

Examining the tensions of the spanish civil war within catalonia



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Spain, once a paramount state ruled under religious conformity and wealth was managed under the unwavering imperial power of the Catholic monarchy and church. Although, with the start of the 16th century began the decline of strong Spanish rule. With the state's lack of social change due to the religious restrictions placed by the church, and high state taxation upon its citizens, it brought upon the tumultuous rule from the 17th century well into the 20th century. Loss of Spanish territory had dwindled tremendously from its original amount in the 16th and 17th centuries, such as the loss of land in Cuba, the Philippines, and Guam, and regressive social and economic policies came to influence numerous battles of independence within the land. 20th-century Spain was a state full of economic and social inequalities, with most of the state wealth and industry held within the Catalanian regions—specifically Barcelona. Additionally, the lack of technological advancement kept the nation in a regressive state.

A divided Spain was evidently demonstrated through a divided government within the 1930s. The Spanish government was completely divided through the Republicans of the Second Spanish Republic, who were allied with the Anarchists and Communists, and fought for a legitimate Spanish State under the support of union and labor movements. Additionally, the Nationalist parties were a prominent opposing force who were supported by Nazi Germany and Mussolini's Italy, and were allied with Falangists, Monarchists and the Catholic Church—which sought to defend a totalitarian state.

Moreover, under the Francoist rule during the Spanish Civil War repression and subjugation on the Catalan minority were able to occur. The differing political, social and economic tensions all contributed towards the formation

of the Spanish Civil War. Moreover, the effects of the civil war were tremendously vast and explosive towards the nation—this as exceptionally evident within the region of Catalonia.

Historians scholars like Andrew Dowling, Simon Harris, I. A. L., and Conxita Mir have analyzed the following tensions that arose within the Catalan region during the Spanish Civil War. These scholars have examined stressors, and the agencies in which the Spanish government had control over, that allowed and influenced the Civil War to persist in Catalonia—such as the lack of agricultural productivity, lack of economic prospects stemming from such inactivity, the Catholic Church (and their influence, affluence, and religious hierarchy amongst a state with a growing agnostic population), the role of the minority, and the emergence of Catalanian culture from tumultuous origins. Furthermore, the interference of conservatism through militarization and state politics, against the scope of regionalism, is seen within this time period. Regionalism stems forward as a major influence on the Catalonians, and ultimately influences their need for autonomy from the Spanish government. Through the Spanish government's ability to control the aforementioned agencies, it enabled domination over opposition forces and doubters of the secular identity agenda.

These scholars, who've studied these tensions that surfaced during the Spanish Civil War within the region of Catalan, conclude how issues of forced pacification and compliance within Catalonia by the Spanish government led to the revival, survival, and perseverance of a minority during an era of nationalism. With the rejection of the Spanish identity during a time of strain, and the forces that heavily influenced the Spanish Civil War, it illustrates the <https://assignbuster.com/examining-the-tensions-of-the-spanish-civil-war-within-catalonia/>

turbulent effects upon a region considered autonomous (by its own residents) from the Spanish government.

Church & State: Tensions Within Catalonia

The power of the Catholic Church has historically illustrated its evolving relations with national governments. From the creation of a monarchical political system, the influence of the Catholic Church has demonstrated to be intertwined with conservative politics and government. Throughout Spanish history, individuals witness the theme of an interlaced church and state, and scholars such as Dr. Andrew Dowling and Conxita Mir have analyzed how tensions between both variables, under the Francoist rule within the Spanish Civil War, ultimately led to controversial occurrences by the Catholic Church under the guise of the Spanish government. With the emergence of the Catholic Church, during the start of the 1st century, the institution has long seen itself as a prominent and leading force of power within the nation of Spain that “[held] great wealth.” [1] Dr. Andrew Dowling iterates that the role of the Catholic Church in Spain was capitalized as a religious hierarchy within the state. It was speared as an institution not only powerful enough to influence tremendous change, but also in its amalgamated role within the Spanish government.

Through the rise of General Francisco Franco during the Spanish Civil War of the 1930s, the Catholic Church saw an ally in the future general and dictator. While the Franco regime brought unity between the state, church, and military, both church and state ultimately depicted the Spanish Civil War as a holy war in which to combat godless communists. Consequently, with the

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support of the church, it gave legitimization towards a new and frightening political system. Although, tensions between the church and its people were more prominent within the region of Catalonia. Throughout the region of Catalan, it was the period of pre-1930s that demonstrated a period of anti-clericalism—specifically during the 15th century in the Thirty Years War and the Franco-Spanish Civil War. This, in turn, set forth the movement of Republicanism in Catalonia, who believed in liberation from the Spanish State. It was during these two 15th century wars that the opposition of the union of crowns (through marriage), of the Crown of Aragon (which obtained the entity of Catalonia) and the Crown of Castile (later known as Spain), was demonstrated by Catalonian peasants through revolt. Ultimately unsuccessful, the Catalan government was unable to establish independence from the principality of Castile, and the region was thus considered an entity under Spain during the War of Spanish Succession.

Through the Spanish Civil War, Catalonia turned away from the mandatory religious dogmas of the church and established a new order of grassroots movements to admonish the anti-Catalan values that were preached by the Catholic Church—“ The Franco regime restored the Church to a position of preeminence yet the belligerent and anti-Catalan nature of Spanish National Catholicism would ensure a break with the regime would take place.” [2] Within the Franco regime, the rise of anti-clericalism in Catalonia assisted in the rise of the minority and its autonomy from church and state. It propelled sentiments of self-determination and refusal of a national religion within the confines of their region.

In the Franco political system, the establishment of pro-Catholic Church policies, such as the establishment of Catholicism as the official religion of Spain and the teachings of Catholicism within all academia, flourished ^[3]. As the power of the Catholic Church increased during the rule of Francisco Franco, the terror upon Catalonians increased and the lack of response from the church continued. Dowling asserts, “ The Catholic Church remained silent on the terror that was institutionalized as construction of the New State proceeded apace.” ^[4] Dowling provides that the role of the church, and enforced religious hierarchy within the state by General Franco, was laid out to be one intertwined with conservative politics in a time of anti-religious sentiments ^[5] due to longings for liberation within Catalonian urban masses. Thus, it created regional mass killings based on religious grounds. Moreover, the rise of anti-clericalism also brought along the rise of independence movements in Catalonia. The need for autonomy from the status quo of Spanish governmental affairs, and its religious sentiments, became embedded within its culture.

Scholar Conxita Mir draws upon further examination of the state itself, and its committed offenses against Catalonia. The rule of Franco was a regime which used repression and subjugation upon the Catalonians to enforce secularization of the Catholic ideals and Francoist nationalism. The Francoist state monopolized on agencies, such as the military, and economic, social and political authorities, to draw upon the fear of compliance against the Spanish minority— “ It covers both physical violence and measures such as

economic repression, imprisonment, professional purges and the social and moral control to which the population as a whole was subjected.” [6]

Mir states numerous instances in which the process of militarization and lack of, or no, due process was utilized to squash Republican tolerance and spread within Catalonia.

This, however, did nothing to abate the fury of the occupiers, which was vented upon a defenceless, exhausted population, living in a backward region that had been further impoverished by the proximity of the front...In any event, the number of extrajudicial deaths recorded...was extremely large...Even so, the figures quoted in the book for the total number of victims caused by repression in each province are constantly being updated...[Solé Sabaté] also provides evidence of the shooting of 148 Republicans who were never tried by a war tribunal and the deaths of 169 political prisoners, and estimates that hundreds of undocumented deaths occurred, presumably as the result of uncontrolled violence during the initial phase of the occupation, when the cemetery was on the Republican side of the front that divided the city in two. [7]

With Francoist rule, the repression and subjugation of an entire population was possible. The violence implemented against the Catalonians, a total between 10, 000 to 11, 000 victims in Catalonia [8], by Francoist repression, against anti-Catholic insurgents, demonstrates the Spanish state's ability to deal out minority pacification with coercion and force. The people who resided within the region of Catalonia, Republican or non-combatants, were

shown a certain amount of hatred, and handed out punishments of execution, simply due to grounds of being suspected Republican sympathizers. ^[9] Repression implemented upon Catalonians was its harshest during 1943, well into the 1950s, when the process of collectivization was being implemented within the region and daily executions (up to 10 deaths per day ^[10]) were being administered. It is to be noted that these activities of oppression and repression occurred when the most pushback against the Francoist regime was taking place—specifically through guerilla activity.

The regime was able to use these agencies to exercise domination, violence against naysayers/insurgents, and establish a secular identity upon Spain's conquered regions and establish forced compliance and pacification upon the Catalan countries. Through the scholar's works, Dowling and Mir evaluate on the monopolization of power and agencies by the Catholic Church and the Second Spanish Republic. The scholars bring forth how the Spanish state actions ultimately motivated the demands of succession by the Spanish minority, the Catalonians, and it's yearning for independence from the Spanish nationalists.

The role of Regionalism & Nationalism

The ultimate rejection of nationalism, and the Spanish identity, by the region of Catalan is illustrated during the Spanish Civil War. Authors Dr. Andrew Dowling, Simon Harris, and I. A. L. examine how with the Franco regime brings forth the emergence and revival on Catalan culture due to the influence and practice of regionalism—despite measures of an imposition on

national Spanish identity, and repression towards the Spanish minority identity.

Dowling brings his analysis into focus from the role of the Catholic Church, as previously noted, to the rejection of Spanish nationalism by Catalonians.

With the Francoist government's imposition of a national Spanish identity, as a means of repression to the minorities within the Spanish realm, the imposition came to be more violent when grassroots movements within Catalonia aided in the elimination of Franco's establishment of nationalistic policies. Dowling states, " The initial political project of the Franco Regime... included the destruction of its social and political enemies...the evolution of the Franco regime which initially sought to impose a monolithic national identity by means of the repression of its national minorities." ^[11] Although, it is in Catalonia General Franco saw firm protest against the Spanish identity, and affirmation of the Catalan nationalism agenda.

With the pushback on Catalan culture and identity, Harris analyzes how the influence of regionalism in the Catalans set forth a desire for autonomy from the Spanish government. Harris states, " Catalan culture under Franco didn't so much undergo a revival as a survival. It never ceased to exist but had been so suppressed that it disappeared from view...Given the strong tradition of associationism at all levels of society, it was just a question of time before the Catalan language and culture would break through to the surface and flourish once again." ^[12] The minority, the Catalonians, were flourishing, despite the oppressive Francoist regime. Historian I. A. L. considers the attempts taken by the Spanish government, and its allies, to

suppress sympathy and sentimentalism towards regionalism— such as the removal of oral and written traditions in the Catalans. I. A. L. writes, “ The idea is, or so the Catalanists say, to kill the language at the sources of its renewal and to condemn it to sterility.” [13] The measures that General Franco and his party took to ensure that Catalan independence wasn’t possible were vast, such as ensuring that Catalan culture and language was dependent to political, social, and economic institutions in all Spanish regions, prohibition of Catalan names, and the discontinuation of the Catalan language in public institutions—orally and written. So, why was such an occurrence able to transpire, despite the full power of the state being behind the Franco regime? Harris states that such a phenomenon transpires due, in part, to the continuous measures of assault and resistance from the Catalonians against Spain’s Nationalist forces—“ Despite the extraordinary levels of repression, there were always small pockets of Catalan resistance to the Franco regime.” [14] It was demonstrated that through these ongoing acts of resistance, and maintenance of oral and written traditions, the local Catalonian government was able to maintain and preserve their culture. These acts of bravery was an emphasis on the importance of preserving traditions and customs, even in a environment that hostile and oppressive to your way of life, because it went against the Spanish political agenda. I. A. L. also emphasizes similar thought, and recapitulates that the efforts of the Spanish to quell ideologies of regionalism essentially backfires. He argues that the consequences of repression on the practice of regionalism has thus created prominent political movements against the status quo, which was the Spanish identity—“ Catalonia and the Basque country produced political

movements strong enough to obtain from the Spanish Republic a considerable measure of regional.”^[15] Despite the known repercussions of defying the Spanish national order, the need for regional autonomy continued to persist on and prosper within the Spanish Civil War, due to factors such as the production of Catalan written and oral traditions within Spanish society.

The Afterthought

Throughout the Spanish Civil War, the corruption embedded within the Spanish government led to a regressive and backward state in which the division between church and state versus its minorities was evident, the power of the state was unquestioned, the role of the minority was repressed and integrated to be a part of the national majority identity, and autonomy was quelled. The historians mentioned throughout this historiography help to identify more closely how themes and tensions of inequality, regionalism, nationalism, church, and the state affected regions like Catalonia during the Spanish Civil War. Moreover, cultural and literary resistance, as displayed by the Catalonians during the Spanish Civil War, demonstrate the phenomenon of independence and the rise of the minority, during an era of regional and minority repression. Regional groups, like Catalonia, who challenged the foundation and nationalistic ideologies of the Spanish government under the Francoist regime illustrates the force needed to undergo political, social, and economic autonomy from the Spanish state. Thus, witnesses of past and current history may want to doubt the virtue of the creation of barriers by

politics and religion, and question the usefulness of the creation of a state by cultural and regional ties.

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Library of Congress.” (1988), 45.

[4] Dowling, *The Catholic Church in Catalonia* , 86.

[5] *Ibid.*, 89.

[6] Mir, Conxita. “ The Francoist Repression in the Catalan Countries.” *Catalan Historical Review* (2008), 132.

[7] Mir, *The Francoist Repression in the Catalan Countries*, 135-36.

[8] *Ibid.*, 137.

[9] *Ibid.*, 135.

[10] *Ibid.*, 137.

[11] Dowling, Andrew. “ Prohibition, Tolerance, Co-option: Cultural Appropriation and Francoism in Catalonia, 1939–75.” *Contemporary European History* 27 (2018), 3.

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[13] I. A. L. “ Regionalism in Franco’s Spain.” *The World Today* 12, no. 10 (October 1956), 406.

[14] Harris, Simon. *Catalonia Is Not Spain: Chapter 22* .

[15] I. A. L., *Regionalism in Franco’s Spain* , 399.