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ROUNDTABLE INTRODUCTION

# Roundtable on the Spanish Civil War: Introduction

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In October 2019 the remains of Francisco Franco were exhumed from the Valley of the Fallen, the vast mausoleum constructed after the Spanish Civil War in the mountains outside of Madrid, and moved to a municipal cemetery. Even in an era of apparently ubiquitous 'memory wars', the controversy surrounding a fascist-era dictator and his victory monument surprised many who had not been following the long-running debates about historical memory within Spain. The event made headlines around the world, briefly drawing attention to the history and legacy of a conflict which, despite being very well known, is not always well understood.

The Spanish Civil War is one of the iconic events of Europe's twentieth century. From its outbreak in July 1936 it captured the attention of the world. It has been depicted in countless novels, poems, films and works of art, often produced by those who witnessed it first-hand. And its memory has lived on both inside and outside Spain since the end of the conflict, although in very different ways. The scholarship on the Spanish Civil War is vast. During the Franco era and its aftermath much of the most important historical research emerged from abroad, but over recent decades Spanish historians have built on these foundations to transform our understanding of the conflict.

The ways in which the Spanish Civil War is understood and taught by European historians has not always kept pace with this new scholarship. Surveys of the period or edited collections on particular themes of European history often pass over the case of Spain or rely on a limited and often outdated English-language historiography. University curricula often include the Spanish Civil War in modern Europe survey modules or as part of courses on the Second World War, fascism or the interwar crisis. But, again, they often rely on a limited scholarship which doesn't necessarily reflect new developments in the field. University libraries, in the United Kingdom at least, are full of dog-eared copies of Hugh Thomas's survey of the Spanish Civil War, originally published in 1961, but too often lack decent collections of more recent scholarship. For many European historians, and by association for many of their students, the Spanish Civil War and the debates surrounding it are much less familiar than contemporary issues such as Italian and German fascism, Stalinism, Vichy and its memory, the Holocaust, collaboration and resistance and so on.

The purpose of this roundtable is therefore twofold. The first is to provide European historians who don't work on Spain with an introduction to some of the key issues and debates currently shaping scholarship on the Spanish Civil War, with a particular focus on situating these debates within their broader European and global contexts. We hope that it showcases some of the innovative new approaches and perspectives which are currently helping to deepen our understanding of the conflict. The second is to provide a teaching resource which can be used to give students an accessible introduction to these debates, even in cases where the civil war is only covered briefly as part of larger survey or thematic modules.

This is the third of a new series of roundtables published in *Contemporary European History*, following collections on the Soviet famines (August 2018) and Brexit (February 2019). The format is similar to previous roundtables. Contributions have been drawn from scholars working on a range of topics, representing different career stages and institutions. They include both specialists on the civil war itself and historians from other fields of European history who have been asked to offer their own perspectives on the conflict and its significance. Contributors have been asked to keep their pieces short and to avoid footnotes. They have each had a chance to read each other's contributions during the drafting stage, and at the start of the process agreed the following set of questions around which to base their discussion:

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*How has scholarship on the experiences of 'ordinary people' during the Spanish Civil War (conscripts, civilians, children, refugees, etc.) affected our understanding of the conflict? How does this differ from earlier scholarship?*

*How can developments in other areas of modern European historiography help us to better understand the Spanish Civil War?*

*How and to what extent is political violence in Spain remembered differently from political violence elsewhere in twentieth-century Europe?*

*How does the public history of the Spanish Civil War compare to other conflicts of the twentieth century? How can we explain the 'relevance' of the conflict to students and non-specialists?*

The contributions that have emerged cover a diverse range of topics and perspectives. But there are two key themes that run through them. The first is the 'politicisation' of the memory and study of the Spanish Civil War. Civil wars, by their very nature, breed partisanship. In the Spanish case, the issues dividing Spaniards were exacerbated by the contemporary international conflict between fascism, communism and liberal democracy. Rebel victory and the repressive triumphalism of the Franco regime ensured that post-war Spain was only exposed to highly partisan accounts of the war, and the debates over historical memory which have beget Spanish society and politics since the 1990s demonstrate the difficulties of overcoming this legacy.

But partisanship is not just a feature of the public memory of the war. Historical scholarship has continued to be marked by overtly politicised interpretations and conflicts in a way that even highly controversial topics in other areas of European history have not. This is true of scholarship produced both inside and outside of Spain, although it is often driven by political debates within Spain about the war and its legacy. It has undoubtedly retarded the development of research into the war and is one of the features which is most commonly remarked upon by historians of other fields and regions who seek to engage with the scholarship. A number of contributions to this roundtable seek to explain this partisanship and to highlight the ways in which historians can, and indeed already do, seek to move beyond it. This is certainly not an easy task, and as David Jorge points out it cannot be achieved simply by adopting a position of 'impartiality' or false moral equivalence between the two sides of the conflict. Nor should it imply a rejection of politically engaged historical research and writing. But it is vital both to the future development of the scholarship in its own right, and to the to the task of helping Spanish society come to terms with its divided past.

The second key theme is the need to embed the Spanish Civil War firmly within its European and global contexts. The trope of Spanish exceptionality, that Spain is always treated as 'different' to the rest of Europe, is sometimes exaggerated. But it is true that, despite the intense international engagement with the Spanish Civil War at the time, the conflict and its aftermath are too often approached in isolation. Many of the contributions here show how the Spanish Civil War was deeply embedded in the broader history of its era, not just as a prelude to the Second World War but also as a reflection of deeper patterns of migration, imperialism, internationalism, military mobilisation, social conflict, religious belief and political violence. The uniquely Spanish features and origins of the conflict have to be appreciated. But it is a conflict which cannot be understood without the comparative and transnational approaches historians have used to bring these wider perspectives to the fore.

The reverse is also true. The Spanish Civil War is not just an interesting appendage to European history, a discrete event which we can use to illustrate larger geopolitical developments and then put neatly back in its box. If we want to understand the interwar (or even transwar) crisis in all its dimensions, to appreciate the forces which shaped European and global history during the period, we need to put the Spanish war and its legacy at the heart of our story.

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