

Spanish civil war



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Since the end of the Spanish Civil war in 1939, the Catalans suffered a systematic and thorough repression at the hands of Franco (Hansen 1977: 1). He had a special hatred for Catalonia, believing that Catalan nationalism and separatism were one and the same (McRoberts 2001: 46). The regime lasted over thirty years and it perpetrated the serious attempt to culturally and linguistically homogenize the peoples of Spain.

It implemented a strong 'nationalization', employing all the resources available - both physical and psychological repression, control of media, education, the elites and the bureaucracy - to create a 'surveillance state' (Guibernau 2004: 35, 49). According to Kenneth McRoberts, "' Despite the best efforts of the Franco regime, Catalonia was still intact when Franco finally died on 20 November 1975". This essay will analyze the impact of Francoism on Catalonia in the light of this statement.

Not only did the regime aim to destroy the political structure, but also Catalonia's spirit, its culture, its very strength and life. Repression was felt at all levels of everyday life, because the intention was to establish a 'New Plan' regime to annihilate any vestige of a Republican and independent past and to block any possibility of resistance. It was a white terror, official and relentless, without anyone to intervene for the victims or to try to save them. First of all, the use of Catalan was prohibited given its status as a second language (Segura 2006: 1-9).

Even in the workplace Catalan was banned as a spoken language. In the University of Barcelona, all subjects dealing with Catalan culture were abolished, and The Institut d'Estudis Catalans was replaced with an Institutio

Espanol de Estudios Mediterre neos. Punishment for the offenders ranged from simple fines to dismissal from the workplace, exile and prison. In the first years of dictatorship, many people were accused of 'separatism' merely for 'daring' to speak in Catalan (Conversi 1997: 111-113).

Moreover, between 1938-1939 more than 108, 000 prisoners were taken to concentration camps and others were executed after sentencing by the Catalan War Commission (Segura 2006: 8). As a consequence, around 500, 000 people fled into exile, 200, 000 of whom came from Catalan-speaking areas. The scope of all these measures was not simply to suffocate Catalanism, but to eradicate Catalan culture and any sign of a separate identity at its very roots. Their result was devastating: Barcelona, the city of revolutionary anarchists and experimental artists, of thronging boulevards and excited discourse, had become another grey provincial Spanish town.

A defeated silence fell over the entire nation, a silence that for years would remain virtually unbroken" (Conversi 1997: 113). Although Catalans were defeated and their country was destroyed, but their identity was preserved thanks to the dynamic action of a very small intellectual elite and also thanks to family circles within which Catalan was spoken. Most Catalans, irrespective of their social class, regarded the Franco regime and its officials as a common enemy.

Only certain sectors of the Catalan bourgeoisie received the Francoist victory with relief and showed their support for the new fascist ideology committed to protecting their economic interests (Guibernau 2004: 51-52). Cultural resistance in the private arena was exercised, above all, by the middle

classes and some sectors of the bourgeoisie critical of Francoism, while the working class and the rural population maintained Catalan, because it was the language they always spoke to.

They learned from their parents and it was normal to use it in everyday life. Catalan was employed to express their most intimate emotions and feelings. In Catalonia, language is the distinguishing and most important element of Catalan identity; hence the obsession of the Franco regime, and many others before it, to reduce the Catalan language to a philological curiosity without any social use. It was originally founded by a small middle-class intellectual group of amateur singers and soon developed into an entirely popular phenomenon.

Their protest songs and classical or modern poetry turned into lyrics became an popular phenomenon (Guibernau 2004: 63-65). The success of singers rekindled national consciousness in all Catalan-speaking areas. It was one of the most effective vehicles for the propagation of national consciousness among the masses. This shows that even though repression threatened Catalan culture's vitality, it could hardly erase the awareness of a strong cultural potential which was already firmly established before the Civil War (Conversi 1997: 121, 123).

Lastly but, most importantly, Franco's ruthless repression and sweeping social change together instigated a re-definition of Catalan identity (Conversi 1997: 137). One of the first stirrings of a renewed Catalanism occurred within the Church that played a remarkable role in preserving Catalan, not just through its use in sermons and religious education, but also as an instrument

of culture and communication (Guibernau 2004: 59). The Church was sufficiently powerful that some Catalans could use it as a sanctuary in which to affirm their identity.

He denounced the Franco regime's violation of fundamental Christian principles (McRoberts 2001: 42-43). This was the burning indictment of the regime, since its legitimacy rested on Catholic backing (Conversi 1997: 127-128). Catalan nationalism moved in a radically different direction from the nationalism of the 1930s, this new phase was also more spiritual and traditionalist than the earlier conservative nationalism (McRoberts 2001: 43).

Secondly, in the late stage of Francoism, far-reaching social changes, such as immigration and a booming economy, shifted the focus onto new issues. In response, new political movements (Marxism, 'independentism' etc.) addressed these new challenges by trying to adapt to, and re-define, national reality. This process of re-definition was important in the intellectual arena, with the emergence of a new historiographical tradition and its related methodologies.

This reflects a contrast between the two stages of defeat and renewal: early forms of opposition were virtually eradicated after the fall of Barcelona and barely survived till 1952 in the form of intermittent and weak guerrilla actions. To conclude, I do not agree completely with the statement from McRoberts that Catalonia was still intact after Franco's death. Francoist repression was enormously cruel and it had no possible comparison, not even with the other European Fascisms from before the Second World War.

Not only did the Catalans lose their institutions and freedom, but also a whole generation of men and women who made up the cream of the cultural, associative and political life of Republican and autonomous Catalonia (Segura 2006: 12-16). Despite the situation, Catalonia had managed to retain its cultural distinctiveness, especially its language, and many Catalans remained convinced that they were a nation. Indeed, some observers consider that Catalonia is a model for other nations without state and that it demonstrates the irrelevance of sovereignty and other outmoded political nations (McRoberts 2001: 45, 180).