up these killings by claiming to have applied the Ley de Fugas: the killing of a person on the pretext that he had tried to escape from the authorities. This procedure was traditionally used by the Spanish military to combat banditry or insurgents in the colonial wars,[80] but never to the extent that it was used in the irregular civil war. On other occasions the bodies

---

[75] Iglesias, *Por qué estorba*, 89; Gómez, *Del mito*, 122; Sánchez Cervelló, *Maquis*, 269; Moreno, *La resistencia*, 62; Jesús de Cos Borbolla, *Ni bandidos, no vencidos. Memorias de una gesta heroica. La guerrilla antifraquista en Cantabria* (Santander 2006), 55; García Piñeiro, *Luchadores*, 879, 883-884, 1019-1020, 1027-1029; Moreno, *Historia*, 102

[76] Moreno, *La resistencia*, 62-63, 77, 81-82, 288-289, 316-322, 474-478, 482-484, 513-531, 549-555, 574, 652-653; Julián Chaves Palacios, *Guerrilla y franquismo. Memoria viva del maquis Gerardo Antón, Pinto* (Badajoz 2005), 31-41; Azuaga, *Tiempo*, 449-451, 457, 596-597, 1023-1059; García Piñeiro, *Luchadores*, 949, 963, 966-970, 984, 1002-1031; Díaz, *La guerrilla*, 87, 198, 217-220, 280; Iglesias, *Por qué estorba*, 73-74, 105, 181-182, 218-221, 340; Romeu, *Más allá*, 115-123.

[77] Serrano, *Maquis*, 91

[78] García Piñeiro, *Luchadores*, 1028

[79] Interview with Manuel Prieto, in Azuaga, *Tiempo*, 845

[80] Serrano, *Maquis,* 243

were disposed of and the deaths not registered in any official document,[81] as would occur many years later in Latin America.

Was this brutalization a result of specific ideological preconditions, which oriented the policy of radical political cleansing? Or was it conditioned by local and internal circumstances, which led to cumulative radicalisation of violence?[82] To what extent did revenge and an absence of information contribute to the extension of these practices?[83] There is no simple answer to these questions. The program of political cleansing implemented by the Francoists from 1936 is the framework that allows us to interpret this process of brutalization. At the same time, throughout the 1940s there were geographical and chronological variations in the intensity of violence and brutality. These variations did not depend on the lack of local information (as I will demonstrate in the following section), but on the different decision-making process followed by regional military officers, who enjoyed a high level of autonomy, and the national and international political context.

The vast majority of massacres and acts of brutality took place between 1947 and 1949. In 1945 and 1946, there was a series of international campaigns against the death sentence being employed by military tribunals against guerrilla fighters who had previously belonged to the French resistance.[84] For that reason, the decision to increase massacres in isolated areas –where it was less likely that events would come to light abroad- responded to a need to conceal the crimes committed by the dictatorship. At the same time, the Franco regime felt that it was finally free to obliterate the guerrilla movement after the clear signals sent by the main international actors in favour of not intervening in Spain.[85]

Finally, local dynamics such as personal/political feuds and feelings of revenge also influenced the process of brutalization. The campaign of extermination against the guerrilla movement initiated by the dictatorship in 1947

---

[81] Sánchez Cervelló, *Maquis*, 205-206; Yusta, *Guerrilla*, 211; Azuaga, *Tiempo*, 439-440, 446-449, 460; García Piñeiro, *Luchadores*, 970

[82] Omer Bartov, *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and the War in the Third Reich* (Oxford, 1992); Ben Shepherd, *Terror in the Balkans: German Armies and Partisan Warfare* (Cambridge: 2012), 5-7

[83] Kalyvas, *The logic*, 58-61, 169-171

[84] Marco, *Guerrilleros and Neighbours,* 165-167

[85] Cowen, 'The Guerrilla, 241-243

intensified these local conflicts, generating a cycle of reprisals which had disastrous consequences. Guerrilla fighters, go-betweens, local collaborators of the dictatorship and state forces were involved in a devastating logic of action and counter-reaction, which radicalized the brutality of both armed actors.[86]

Information and Counterinsurgency

The systematic use of massacres and other atrocities did not preclude the use of other more sophisticated techniques of repression. In 1944 the Civil Guard created regional schools providing specific courses on counterinsurgency.[87] The teaching emphasized the importance of the collection, classification and use of information. During the conventional civil war the Francoist authorities greatly improved the intelligence services to facilitate the compiling of military and political information on the enemy. The former was intended to gain a tactical advantage on the battlefield while the latter was used to aid the programme of political cleansing.[88] However, the nature of the irregular war, with a scattered enemy who blended perfectly into the population, rendered the intelligence services even more important and led to the implementation of slightly different tactics to those used previously. "Information" must be "the main instrument of repression" against "las partidas" (guerrilla groups) who "function thanks to help, go-betweens and collaborators",[89] concluded a Civil Guard expert.

The offices of information of the regional military governments, the intelligence section of the armed police, the Dirección General de Seguridad (general security council) and the Falange all collaborated in the persecution of the anti-Francoist guerrilla movement, although the most significant contribution was made by the intelligence service of the Civil Guard and the 'contrapartidas'. One of its principal objectives was to infiltrate the guerrilla groups, and the political

---

[86] Jorge Marco and Mercedes Yusta, 'Irregular War, Local Community, and Intimate Violence in Spain, 1939-1952', *European History Quarterly,* 49-3 (2019)
[87] Cowan, 'The Guerrilla War, 240; Sánchez Cervelló, *Maquis*, 193; García Piñeiro, *Luchadores*, 946
[88] Gómez Bravo and Marco, *La obra*, 38, 159-177; Peter Anderson, *Friendo or Foe?: Occupation, Collaboration and Selective Violence in the Spanish Civil War* (Brighton 2016); Gutmaro Gómez Bravo, *Geografía Humana de la represión franquista. Del golpe a la Guerra de Ocupación, 1936-1941* (Madrid 2017), 90-151, 261-295
[89] Antonio Díaz Carmona, *Bandolerismo contemporáneo* (Madrid 1969), 186

groups supporting them, with informers. The first rudimentary attempts were made by mid-level officials acting on their own initiative and generally involved obtaining the collaboration of small armed groups following their arrest.[90] However, from 1945, more thorough plans for infiltration were drawn up, co-ordinated by the regional command. At times undercover agents would spend months passing themselves off as guerrilla fighters in the mountains in order to win the trust of the armed groups and be integrated into their structures. Nonetheless, the most effective tactic was infiltration by go-betweens and guerrilla fighters who had been arrested and became informers. This occurred to such an extent that in the Agrupación Guerrillera de Granada (the main guerrilla group in Andalucía) three of the five leaders would become active informers for the Civil Guard.[91] The information and co-operation of these informers was the key to the dismantling of the armed groups and their support networks.

The intelligence services of the Civil Guard also used psychological techniques to undermine the strength of the guerrilla groups. The most effective was the so-called 'tactic of attraction' whereby guerrilla fighters were encouraged to desert. It had already been used by Francoist troops during the conventional civil war in occupied zones where trapped republicans had fled to the mountains but was refined during the 1940s. Between 1937 and 1945 the method was to drop leaflets in the mountains informing those who had not committed crimes of violence that they would not be prosecuted if they handed themselves in on a certain date.[92] However, this tactic lost effectiveness when it became clear that the promise would not be kept.

From 1946-1947 three new features were added to the 'tactic of attraction'. The first was to order the cessation of mass arrests of go-betweens, to postpone interrogations and to offer to release recently arrested guerrilla fighters on bail, prior

---

[90] Military Trial nº 1233/403 (Archivo del Tribunal Togado Militar nº 23 de Almería, ATTMA)

[91] Manuel Sada Terceiro, 'El maquis. Recuerdos de un guardia civil infiltrado', *Interviú*, 511, 26 February-4 March 1986, 34; Moreno, *La resistencia*, 472-477; Marco, *Hijos*, 375-382, 407-428; García Piñeiro, *Luchadores*, 352-359, 768-770, 958-960; Serrano, *Maquis*, 297-305; Kalyvas, *The logic*, 91-106; Military Trial nº 1195/75 (ATTMA); Military Trial nº 657/24 (Archivo del Tribunal Militar Territorial Segundo, ATMTS); Military Trial nº 719/18 (ATTMA)

[92] Serrano, *Maquis*, 42, 49, 59 ; Justo Vila, *La guerrilla antifranquista en Extremadura* (Badajoz 1986), 87-88; García Piñeiro, *Luchadores*, 933-934

to initiating the campaign. The second was to dispense with the time limit for guerrilla fighters to hand themselves in, meaning that the campaign could last for months.[93] The third was for the Civil Guard to prepare personalized leaflets aimed at specific guerrillas, using information obtained from interrogations, and deliver these to their families.[94] In this way, the Civil Guard hoped to earn the trust of the guerrilla fighters and increase the pressure on them through their families.

This tactic was also used during WWII. It is more likely to succeed during periods of decadence in the guerrilla movement when the proximity of defeat tends to encourage strategies for individual survival.[95] This is exactly what took place in Spain. From 1947 the number of desertions was greater than that of arrests. This technique was not only successful in reducing the number of guerrillas, as , at the end of the campaign, the Civil Guard arrested the deserters and gave them two choices: join the contrapartidas, with a promise of better conditions in prison, or to be harshly judged by the military courts. A high percentage of the deserters are believed to have chosen the former, thus causing further damage to the guerrilla movement.[96]

Another task of the information services was the preparation of files on the population in zones of guerrilla activity. This was achieved by going from town to town listing all reports made by civilians and personal information released by town halls, priests and the local branch of the Falange. This information was then used to place each civilian into one of three categories: dangerous, favourable to the regime or indifferent.[97] State forces could then take specific measures against those suspected of sympathizing with the guerrilla movement. A blacklist could then be compiled and used to decide which individuals would be watched, arrested or killed. This was a similar technique to that used by the dictatorship to determine responsibilities during the war following punitive logic.

---

[93] Eulogio Limia, *Resumen del problema del bandolerismo en la provincia de Granada,* 4 September 1951, 3-4, Movimiento Guerrillero, Caja 106, Carpeta 1/3 (AHCCPCE)
[94] Marco, 'Una Corea, 11-13
[95] Statiev, *The Soviet*, 196
[96] Marco, 'Una Corea, 18-19
[97] Interview with Manuel Prieto (Civil Guard), in Azuaga, *Tiempo*, 462-463

However, the information services also employed other methods to obtain information, such as torture during interrogation. Prisoners of war, common prisoners and those under arrest suffered ill-treatment both during the conventional war and during the 1940s. This was mainly motivated by a desire for vengeance or that the internal enemies were less than human in the eyes of the perpetrators.[98] The purpose of this ill-treatment was not to extract a confession as the victim's guilt was taken for granted. The great difference between the ill-treatment meted out following punitive logic and the torture following counterinsurgent logic was that the latter sought a confession which would permit further arrests and operations against the anti-Francoist opposition.[99]

The Civil Guard produced a manual detailing different torture techniques, which they could apply continuously over a period of months. Under the Fuero de los Españoles, passed in 1945, any detainee had to be released or sent to the judicial authority within 72 hours. However, in practice there was no time limit for a suspect to be detained.[100] The only day of rest for a detainee was Sunday, "when the torturers went to mass".[101] Hanging up naked detainees and beating them until they lost consciousness; placing splinters under fingernails, submerging faces in water until asphyxiation; applying electric shocks to wrists and genitals; beating and burning the soles of the feet; and pulling out fingernails and toenails were the most common methods remembered by survivors.[102] Women were also subjected to specific forms of torture. Simply being naked is remembered by many female detainees as a form of humiliation, as is ill-treatment of their children during the interrogations. They were also the victims

---

[98] Javier Rodrigo, *Cautivos. Campos de concentración en la España franquista, 1936-1947* (Barcelona 2005), 156-160; Gómez Bravo and Marco, *La obra*, 214-228

[99] Victor Alba, *La oposición de los supervivientes* (Barcelona 1978), 167-169; Sánchez Cervelló, *Maquis*, 197-199, 304; Marco, 'Una Corea, 11

[100] *Fases de una investigación*, n.d., cited in Azuaga, *Tiempo*, 575; Article 18, Fuero de los Españoles, *Boletín Oficial del Estado*,199 (18 July 1945), 359; Interview with Camilo de Dios, in Domingo, *El canto*, 122; Alba, *La oposición*, 168; Sánchez Cervelló, *Maquis*, 304

[101] Interview with Remedios Montero, in Sánchez Cervelló, *Maquis*, 304-305

[102] Ricard Vinyes, *Irredentas. Las presas políticas y sus hijos en las cárceles franquistas* (Madrid 2010), 23-24; Interviews with Remedios Montero and Leandro Saún, in Sánchez Cervelló, *Maquis*, 304-305; Azuaga, *Tiempo*, 558-559, 562; García Piñeiro, *Luchadores*, 879, 923; Interview with Enrique Urbano, in Romero, *Recuperando*, 105, 119, 147; Moreno Salazar, *El guerrillero*, 63-72; Interviews with Gloria Blanco and Camilo de Dios, in Domingo, *El canto*, 98, 122; Romeu, *Más allá*, 128; Manuel Amblard, *Muerte después de Reyes. Relatos de cautividad en España* (Madrid 1977), 52-53

of sexualized torture such as rape, mutilation of the clitoris, the insertion of red-hot metal into the vagina and electric shocks to the nipples.[103]

Torture sessions were carried out in Civil Guard headquarters, police stations and secret torture centres such as farmhouses or factories.[104] An unknown number of civilians died as a result of torture, with the crimes being hidden by the perpetrators recording the Ley de Fugas or suicide as the cause of death.[105] Most victims of torture suffered severe physical and psychological after-effects for the rest of their lives. Some were unfit for work or were admitted to psychiatric units. Others were unable to cope and committed suicide.[106] Although it is taboo amongst the survivors, a significant number gave in and confessed, as admitted by the guerrilla fighter Camilo de Dios.[107] As was the case in other contemporary European military forces, the Francoist state forces found torture to be the most effective method for extracting information in counterinsurgency warfare.[108] At the same time, from the mid-1940s, new methods of interrogation were experimented with, such as the injection of Pentothal (′truth serum′), as both victims and perpetrators acknowledge.[109]

Conclusions

There has been consensus among researchers for decades that the defeat of the regular Republican Army on 1st April 1939 did not mark the end of the

---

[103] Interview with Manuel Prieto (Civil Guard), in Azuaga, *Tiempo*, 560; Vinyes, *Irredentas*, 304-304; Francisco Martínez-López, *Guerrillero contra Franco. La guerrilla antifranquista de León*, 1936-1951 (León 2002), 88; Romeu, *Silencio*, 110-111; García Piñeiro, *Luchadores*, 918, 967-968; Irene Abad, 'Las dimensiones de la "represión sexuada" durante la dictadura franquista', *Jerónimo Zurita*, 84 (2009), 84-85

[104] Moreno, *La resistencia*, 317; Interview with Enrique Urbano, in Romero, *Recuperando*, 105, 119, 147; Baird, *Between*, 70

[105] Mercedes Yusta, *La guerra de los vencidos. El maquis en el Maestrazgo turolense, 1940-1950* (Zaragoza 2005), 156; Moreno, *Historia,* 86; Sánchez Cervelló, *Maquis*, 203, 229, 306-308; Azuaga, *Tiempo*, 560, 807-808; García Piñeiro, *Luchadores*, 921

[106] Several testimonies in: Vinyes, *Irredentas*, 23-24; Azuaga, *Tiempo*, 558-559; Sánchez Cervelló, *Maquis*, 305; García Piñeiro, *Luchadores*, 880-881; Romero, *Recuperando*, 300, 304, 327; Romeu, *El silencio*, 110-111; Iglesias, *Por qué estorba*, 47, 76-77; Domingo, *El canto*, 103; García Piñeiro, *Luchadores*, 881-882; Romero, *Recuperado*, 300; Díaz, *La guerrilla*, 81, 93-94

[107] Interview with Camilo de Dios, in Domingo, *El Canto*, 122; Amblard, *Muerte*, 69-70

[108] Marnia Lazreg, *Torture and the Twilight of Empire. From Algiers to Baghdad* (Princeton 2007), 15-33

[109] Interview with Manuel Martín, in Romero, *Recuperando*, 300, 304; Amblard, *Muerte*, 49-51; Carcedo, *Sáenz de Santa María*, 60-62

violence but the continuation of the process of political extermination of the internal enemy, initiated on 17th July 1936. In this article I have shown that in military terms the war did not end on 1st April 1939 but underwent a transformation from a conventional civil war into an irregular civil war. The anti-Francoist resistance presented less of a challenge than the organized regular Republican Army between 1936 and 1939 and was miniscule compared to irregular armed groups in Europe during the 1940s. However, in military terms, the conflict between the dictatorship and the resistance undeniably took the form of an irregular civil war, as was the case in several countries in Europe during and after WWII. To describe the 1940s as a post-war period would be to underplay the armed conflict which had a great impact on the rural areas of the country while also resonating in the cities.

I have insisted here that the irregular war brought with it its own logic of violence, which, within a common programme of political cleansing, interacted with a simultaneous logic of punitive violence. The two logics were directed against the same internal enemy, which, in political and class terms had challenged the traditional order. After the defeat of the regular Republican Army the dictatorship applied an extensive punitive programme. The defeated were obliged to pay for past actions. Most were classified by the dictatorship as redeemable and subjected to an intense process of isolation, punishment and forced conversion. On the other hand, thousands of republicans were regarded as irredeemable and were executed by military courts. This punitive logic was designed to permanently subjugate the beaten enemy.

The magnitude of the repression was such that a small, but significant, number of the beaten enemies decided to rebel throughout the 1940s. The armed defiance of the guerrilla groups triggered an irregular civil war, and, with it, the logic of counterinsurgency violence. The organization of armed groups against the dictatorship was a threat to the stabilization of the regime and the most significant reminder that that the internal enemy was still not completely exterminated. For this reason, the dictatorship combined different repressive techniques, including the military courts and the penal system, but, above all, the

logic of counterinsurgency employed a wide range of brutal practices and massacres against both civilians and combatants.

Many of the methods used were similar to those employed in the conventional civil war, even some which had disappeared, such as the public display of bodies. However, there were also new practices. One of the most significant was the development of the intelligence services. These created ample networks of informers, directed paramilitary groups specializing in dirty warfare tactics, such as the contrapartidas, and introduced techniques of psychological warfare. They also designed techniques to attract guerrillas, infiltrated the main armed and political groups of the anti-Francoist opposition and systematically used torture to obtain information. Those experiments in counterinsurgency tactics carried out by other western military forces in Algeria, Cuba, Vietnam or Angola had already been put into practice by Spanish forces against their fellow citizens in their own country.

With the exception of a few dozen men who decided not to give themselves up and died in silence or remained in hiding until the end of the dictatorship, the rebellious enemies laid down their arms at the end of 1952. In 1948 Stalin recommended to the Spanish Communist Party not to focus exclusively on armed struggle, but also to develop other strategies such as infiltration into the structures of the state. The devastating effects of counterinsurgency, the internal conflicts within the anti-Franco opposition, and the lack of external support, led the Spanish Communist Party to make the decision four years after Stalin's advice. The rebellious enemy was finally beaten after being subjected to more than a decade of terror. There was no official declaration to mark the end of the irregular war. In 1956, the Spanish Communist Party, the political organization which had given most support to the guerrilla movement, rejected the use of violence to overthrow the dictatorship.

Henceforth, the dictatorship would modulate the intensity of the violence and regulate the methods of repression in response to the challenges presented by a new generation of anti-Francoists. Nonetheless, some counterinsurgency methods learned during the irregular war, such as the use of informers, torture

and infiltration of organizations became part of the everyday repertoire of Francoist anti-subversive policy.