

Fall 2012

One Last Fight: Telling the Stories of the Anti-Francoist Guerrilla in Twenty-First Century Spain

Luis Martín Estudillo

Megan L. Corbin

West Chester University of Pennsylvania, mcorbin@wcupa.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.wcupa.edu/langcult_facpub



Part of the [Spanish Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Estudillo, L. M., & Corbin, M. L. (2012). One Last Fight: Telling the Stories of the Anti-Francoist Guerrilla in Twenty-First Century Spain. *Hispanic Issues On Line*, 12, 232-240. Retrieved from http://digitalcommons.wcupa.edu/langcult_facpub/14

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Arts & Humanities at Digital Commons @ West Chester University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Languages & Cultures by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ West Chester University. For more information, please contact wccressler@wcupa.edu.

◆ Afterword

One Last Fight: Telling the Stories of the Anti-Francoist *Guerrilla* in Twenty-First Century Spain

Luis Martín Estudillo
Megan Corbin

The essays included in this volume expose the negotiation that creators of aesthetic constructs are faced with when given a set of received stories (personal memoirs, folk accounts, propaganda, films, photographs, drama) that deal with a historical phenomenon—the ‘maquis’ or armed groups that fought the Nationalist regime, from the start of the rebellion of 1936 until well into the 1950s. The power of the works examined here rests on a series of discourses that have had as much influence—through their portrayal of that protracted conflict—as did the actual activities carried out by the guerrillas and their more powerful antagonists. Aesthetic responses to the maquis’s experience range from the propagandistic efforts of the regime to the almost hagiographic portrayals of some of the members of the guerrillas. Yet, only a few of those studies managed to go beyond the demonization or exaltation of these ‘criminals’ or ‘freedom fighters,’ as opposing views would label them. Approaching these stories in a critically informed way, from first-hand accounts to current narratives based mostly on previous fictions, is necessary if one wishes to understand the singularity of the maquis and its place in the recent history of Spain. The way symbolic products dealing with this figure implicate us in the complexities of those vital (and often lethal) experiences and, more broadly, the manner in which an open society deals with the memory and practice of different kinds of resistance to a variety of power establishments, means that this figure remains pointedly relevant today.

The relevance of these questions becomes clearer when one considers Spain’s social context in this second decade of the Twenty-first century, when the risk of social fracture is probably at its highest point since the

Armed Resistance: Cultural Representations of the Anti-Francoist *Guerrilla*
Hispanic Issues On Line (2012)

reestablishment of democracy. The current pervasive lack of trust in institutions and the lack of hope for the future stems from the realities of record levels of unemployment, a radical downgrading of public services and social protection networks, diminishing workers's rights, increasingly clashing nationalisms, and myriad examples of unethical behavior on the part of political and financial leaders. The social malaise at the origin of this grim panorama has pushed to the side the debates on 'historical memory,' thereby obscuring the previous decade's prominent public controversy regarding the public uses of recent history, an issue to which the topic of this volume is closely related.¹ However, one could argue that the examination of anti-Francoist armed resistance belongs just as much to the realm of memory as to the conflictive—and potentially explosive—moment in which Spain is presently immersed.

Observers have remarked that Spain is not witnessing the kind of open social clashes that have accompanied Greece's version of the current financial crisis. Since the beginnings of the recession in 2008, civil servants have protested loudly, but have not resorted to violence. And while protesting miners have been "raucous and occasionally violent," as *The New York Times* put it, such rumblings are contrary to the norm. Moreover, extremist political organizations remain largely absent from the scene and the lack of displays of heightened conflict is striking given the dire situation of both the unemployed and the underemployed.

This absence can be seen as a remnant of the political practices and patterns of socialization favored officially during the dictatorship and the transition to democracy. The New Order established by the Franco regime following the Civil War attempted to eliminate or at least limit as much as possible any form of social protest. This agenda is evidenced by the special emphasis the regime placed on the destruction of organized labor movements (Molinero and Ysàs). While focusing on eliminating outward manifestations of protest, the regime also sustained a strategy of general depoliticization by expressing contempt for political parties and by instilling in the citizenry a common weariness toward plurality. The trend toward a depoliticization of the people continued during the transition, a time that was marked by a continued demobilization of social movements which, along with depolarization, "had the effect of reducing the excitement of political participation during a crucial stage of attitudinal development" (Gunther, Montero and Botella, 151).

Experiences that contrast with the political culture of disengagement favored by Francoism during the transition to democracy are thus exalted as valuable displays of the citizenry's commitment during times of as much unrest and uncertainty as the present. That the maquis is now seen under such positive light may be related to the fact that guerrilla warfare is an *active, confrontational* resistance generated from below against the political status quo. At a time of clear disconnect between the citizenry and its

political representatives (as identified by political scientists and denounced by civic movements such as 15-M), such a stance has resonance among certain sectors of Spain's most discontented people as well as the most politically conscious population. For some among this group, the anti-Francoist guerrilla may appear as a clear precedent for a vigorous form of popular resistance exercised against a government that is perceived to be acting against the general interest of its people.

Along these lines, it is interesting to note that the experiences of the maquis and the example set by their efforts have acquired a central role in initiatives that build connections between historical memory, social activism, and other civic concerns such as the protection of the environment or the defense of rural lifestyles. Such is the case of *La Gavilla Verde*, an association created in the small town of Santa Cruz de Moya (in the mountains where Aragón, Castilla-La Mancha, and Valencia meet) whose remarkable work on the guerrillas includes meetings dedicated to the celebration of the maquis, events that have been occurring annually since the year 2000. Pablo Sánchez León and Carlos Agüero (in this volume) analyze this association's role as a catalyst for a model of civic engagement that questions the validity of assumptions about epistemic authority over the past. Similar displays of resistance to the domestication of the maquis's lived experience by those who seek to retell it are dealt with by Gina Herrmann (in this volume), whose analysis rests on the testimonies given by former guerrilla Remedios Montero, which Herrmann interprets as a strategic deployment of secrets, silences, and withholdings that lend Montero agency over not only the initial telling of her experience, but the continued reenactment of her story (by both herself and others).

Understanding the surge of interest in the maquis revealed by groups such as *La Gavilla Verde* and individuals whose works are analyzed in this volume, requires not only relating them to the 'memory boom' that occupied much of the social and cultural panorama of Spain during the first decade of this century, but also contextualizing them within wider currents. Until recently in Europe, this focus on memory was deep and extensive, to the point that some scholars, such as Tony Judt, were claiming it was "indulging to excess the cult of commemoration." Judt went on to argue that "the first post-war Europe was built upon deliberate *mis*-memory—upon forgetting as a way of life. Since 1989, Europe has been constructed instead upon a compensatory surplus of memory: institutionalized public remembering as the very foundation of collective identity" (Judt 829). From a comparative perspective, the relative belatedness that Spain may have experienced with respect to this *official* attention to the recent past is probably due to the chronological proximity of the dictatorship and an unwillingness to engage with this politically-charged past during the transition to democracy.² More intriguing, however, is the limited form of institutionalization that the cult of memory took in Spain. The scarce recognition of the maquis by state

authorities is a clear example of this incomplete treatment of the consequences of the Civil War and the dictatorship even after the passing of the so-called “Historical Memory Act” in 2007.

While a few typological characters of the ‘Spanish drama,’ such as the international brigadiers or the exiles, have been exonerated and publicly vindicated by the democratic establishment, the anti-Francoist guerrilla fighters have only enjoyed limited institutional recognition. As historian Santiago Vega points out, “[l]os mismos que eran homenajeados en Francia por combatir el nazismo, en nuestro país todavía son considerados por amplios sectores de la población como delincuentes o bandidos. Muchos de ellos fueron fusilados o asesinados en el monte y sus cuerpos permanecen donde los dejaron sus ejecutores” (Vega Sombria 293) (the same individuals who were the objects of official homages in France for their fight against Nazism are still seen as delinquents or bandits by a large segment of the public in our country. Many of them were summarily executed or killed in the mountains, and their bodies lay where their executors left them).³ The brigadiers who left their native countries to fight for the Spanish Republic are widely seen as an example of generosity and idealism, and the exiled community is usually metonymically reduced to its most culturally prestigious minority. Interestingly, as Elena Cueto Asín shows in her essay (in this volume), in some instances the guerrilla fighter was constructed as “a second self for the exiles, one that fulfills the desire to join the continued fight” (64). The positive patinas that adorn the image of both brigadiers and exiles, and the fact that Francoist propaganda was less proactive against them due to their essential neutralization by virtue of their physical distance from Spain, have resulted in an easier repositioning of their roles within the imaginary of the democratic era. Since this new climate has as one of its core principles the rejection of any kind of political violence (at least in theory), the location of the guerrilla and active use of armed resistance within that imaginary is much more problematic for Spain’s political class as well as for Spain’s citizenry in general.

Thus, it could be said that as the former participants in the conflict who are still alive get closer to the end of their days, they are witnessing one last fight: that which concerns their place in history and public memory. Historians as well as writers and filmmakers are nowadays most responsible for the position of the guerrilla fighters in the national narrative as they now undertake the aesthetic representation of resistance which, in many ways are shaped by their own political sensitivities.⁴ However, as Ángel Loureiro underscores in his essay (in this volume), there are qualitative differences among the representations of the maquis, something that is shared by Santiago Morales-Rivera (also in this volume) who sees in Carlos García-Alix’s film, *El honor de las injurias*, a resistance to historical reductionism. Both critics are right to point to the difficulties of addressing the past in ways that are not overtly simplifying. Bernardo Antonio González (in this

volume) complicates the vision of the maquis by presenting the overlap of the personal and the political by identifying cases of deception which give “emotional texture” to “the collective dimension of what is, in essence, a psycho-social study of the effects of isolation and oppression on a besieged community” (186).

The complexity of approaching issues related to ‘historical memory’ is particularly relevant when dealing with the maquis, as the symbolic treatment of the long and mostly hidden conflict they sustained has been prone to a romanticized Manichean vision that either demonizes it or glorifies it due to its underground nature (the continuation of a war after victory had been claimed.) The secrecy that necessarily governs guerrilla operations contributed to the strategic creation of myths by the repressive forces of the Franco regime. As Carmen Moreno-Nuño points out (in this volume), such myths painted the maquis as a gang of bandits and assassins and were subsequently used by the regime to eventually destroy the guerrilla resistance. After the restoration of democracy, a more limited process of mythification (which is examined by Ulrich Winter (in this volume) has helped to salvage their memory as heroes of the anti-fascist resistance. However, to this day, any vision of the armed opposition to the Franco regime remains conditioned by the images generated by the general’s New State’s apparatuses. These forces were very active in their propaganda and counter-information efforts during the dictatorship, and were extremely successful in their endeavor. As those institutions mutated into liberal ones during the onset of the democratic era, they were comparatively much less energetic in revising past propaganda that negatively represented the guerrilla; there was no urgency to do so, since the low-profile conflict was buried in all possible senses, and the social benefits of unearthing the fight of the anti-Francoist guerrilla fighters were unclear, except to its protagonists.

Managing the public image of the guerrillas was seen as an important security and ideological issue from the moment of their emergence at the beginning of the Civil War. As early as the summer of 1936, groups of soldiers carried out pro-Republican guerrilla operations within the areas of the country where the military uprising had succeeded. But what is usually considered to be the anti-Francoist guerrilla was the constellation of small groups formed by soldiers of the defeated army who realized that the new regime would not accept them in the order it created following its victory in 1939. Upon their return home from the front, they encountered a severe system of repression that was already in place, and often they were imprisoned and killed. Thus, many of them sought refuge in the mountains. At first their goal was their own survival, but soon some dreamt of defeating the dictatorship. The Nationalist army responded swiftly with a counter-offensive that took different forms, including the creation of feigned guerrillas that committed delinquent acts against the community in order to

undermine their support for the partisans, whose activity could serve as a reminder of the regime's contested legitimacy. The clashes would last until the early 1950s and resulted in over 25,000 victims between fighters and collaborators, either dead or convicted (Mateos 4; Vega 291). The military actions undertaken to crush the maquis were backed by a sustained propaganda campaign in several media, which consistently presented the fighters as degenerate criminals, (Moreno-Nuño in this volume). This battle of representations has not been limited to Spain, as Sebastiaan Faber shows (in this volume). Faber's analysis traces the give and take that occurs between visual representations of the Republican figure and the political demands of a given time. Focusing on the US context, Faber demonstrates parallel processes to those explored in Spain by others in this volume.

In the most favorable views, the maquis would be perceived as failed heroes, as their struggle did not have a distinctive role in the demise of the Francoist regime. In any case (i.e., both in positive and not-so-positive accounts), the maquis experience is at risk of becoming typified. Its heterogeneity may end up being reduced to a series of stereotypes highlighting the animalization of the guerrilleros as a consequence of their customary rural or 'wild' setting, or characterizing them as elusive types being 'hunted down' by the state security corps. In an attempt to counter this type of reductionism, the representation of the connection between the maquis and their milieu is problematized by Alberto Medina, Germán Labrador-Méndez, and María Agustina Monasterio Baldor (in this volume). Medina reflects on the engagement produced by the imaginative contemplation of the sublime landscape in Julio Llamazares's *Luna de lobos*, along with its sensual absorption of the reader, which, for Medina, signals a mandate for ethical engagement, as it creates a space for a productive relationship between Myth and History, and a new, ethical confrontation with the melancholia, forced oblivion, and legend of the ghostly past. Labrador-Méndez and Monasterio Baldor emphasize the urban character of the maquis imaginary and the scripting of the country as the "magic mountains," something that ignores the fact that other communities existed between the space of the city and the mystique of the hillside.

As the editing of this volume was being completed, there appeared other works dealing with the maquis. The most prominent among them is Almudena Grandes's novel *El lector de Julio Verne. La guerrilla de Cencerro y el trienio del terror: Jaén, Sierra Sur, 1947-1949* (2012). The remarkable media presence of Grandes contributed to the commercial impact of the novel, which notwithstanding some questionable choices (such as the lack of verbal decorum of some of its characters) offers angles worthy of consideration in a discussion of current representations of the anti-Francoist armed resistance.

The reader of Verne to which the title alludes is Nino, a child on the verge of becoming an adolescent who lives in a world where adventure, for

better or worse, is as real as it gets. The story is narrated by an older Nino, who recounts those formative years spent in Fuensanta de Martos, a mountain village south of the Andalusian city of Jaén as the son of a *guardia civil*. His father is part of the brigade in charge of fighting the guerrilla group that resisted under the leadership of the quasi-legendary “Cencerro.”

The focus is thus not on the guerrilla fighters, who appear in the usual flashes: mostly heroic presences, although also as the victims of the temptation of treason; mostly dignified resistance warriors, but also animalized. The interest of Grandes’s novel lays mostly in her exploration of the ‘middle ground’ between the cities where the bureaucratic machinery and political leadership of the dictatorship is centralized and the mountains where the maquis dwell: the place where in the 1940s the ‘collateral damage’ of a war that was not over was most severe and also most repressed.

Grandes’s depiction of the repressive forces from within humanizes them without relieving them of their responsibility in the brutal practices used to defeat the maquis. It also offers a glimpse into the composition of those forces and complex dynamics: the Guardia Civil squad in Fuensanta de Martos includes a communist working as a mole; a son and grandson of anarchists who sees his job as the only way to guarantee that his family is safe from political repression and (barely) fed; and others whose ideological commitment to the cause of National Catholicism is questionable. As historian Jorge Marco notes, after 1952 the guerrilla was hardly a topic of importance within the pro-Franco symbolic production, whose main source of legitimacy and pride was the war, whose end date had been established as 1939. The ensuing fight against the maquis was not officially deemed a part of that confrontation and was only vindicated as an important episode by a few members of the Guardia Civil, a corps that considered its anti-resistance efforts (which they presented as an anti-Communist fight) as its greatest, albeit unrecognized, contribution to the regime’s stability (Marco 82–3). *El lector de Julio Verne* effectively dismantles any anti-heroic vision of the guerrilla that accounts by the Francoists could have countered. Interestingly, the novel also tackles the issue of the memory of the guerrilla among the anti-Franco establishment, which in the later stages of the dictatorship had come to view the maquis’s fight as “un grave error estratégico” (Grandes 392) (a serious strategic mistake).

Grandes clearly vindicates and re-dimensions the role of the maquis within the greater scheme of the opposition to the Franco regime. In a new shift to the old arms and letters topic, Grandes links the guerrilla fight to the survival of a liberal intellectual tradition under the dictatorship. In the novel, doña Elena, a former teacher, seeks refuge in the countryside after losing her Republican husband and one of her daughters as a consequence of the war. She is also the victim of the massive purge of the teaching profession that the New Order carried out, which ‘cleansed’ the education system of those

with a liberal past. Doña Elena cohabitates with las Rubias, a family that has also been victimized by the Francoist regime and is still suffering in the late 1940s due to its strong maquis connections. Among works by Spanish writers Elena's library includes those of Cervantes, Galdós, Ortega y Gasset, Juan Ramón Jiménez, Federico García Lorca and Antonio Machado, a veritable liberal heritage that the Franco regime had tried to destroy but which survived in the shadows—in this case, symbolically as well as literally, as the books were orderly kept “debajo de un altillo corrido, tan profundo que dos ventanucos no bastaban para iluminar su contenido” (Grandes 185) (under a long, narrow storage loft, so deep that two small windows could not illuminate its content). That space of dissidence and the people and books that inhabit it become central to Nino's sentimental and formal education. In fact, it is thanks to the consolation and example of great literature that Nino finds the emotional and practical resources to survive amidst the hostilities that characterize that official (although undeclared) war situation denominated the “Trienio del Terror” (triennium of terror) in the subtitle of the novel.

The novel is the second in a series titled “Episodios de una guerra interminable,” which points to the Galdosian inspiration of Grandes's narrative project and, perhaps more importantly, reflects her view of the maquis as the last active front of a war that ended on April 1, 1939, but only pro forma. For historians Julio Aróstegui and Jorge Marco, the guerrillas were the last active front of the Civil War. Works such as Grandes's novel and others dealt with in this volume contribute to the process of dismantling the notion that the violence that culminated with the Civil War ended when the Nationalists proclaimed it to be over. The paternalistic commemoration by the Franco regime of the anniversaries of the war's end as “años de paz” (peaceful years) is giving way to an increasingly generalized awareness of the different forms of violence used by the dictatorship to maintain its hold on Spanish society. The floor is now open for a discussion on how those practices are still conditioning the civic mores in Spain, and the role the maquis and their supporters might have as an example of a deeply committed political engagement.

Notes

1. For a study of this topic, see the forthcoming *Hispanic Issues* volume *Memory and Its Discontents: Spanish Culture 2000–2010*.
2. That it was the *official* recognition what took longer in Spain needs to be emphasized since, for instance, that same 1989 that Judt signals as a turning point is a key year in terms of civic attention to the maquis. In that year, the Day of the Guerrilla Fighter was first celebrated after a private organization of friends of the maquis reached that resolution four years earlier (see Sánchez León and Agüero in this volume).

3. This same paradox is explored by Carmen Moreno-Nuño in this volume, in her comparison of the scripting of the maquis figure as a bandit within Spain, and as an decorated, heroic figure outside of Spain, in France.
4. The give and take between the aesthetic representation of the maquis and the underlying political anthropologies of the moment in which such narratives are produced forms the basis for Ulrich Winter's intervention in this volume.

Works Cited

- Aróstegui, Julio, and Jorge Marco (eds.) *El último frente: la resistencia armada antifranquista en España, 1939–1952*. Madrid: Los Libros de la Catarata, 2008. Print.
- Grandes, Almudena. *El lector de Julio Verne. La guerrilla de Cencerro y el trienio del terror: Jaén, Sierra Sur, 1947–1949*. Barcelona: Tusquets, 2012. Print.
- Gunther, Richard, José Ramón Montero, and Joan Botella. *Democracy in Modern Spain*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004. Print.
- Judt, Tony. *Postwar. A History of Europe since 1945*. New York: The Penguin Press, 2005. Print.
- Marco, Jorge. "Ecos partisanos. La memoria de la resistencia como memoria conflictiva." *Historia del Presente* 17, 2011/1: 79–91.
- Martín-Estudillo, Luis, and Nicholas Spadaccini (eds.) *Memory and Its Discontents: Spanish Culture 2000–2010*. Forthcoming.
- Mateos, Abdón. "Represión, información y propaganda." *Historia del Presente* 9 (2007): 3–6.
- Molinero, Carme, and Pere Ysàs. *Productores disciplinados y minorías subversivas: clase obrera y conflictividad laboral en la España franquista*. Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1998. Print.
- Spain's Leader Plans New Austerity Steps as Miners Clash With Police. *The New York Times*. July 11, 2012.
- Vega Sombria, Santiago. *La política del miedo. El papel de la represión en el franquismo*. Barcelona: Crítica, 2011. Print.

Martín Estudillo, Luis and Megan Corbin. "One Last Fight: Telling the Stories of the Anti-Francoist Guerrilla in Twenty-First Century Spain." *Armed Resistance: Cultural Representations of the Anti-Francoist Guerrilla*. Ed. Antonio Gómez López-Quiñones and Carmen Moreno-Nuño. *Hispanic Issues On Line* (Fall 2012): 232–240. Web.
