

Review–Article

Moaist Revolution and the Spanish Civil War: ‘Revisionist’ History and Historical Politics

Los mitos de la guerra civil. By PÍO MOA (Madrid: Esfera de los Libros, 2003; pp. 640. Eur 29);

Franco—Un balance histórico. By PÍO MOA (Barcelona: Planeta, 2005; pp. 180. Eur 19);

Vivir en Guerra: Historia Ilustrada, España 1936–1939. By JAVIER TUSELL (Madrid: Silex, 2003; pp. 224. Eur 19);

El infierno fuimos nosotros: La guerra civil española (1936–1942). By BARTOLOMÉ BENASSAR (Madrid: Taurus/Santillana, 2005; pp. 537. Eur 23.50);

Los mitos de la represión en la guerra civil. By ÁNGEL DAVID MARTÍN RUBIO (Madrid: Grafite, 2005; pp. 283. N.p.);

Franco’s Justice: Repression in Madrid after the Spanish Civil War. By JULIUS RUIZ (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2005; pp. 269. £53);

Republic of Egos—A Social History of the Spanish Civil War. By MICHAEL SEIDMAN (Madison: Wisconsin U.P., 2002; pp. 406. \$55; pb. \$24.95).

I

THE Spanish general election of March 1996 was a close contest between the centre-left Socialist party (PSOE)—in power for more than thirteen years—and the centre-right Popular Party (PP). The previous decade had seen the development of an underlying consensus, both of principle and policy, between the main constituents of Spanish politics. During this period a mixed economy, liberalised public culture, equality of opportunity, progress towards social justice, and recognition of regional autonomies, had moved to a secure zone beyond partisan dispute. Despite—though also because of—the continuing depredations of the Basque separatists of ETA, bridges were constructed over the turbulent rivers of a deeply divisive past. In the solid centre of politics now lay a lodestone of constitutional *gravitas* which seemed at once to be the coping-stone of ‘La Transición’—Spain’s slow and deliberate journey from dictatorship to democracy, and from relative poverty to a consumer society, to which many observers (the present writer among them) wonderingly attached the word ‘miraculous’.

The PP, under its charismatic young leader José María Aznar, won a narrow election victory and formed a minority government. But this

demonstration of healthy democratic processes came at a price which at the time aroused little comment. By unfortunate coincidence, the election took place in the year which marked the 60th anniversary of the civil war (1936–9) which brought General Franco to power: and with him a dictatorship which lasted until his death in 1975. At the hustings, the Socialist leadership accused the PP of being a creation (by extension, a vehicle) of Francoism. In a surprising riposte, Aznar responded by identifying his party with the legacy of Manuel Azaña, regarded by most Spaniards as the exact opposite of Franco's. Azaña was President of the much-lamented Republic overthrown in 1939. Fifty years after his death in 1940, he had achieved general recognition as the outstanding protagonist in the tragic history of 'Spain's first democracy'.

For the first time, but (as things have proved) irreversibly, the civil war had been dragged into the arena of democratic politics. A tacit moratorium between the parties—fundamental to the 'transition'—was thus annulled. Following Franco's death, a 'Pact of Forgetfulness' (or 'Pact of Silence') placed limitations on public invocation of civil-war memories. Of course, everyone knew that numberless grievances had never been fully extinguished. But, like the 'disappeared' rivers of this drought-ridden era in Spain's climatic history, streams of resentment had seemed destined to run a harmless subterranean course towards oblivion. Now, suddenly, the bridges trembled and a warning roar was heard from the foaming waters beneath. Many in Spain—not just PSOE faithful—angrily rejected Aznar's claims to be *Azañista* as a tendentious re-writing of history. Yet the experience of the first PP administration went some way to justify these pretensions. Not long after Aznar's victory at the polls, for example, the Cortes voted *unanimously* to offer honorary Spanish nationality to all foreigners still living who had fought for the Republic in the International Brigades. It was strange, Spain being a kingdom with no role for overt republicanism, that men who had fought the monarchist Franco were now invited to become subjects of his royal successor. Strange, too, that in these years of centre-right government the cause of the Second Republic finally became the official (almost the constitutional) inscription of Spanish democracy. As late as 2002, a PP-dominated Cortes adopted a formal resolution—*again unanimously*—acknowledging that the Civil War was the result of a military coup which was both illegal and unjustified. Though neither of these confessions was legally binding on Spaniards, taken together there seemed to be a tacit implication that failure to subscribe to the Republic's left-liberal heritage was tantamount to a lack of patriotism.

Under Aznar, the economy flourished as never before, and standards of living achieved parity with the affluent elite of the EU. Spain emerged from centuries of political decline and economic dependence. The PP was duly rewarded with an overall majority in the election of 2000. The sound of agitated waters receded to a murmur. In 1995, I queued with hundreds of young people in Madrid, eager to see Ken Loach's film

'Land and Freedom'. Only three years later, amid the ruins of Belchite, I encountered a group of teenagers on a school trip.¹ They told me not only that they did not know anything about the civil war, but that they positively did not *want* to know. Then came 9/11. Aznar lined up unequivocally with Bush and Blair over 'the war on terror', supported the invasion of Iraq, and sent Spanish army units to bolster post-war occupation forces. Party politics were convulsed, since the PSOE, along with the left-wing Catalan government, bitterly opposed Aznar's policy. The early years of the present century were dominated by acrid disputes over this issue. Party antipathy was compounded by the equally misconceived government dedication to a gigantic project, intended to redistribute the precious waters of the Ebro river to farms and other enterprises in Aragon (a region of strong PP support)—to the perceived detriment of Catalonia (which is not). For all their virulence, such quarrels were not sufficient to give the 'Pact of Silence' its quietus. From the late 1980s onwards, it was being steadily undermined by local and improvised groups engaged in the disinterment of human remains from collective graves in various areas of Spain. Amateur archaeologists and local historians, along with descendants of persons believed murdered by Francoists during and after the civil war, set up an 'Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory'. Sponsored by local authorities, financial institutions, and media sources, this grew into a powerful lobby. When Aznar's cabinet rejected its demand for government support, a public outcry ensued. The murky waters of its history once again threatened to inundate Spain.

Meanwhile, in 1999, almost unnoticed, an obscure librarian published the initial volume of a five-part history of the Second Republic (1931–6), a subject more or less coterminous with that of 'the origins of the civil war'.² This, and subsequent instalments of Pío Moa's work, were largely ignored by the press and scholarly journals, but brisk sales belied the indifference of the professional intelligentsia.³ In 2003, as the eggshell surface of consensus politics began to show hair-lines of stress, Moa produced *Los mitos de la Guerra Civil*. Here, the politically correct line was characterised as a narrative construction, maintained in the interests of a politico-cultural establishment which was leftist by its very nature. Moa became a mouthpiece for those on the right who felt the

1. Belchite, not far from Zaragoza, was destroyed during the battle for its capture by Republican forces in 1937. Franco ordered it left in ruins as a monument to the 'war of liberation', and a new village was built alongside the rubble.

2. This essay foregrounds recent examples of Luis ('Pío') Moa's work. But of equal relevance is the above-mentioned sequence, appearing in the following order: *Los orígenes de la guerra civil* (1999); *El derrumbe de la Segunda República* (2001); *Los personajes de la Segunda República visto por ellos mismos* (2002: all Madrid, Encuentro); *1934: Comienzo la guerra civil* (2004); and *1936: El asalto final a la República* (2005, both Barcelona, Altera).

3. Exceptions were the centre-right newspaper *El Mundo*, which gave Moa generous coverage (see, for example, the review of *Los Mitos* in its supplement *Crónica*, 12 January 2003 [also available at el-mundo.es/cronica/2003/377/1042458345]); and a few academics (notably E. Moradiellos and A. Ferrary) whose interventions were posted on website magazines such as those referred to later in this essay.

'peaceful co-existence' of the previous twenty years had been predicated on *their* silence—indeed, that it was based upon denigration of the Nationalist legacy, to the point that the very legitimacy of right-wing democratic politics was denied.

II

The premiss of Moa's history was announced in its opening pages:⁴

'My basic thesis is that the insurrection [of October 1934] constituted, literally and in the fullest sense, the beginning of the Spanish civil war.'

This statement was a shell intended to open a breach in the walls of orthodoxy. Moa attacked the framework of 'facts' supporting the quasi-official historiographical consensus, seeking to demolish the belief that the civil war began in July 1936, with a military rebellion against a moderate government legally elected to power. In so doing, he switched the focus from 1936 to 1934, and moral opprobrium over the civil war from right to left. The original sin of betraying democracy, the treason from which all Spain's subsequent sufferings flowed, was the responsibility of the parties which governed during the opening phase of the Republic (1931–3), a period dominated in parliamentary terms by the PSOE. Moa showed that many of the Republic's founding fathers refused to accept the verdict of the December 1933 election which ejected them from power. Some flirted with the idea of rebellion, others contemplated unlawful demonstrations of discontent. In particular, the PSOE espoused (overtly) the policies and (secretly) the political tactics of violent workers' revolution.

It is one thing to accept the case contained in the above paragraph. It is another to endorse Moa's more demanding proposition that what the leftist enemies of the Republic consciously intended in 1934 was not a successful revolution on the Bolshevik model, but rather a long and bloody civil war, on the distinctly unmodelled lines of the Russian civil war of 1918–21.⁵ Yet Moa states unequivocally that 'the uprising [*movimiento*] of October was *explicitly designed as* a civil war', and goes on to title a key chapter 'The Left declares a Civil War'.⁶ The interpretation seems to fly in the face of reason and common sense. Can a civil war be planned at all? Or, if this is not a valid history question, has a civil war ever been deliberately planned before or since? Perhaps what

4. *Los orígenes*, 9. Moa's fourth volume (1934: *Comienzo*) is largely devoted to providing documentary illustration of this thesis.

5. 'Why [Moa asks] did the PSOE choose the path of civil war?'. But his answer does not meet the question: 'because they believed historical conditions for ... the socialist revolution had matured'; *Los orígenes*, 10, see also 44.

6. *Los orígenes*, 9–13 & 43 [my emphasis]. But, if a state of civil war existed from October 1934, there is no point in the ethical question 'which side was more guilty in bringing about the crisis of July 1936?', to which Moa frequently returns (see *Los mitos*, e.g. 105–32, and much of 1936: *El asalto final*).

is happening in Iraq as I formulate these doubts should give me pause. And Moa does not neglect to support his argument, going on to cite ideas from Austria and the Soviet Union (along with the activities of Comintern agents in Spain) which influenced the elaboration of the conspiracy commissioned by Socialist leader Largo Caballero and masterminded by his aides during the course of 1934.⁷

Reservations about the 'planned civil war' hypothesis are important because the notion contains nearly all the seeds of dissent from conventional readings of the 1930s which Moa nurtured in subsequent volumes of his history. If accepted at face value, there can be no further debate about 'responsibility' for the Spanish Civil War (with its revised dates of 1934–9). For Moa goes on to demonstrate exhaustively that the rising of 1934, along with the simmering disputes and violent clashes which followed its suppression, led to the disappearance of the political centre-ground and the definitive division of Spaniards into two equal, mutually fearful communities. This, in turn, leads Moa into two further phases of his dialectic. First, that proper constitutional government had effectively collapsed before the onset of the generals' bid for power in July 1936. Second, that after this event the left was defeated in a promiscuously murderous conflict which it had deliberately precipitated. Thus the Nationalist victors had been justified: their action was a principled rising, not a selfish rebellion. It follows, finally, that they were also justified in punishing their beaten enemies severely on the basis of a 'Law of Political Responsibilities' back-dated to October 1934. In sum, the Nationalist Cause—a phrase which to the great majority of interested persons, at least outside Spain, remains a contradiction in terms—is elevated onto the high moral ground for so long unquestioningly occupied by the Republic.

Even without subscribing to the full Moaist agenda (and to the present writer, the 'deliberate civil war' hypothesis is ultimately implausible) many items remain worthy of serious consideration. Of course, not everything was newly-minted. On the 'long civil war' issue, some aspects were already familiar, though Moa fortified the scenario with fresh material, much of it quarried from the archives of the PSOE itself. The importance of 1934 to the tragic dénouement of 1936 was pointed out by Salvador de Madariaga, a celebrated non-aligned intellectual, soon after the civil war ended.⁸ As it happens, *The Times's*

7. *Los orígenes*, 43ff. & 272ff.

8. S. de Madariaga, *España: Ensayo de historia contemporánea* (Buenos Aires, 1942), esp. 526–35. These pages may well have stimulated the original manifestation of Moa's muse. Madariaga pointed (for example) to 'the rebellious and unconstitutional attitude of the socialists' in events leading up to October (517); referring to the rebellion itself as 'unforgivable', not least because it meant that 'the Spanish left relinquished in perpetuity any moral authority to condemn the rebellion of 1936' (526–7). A later monograph expounds a similar thesis: E. Barco Teruel, *El 'Golpe' Socialista del 6 de octubre de 1934* (Madrid, Ediciones Drysa, 1984). The case for the PSOE's culpability is summarised at page 158 of A. Shubert, *The Road to Revolution in Spain: The Coal Miners of Asturias, 1860–1934* (Urbana, 1987).

correspondent with Franco's forces had adumbrated this insight in a final (private) report to his editors. Though Harold ('Kim') Philby believed the 1936 election was won 'fair and square' by the Popular Front, he added that 'the Nationalist case becomes considerably stronger when the subsequent record of [the new government] is examined'. The violence of October 1934 now became endemic. Civil war was made inevitable by 'a series of extra-parliamentary aggressions on the part of the left'. Worst of all was the burnings of churches and convents, by which 'the religious sentiments of a large part of the nation were offended'.⁹ In a retrospective context which is now rather less than private, Philby's account seems more like Moa than Moscow.

Some of Moa's points are clearly intended to bear out justifications issued at the time by leading conspirators of 1936. Relevant apologias had been made since the 1970s by Nationalist historians of merit. In the same era, only two non-Spanish specialists resisted *a priori* approbation of the left-liberal consensus.¹⁰ When he came to write *Los mitos de la guerra civil*, Moa was ready to harvest his crop. In this book, sheaves of arrows are launched against every major leftist shibboleth about the Republic and Civil War periods.¹¹ Part One contains ten chapters which examine the reputations of *dramatis personae*, from the Republic's aristocratic inaugural premier, Alcalá-Zamora, to the first-ever anarchist cabinet minister, García Oliver.¹² In Part Two, a further seventeen chapters analyse some of the war's most notorious events (such as the massacre of clergy, and the atrocities of Badajoz, Gernika, and Paracuellos) and other controversial topics (Franco's relief of the Alcázar of Toledo, Juan Negrín's surrender of Spain's gold reserves to Moscow, the role of the International Brigades). The book is constantly enlivened by the author's magus-like revelations of hidden perspectives, often introducing new, unfamiliar or previously under-employed material. Although occasional concessions are made to conventional views, the net result is almost always to throw them into serious doubt.

One essay places under the microscope the Republic's claim to have protected Spain's incomparable artistic heritage.¹³ President Azaña decreed that this was 'more important than saving the Republic itself'. The Prado's collection of masterpieces (*inter alia*) was certainly given priority over competing demands. Removed from Madrid in November 1936, it later arrived in Switzerland. In fact, the paintings were never in

9. Report dated February 1939, Philby File, Archive of The Times Newspaper, London.

10. I refer to R.A.H. Robinson, *The Origins of Franco's Spain: The Right, the Republic and the Civil War, 1931-1936* (Newton Abbot, 1970); and to S.G. Payne, whose relevant publications are too numerous to cite, but include most notably *Spain's First Democracy* (Madison, 1993). Contributions to his overarching thesis by these and other precursors are acknowledged (*passim*) by Moa.

11. These are cogently presented by S. Payne in a review of *Los mitos* in *Revista de Libros*, accessible online and gratis at <http://www.revistadelibros.com/Editions/Detail.asp?IdNews=3042>.

12. Many vignettes are based on Moa's collation of dozens of published memoirs and autobiographies, already deployed in *Los personajes*.

13. *Los mitos*, 447-72.

serious danger from aerial or artillery bombardment. As Moa argues, the operation provided endless propaganda copy for ‘the civilised world’ about the allegedly contrasting priorities of ‘fascist barbarism’. Though this danger too was enormously exaggerated for propaganda purposes, the non-combatant population of Madrid was certainly more vulnerable.¹⁴ Yet the Prado operation involved dozens of vehicles desperately needed for evacuation of the aged and the sick, mothers and children. While this went on, innumerable artworks of religious significance were being indiscriminately destroyed all over the Republican zone. Later, in a panicky moment near the French border, retreating Republican soldiers burned a consignment of many tons of ‘minor’ artworks. In other incidents, abandoned libraries were plundered of rare books and manuscripts by intellectual opportunists, while items suspected of ‘Fascist’ content were consigned to neo-inquisitorial flames. Moa concludes by suggesting that Republican leaders came near to auctioning off Velázquez and Goyas, a scheme rendered attractive by the need to purchase war munitions. His further suspicions that a closet motive may have been to provide a fund for a post-war government-in-exile, or even for the private benefit of prominent individuals, at present lack solid foundation.¹⁵

III

By the time *Los mitos* appeared, Moa had attracted attention not just for his ‘revisionist’ arguments, but for the irresistibly newsworthy fact that he was a convert from radical Marxism. Indeed, as a young man he was arrested by the Francoist authorities for being a member of the terrorist organisation GRAPO. He served a prison term, and later spent time in (almost traditional) Parisian exile.¹⁶ Moa’s spirited defence of the despised dictator, and, above all, his strenuous projection of a moral case for the Nationalist side in the Civil War, were thus all the more surprising. Despite its apparent implausibility, typical journalistic reaction was to associate Moa with ‘*bunkerista*’ writers such as Ricardo de la Cierva, Franco’s court historian, who doggedly recycled pro-Nationalist pot-boilers, based on little or no fresh reading, into the late 1990s.¹⁷ But on the whole, Spanish scholarship simply ignored Moa’s

14. See R. Stradling, *Your Children Will Be Next: Bombing and Propaganda in the Spanish Civil War* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, forthcoming).

15. These are derived from memoirs and published correspondence of principal actors, notably Juan Negrín, the Republican prime minister, and his rival Indalecio Prieto.

16. Information from various autobiographical reminiscences published by *Libertad Digital* [libertaddigital.com].

17. ‘El bunker’ was the collective media term for prominent diehards among the establishment of late Francoism—another example of a subtle vocabulary intended to link the regime with Nazism.

books, at least in terms of published reference or public discussion. Indeed, so uniform was the moratorium that it seemed almost the product of a self-denying ordinance adopted in common by university historians. We can only guess at the extent to which senior figures in the field, Javier Tusell and Santos Juliá (for example), were involved in a 'policy' of asphyxiating the maverick intruder with a blanket of silence. At any rate, the professional 'guild' rigorously abstained from any comment which might have implied recognition of Moa as a legitimate historian.¹⁸

Much the same attitude prevailed in academic circles outside Spain. In Britain (up to the time of writing) the Spanish practice has been observed almost unanimously. In one remarkable exception, Helen Graham, historian of the wartime PSOE and advocate of Juan Negrín, sallied forth to defend *La Niña Bonita* against the dragon.¹⁹ Professor Graham's review of *Los mitos* had elements of diatribe, accusing Moa of ignoring 'historical analysis' in favour of 'a crude repackaging of Francoist propaganda'. In her view, Moa 'presents no new evidence'. Furthermore, 'his arguments do not count as serious history' and represent 'a meretricious concoction' aimed at combining 'unreconstructed Francoism' with 'commercial success'.²⁰ Given this comprehensive rejection, and the overall context of mute outrage manifested by indigenous experts, even more striking was the response of Stanley Payne, a Hispanist of unassailable credentials, whose contributions (during a research career spanning four decades) are notable for their objectivity. Payne declared himself broadly satisfied with both Moa's methodology and his conclusions.²¹

In Spain, the phenomenon of Moa's 'box-office' success rolled on. Early in 2003, Moa's appearance on a popular TV magazine programme appears to have been the last straw for Javier Tusell. He now spoke out, sending a letter to the centre-left newspaper *El País* which lamented the 'shameful' publicity accorded a writer whom he characterised, if not in quite so many words, as a dangerous charlatan.²² Tusell asserted that Moa's work 'does not merit one line of review'; referring to the author as 'an ex-terrorist translated to the shores of extreme Francoism'; and as 'this amateur who has read a few books, on the strength of which he

18. See, however, above, n. 4.

19. The Second Republic liked to be known and depicted as 'The Good-Looking Girl'.

20. 'New myths for old', *TLS*, 11 July 2003. Professor Graham's negative formulations echoed those made a few months earlier by Javier Tusell, and cited below (n. 22).

21. Payne's review of *Los mitos* (see above n. 11). The distinguished American scholar has also written a prologue for Moa's 1934: *Comienzo la Guerra Civil*. His even-handed approach to relevant contemporary quarrels in Spanish politics was publicly instanced by his support of the (recently realised) Catalan campaign for the 'restoration' of papers stored in the National Civil War Archive at Salamanca: see *The archives Franco stole from Catalonia: The campaign for their return* (Editorial Milenio, Lleida, 2004), p. 95.

22. 'Bochornosa televisión', *El País*, 22 Feb. 2003. Professor Tusell later added a more maturely considered resumé of his objections to the work of 'revisionists' such as Moa and César Vidal; 'El Revisionismo histórico español', *ibid.*, 8 July 2004.

questions our professional consensus'. Not unreasonably, Moa was riled at calls for his censorship by the man who—as head of history at the *Universidad de Distancia*²³—was *ex officio* the most familiar face of Spanish history. He wrote in reply to *El País*, the editors of which resolutely refused to print his letter.²⁴ The fall-out from this incident, which included an abortive attempt by Moa to invoke anti-censorship laws against *El País*, stimulated public attention. Then, out of the blue, a further unlooked-for impetus was given to what had been a comparatively esoteric *escándalo*. On 11 March 2004, terrorists killed almost 200 commuters on trains heading into Madrid. The disturbing events surrounding the general election held over the following weekend led observers to recall allegedly analogous circumstances in 1936.²⁵

Irrigated by the rising waters, new websites sprouted on all sides, some exclusively devoted to debating the civil war. Existing sites were inspired to feature 'blogs', 'forums' and plain old-fashioned reviews of relevant material. Via the internet pages of *Catoblepas*, *Libertad Digital* and *Satiria* (to name but a few) the flow of opinion now seems endless.²⁶ The case of Pío Moa has been firmly woven into current politics. It has consequently provided the world's first open online debate over a major historical issue which flourishes independently of academic mediation. The author himself contributes effusively to this phenomenon, employing nimble gifts of dialectic to instruct, offend and entertain an incalculably large and promiscuously 'interactive' readership. Democracy—or at least a productive demotic current of it—has made a belated (but irreversible) debut in history, for so long the secluded scriptorium/auditorium of full-time academics. But before we assume all this is good for business, a sober note is necessary. Polemic is part of history, sometimes a duty, frequently a pleasure. In order for the part not to substitute for the whole, it demands to be written with discipline and read with caution.

IV

Moa's *Franco: un balance histórico* is an example of his talent for combining history and polemic to challenging effect. Since Franco's

23. That is, the Spanish equivalent of The Open University.

24. Moa's reply, 'El espíritu democrático de El País' was posted in the 'Foros' (debating) section of the web magazine *Libertad Digital* on 5 March 2003. To date, *El País* has scorned every attempt by Moa to answer Tusell's indictment. This attitude may be contrasted with that of the *Times Literary Supplement*, which gave his response to Graham's review a prominent place; 19 September 2003, 20.

25. See A. Feros, 'Civil War still haunts Spanish Politics', *New York Times*, 20 March 2004, along with countless opinions and readers' responses printed in Spain's newspapers in the course of that spring.

26. In addition to those for *El Mundo* and *Libertad Digital*, already cited above, the following websites may be noted: www.nodulo.org (*Catoblepas*, *Revista Crítica del Presente*); www.galeon.com; hispanista.com (*Razón Española*).

death, apart from the occasional *ex-voto* offering, biographical analysis (especially when made by professional historians) has generally been severe. In an editorial ostensibly devoted to celebrating ‘thirty years without Franco’, *El País* actually concentrated on excoriating Moa’s book, copies of which were stacked to precarious heights on the tables of Madrid’s best-known bookshops.²⁷ Here, Moa again draws on his earlier work for evidence which is used to re-focus controversial issues. He begins (pp. 17–33) with the question of whether Franco traduced the Republic by plotting its downfall in defiance of his *juramento militar* (loyalty oath). He argues that the rising star’s attitude was impeccable, and in a characteristic *coup de l’épée* contrasts this with the behaviour of politicians, who—except for a handful of honourable exceptions, not including Manuel Azaña—habitually intrigued against the Republic. Persuasive in most other departments, Moa’s case is partly spoiled by his failure to explain Franco’s intervention (when Head of the Armed Forces) over the election of February 1936. Was he trying to annul the Popular Front victory, or even seeking support for a *golpe de estado*? The evidence is equivocal over the former and does not support the latter. But Moa’s contention that, in attempting to delay declaration of the results, Franco’s overriding concern was to safeguard public order from the ‘legitimate rejoicing’ of the people also seems unconvincing. Elsewhere, Moa re-examines Franco’s comportment during the Second World War (pp. 101–14). He does not deny that the *caudillo* would have preferred a German victory, nor that the Nazi war-effort was aided in various marginal ways. But contemporary records of the celebrated encounter between Franco and Hitler in 1940 are (in Moa’s view) entirely consistent, both within themselves and with the pragmatic line of policy actually followed in 1940–44.²⁸ Not even Hitler’s invasion of the Soviet Union, the overthrow of which was in ideological terms devoutly to be wished, altered the fact that, for Spain, war with Britain was strategically inconceivable.

Javier Tusell’s decision to condemn Moa openly in 2003 was partly motivated by the latter’s overt appeals to Spanish youth.²⁹ His own textbook on the civil war, intended for students at senior institute and early university grades, had just appeared. Yet, very curiously, *Vivir en Guerra* turned out to have a much more irenic cast than might have been expected in the circumstances. On several contentious issues, Tusell himself seems to be reaching for a balanced conclusion rather than reiterating the clauses of what (in the pages of *El País*) he

27. *El País*, 20 Nov. 2005. For a similar state of alarm, see G. Tremlett, ‘Pro-Franco history tops bestseller list’, *The Guardian*, 15 Nov. 2005.

28. Moa thus rejects P. Preston’s argument (*Franco: A Biography* [Collins 1993], 394–400) that Franco’s reputation as ‘the man who stood up to Hitler’ was a propaganda myth.

29. ‘Is this what we want our young people [to whom Moa dedicates his book] to learn?’ ‘Bochornosa televisión’, *loc cit.*

simultaneously characterised as 'our professional consensus'.³⁰ Wartime atrocities are a striking case in point. The approach adopted by left-liberal historians had always been that, while offences did occur in the Republican zone, they were of diminished moral obloquy because (to paraphrase the poet) they were a spontaneous overflow of communitarian feeling, whereas Nationalist crimes were an intrinsic feature of their war-effort. Moa seeks to annihilate the extenuating circumstances of 'difference', by pointing out that mass murder of clergy, Catholic families, small landowners and businessmen, and an indiscriminate variety of other 'fascists', was, more often than not, organised by official representatives of local government, political parties and trade unions. In his new book, Tusell accepts that the old rationalisation is no longer tenable (p. 48): further, that the Republic's persecution of the Church was intolerable and that civil war had a powerful (if not definitive) religious character (pp. 49, 62). His pages on the bombing of Gernika are also instructive. These culminate with recognition that the official figure of 1,654 dead may represent a tenfold exaggeration. *En route*, Tusell suggests that the bombing was not approved by Franco's headquarters; that Burgos sincerely believed the Basques themselves had fired the town; and that the Gernika operation arose from military decisions of a type which frequently confronted both sides rather than a determination to terror-bomb civilians (pp. 100–01).

Tusell's last published work may be taken as a ray of hope for the future of civil-war studies.³¹ Moreover, there has subsequently appeared a general study of the war by Bartolomé Bennassar, a hugely distinguished scholar of early-modern Spain. Bennassar's book is much more ambitious in scale.³² It also advances some surprising conclusions. Bennassar argues, for example, that the democratic experiment of the Second Republic had definitively failed even before the generals' rising (p. 52).³³ It may be deduced from this that Hitler and Mussolini bear diminished responsibility for the death of Spanish democracy. But, in any case, their military intervention on Franco's behalf was matched almost throughout by French and Soviet assistance to the Republic, which Bennassar states did not seriously falter until the fall of Catalonia in January, 1939 (pp. 126ff.). Like Tusell, he defies established interpretations of the Gernika issue (pp. 196–8). But Bennassar's most valuable *dicta* come in the area of general ethics. With a handful of particular reservations, he recognises not only that the Nationalists fought for ideals worthy of respect, but also that there was little difference in the extent to which

30. See above, n. 22.

31. The points highlighted here run so counter to Tusell's former views that they might even be regarded as a sort of apostasy. The book was commissioned by the Ministry of Education under Aznar's government (Professor Tusell died in February 2005).

32. First published in French as *La guerre d'Espagne et ses lendemains* (Paris, Perrin, 2004).

33. This section concurs with Moa that the Republic was violently subverted by the left parties not the Falange, a point on which Paul Preston is specifically contradicted (59–72 & 503).

both sides compromised their ideals under the pressures of a mutually murderous war (pp. 72, 157, 189).

The presentation of such a perspective by a major scholar has, in the present writer's view, been overdue for decades. Bennassar seems to have been drawn irresistibly (even *malgré lui*) to such conclusions during years of teaching and research.³⁴ Perhaps he was inspired by the example set by Tusell—though, if so, his 'Prólogo' carries no relevant acknowledgement.³⁵ On the other hand, Pío Moa's output is referred to in a strangely pejorative and dismissive manner. Yet the notion that Bennassar has been influenced by the output of Moa and other 'revisionists' is encouraged by the chronological circumstances of his book's production. Otherwise, it would seem curious in the extreme that such an elder statesman among Hispanists could have adopted unexpected propositions in such key areas and in such a manner as to alarm and dismay the orthodox.³⁶

V

The tendency to gloss over or even ignore Republican war crimes, which vitiates vast stretches of civil-war bibliography, came to a definitive end with the publication of a worthy compendium edited by Santos Juliá.³⁷ Several other contributors have taken this further in work which broadly supports Moa's revisionism.³⁸ Prominent in research terms are a series of monographic studies by Angel Martín Rubio, whose new 'revisionist' survey, *Mitos de la Represión*, incorporates a useful account of the secondary literature, supported by the most comprehensive statistical analysis yet conducted (pp. 77–105). Though it must be borne in mind that human remains are still being disinterred, it would surely take discoveries of post-Soviet dimensions to justify reference (popular in some quarters) to 'a Spanish Holocaust'.³⁹ Yet perhaps the only major question on which it remains difficult to dismiss the conventional view of Francoism is the contingent one of its record of repression following victory in

34. This (if a personal note will be forgiven) is exactly what happened in the case of the present writer.

35. An omission which seems anomalous when the names of Tuñón de Lara, Angel Viñas and Santos Juliá are honourably invoked.

36. The latter impression was left on the present writer by curricular debates and private conversations held during the three-day Conference 'War Without Limits' held at Bristol University in July 2006.

37. *Víctimas de la Guerra Civil* (Madrid, Temas de Hoy, 1999).

38. See, *inter alia*, recent books by C. Vidal (*Checas de Madrid: las cárceles Republicanas al descubierto*, Barcelona, 2003); C. Alcalá (*Checas de Barcelona: el terror y la represión estalinista en Cataluña durante la Guerra Civil al descubierto*, Barcelona, 2005); and J. M. Zavala (*Los horrores de la Guerra Civil*, Barcelona, 2003).

39. Terms like 'genocide' and 'holocaust' were apparently inspired by G. Jackson's guesstimate of 200,000 Francoist executions during the decade 1936–45: see *The Spanish Republic and the Civil War, 1931–39* (Princeton, 1965), esp. 538–9.

1939. Moa himself sees this as 'the darkest stain',⁴⁰ a phrase which hints at a more trenchant act of acknowledgement to the other side.

Julius Ruiz's stimulating study of post-war repression provides frequent illustration of Nationalist vindictiveness. His estimate, based on abundant archival materials, is that at least 3,113 people were executed for war crimes in Madrid and its province (Spain's most populous) in the period 1939–44, but also that the number of deaths diminished dramatically after that date (15–24). Franco and his general staff perceived repression as the last campaign of the civil war, to which all the due military considerations were to be applied. Though feelings of righteous revenge were strong at the grass roots of Francoist support, there is little evidence that the policy responded to them (17off.). The Falange were firmly excluded from the business, indeed at times appearing almost as much victims as victimisers (21–2 and *passim*). Few will be surprised by Ruiz's citations of illogical and corrupt judgements. They may feel less comfortable with evidence of more bizarre—even grimly amusing—aspects of the subject. Many 'fifth columnists' who helped the victors' cause behind enemy lines were later punished for their official adherence to the Republic rather than rewarded for their heroism in saving Nationalist lives, despite the fact that the former was a condition of the latter. More than twice as many *falangistas* as *rojos* were convicted under the infamous 'Law for the Repression of Freemasons and Communists' (212–17).⁴¹ The author neatly reveals how both the principle of military justice and the enabling decree of repression (the 'Law of Political Responsibilities') had conscious precedents in Republican security legislation introduced and applied by Azaña and others before 1936 (20, 78). On the whole, the operation was conducted with ponderous propriety. There was a respectable incidence of acquittals. As the campaign was wound down in the mid-1940s, thousands had death sentences commuted, gaol terms drastically reduced, and/or obtained conditional release. But as Ruiz argues, these were concessions to pragmatic necessity rather than motivated by mercy, rehabilitation, or (far less) any sense of reconciliation. In another innovation he exposes the extent of 'minor' repression, ignored by previous writers in favour of a more politically profitable litany of death and martyrdom (165–91). Here lies an odious underworld of sackings, bannings, fines, repeated arrests and harassments, which aggravated the already miserable existence of millions of 'excluded' Spaniards in the grisly years of the *posguerra*. Dr Ruiz's compelling book has placed study of his subject on new foundations.

Michael Seidman is among the most accomplished of non-native younger historians currently working on Spain's Civil War. His latest book has had a rough ride from some reviewers. At one level this is

40. 'la mancha más negra'; *Franco*, 91.

41. One hearing was abandoned in confusion when the accused revealed that Nicolás Franco—the *caudillo's* brother—was a Mason (213).

understandable. The author goes his own way, accumulating four huge, unsectioned chapters, and the single guidance he accepts is that of following his nose. The only categories allowed are the amorphous concepts of his chapter-headings: Militancy, Opportunism, Cynicism, Survival. Though broadly influenced by the political economy of the Reagan-Thatcher generation, Seidman has no truck with any modern, leave alone postmodern, methodology. It shares the *esprit* of Richard Cobb, especially its insatiable appetite for archival anecdotes. This is history aspiring to the condition of the (Russian) novel, promiscuously crowded with stories and protagonists.⁴² Many will be initially bewildered, but rich rewards await those who persevere.⁴³ On every page Seidman encapsulates the sheer chiasma of the war, manifesting Bennassar's title ('We ourselves were the Hell') better than Bennassar himself. But this is not quite 'una locura común' (a common insanity), as the war was characterised during the later Franco years. Seidman concentrates mostly on the Republican side, and on the 'quiet fronts', as John Cornford, who fought in Spain with the International Brigades, once described the situation in Aragon. In 'Opportunism' (pp. 73–154) the chronic inadequacy of the Republic's war-effort is profusely illustrated. Profiteering was endemic even in the trenches, likewise desertion, self-mutilation, shirking, plunder of civilians, and petty theft (even by hospital staff). A catatonic degree of incompetence was often achieved by *intendencia*, leading to shortages in every frontline necessity, including food, and worst of all, tobacco. In absorbing Seidman's *episodios de la guerra*, one starts to wonder, like Paul Preston (though for different reasons), why the Nationalists took so long to win the war. At the same time, the apprehensions of foreign volunteers about fighting alongside indigenous units are candidly explained. To put things crudely, when the going got tough, only Communist fighters—units of the Fifth Regiment and their affiliates, the International Brigades—got going.

One result was the emergence of another conflict in a parallel dimension to that of 'the front'. This was the war of eternal internal vigilance, fought by a bloated security apparatus. The octopus grew so many tentacles that it became a vast, inert knot choking to death on its own slime. Yet Seidman concludes not that the Republic was too brutal and ruthless, but that it was not brutal or ruthless enough (pp. 238–9). Just as Moa demonstrates the case as regards the pre-1936 period, Seidman relentlessly exposes how the wartime Republic also encompassed its own destruction. Yet, in so doing, he tends to the hypothesis that the

42. Overlap of theme and illustration between chapters makes citing meaningful page sequences difficult. Also, treatment sometimes cries out for a lighter touch. For example death in action did not conform to the *horario* of the mortuaries. Ambulancemen sometimes dumped bodies outside locked doors. Seidman comments that 'this display of piled-up corpses did not hearten new arrivals' (85).

43. One aspect is the author's regular inter-textual references to other great civil wars which are both stimulating and instructive.

political entity which fought the war was a different animal, a 'Third Republic' born when Communists and Anarchists joined Largo Caballero's 'Government of Victory' in November 1936. Defying no less an authority than Pierre Vilar, who (with reservations) stressed the organisational efficacy of communitarian resistance in 1936,⁴⁴ Seidman argues that systemic incapacity was a function of basic realities determined during the war's first year. The regions gained by the rebels produced most of Spain's bread, but also regular harvests of volunteer militiamen dedicated to the point of fanaticism. The Nationalist army was never the simple mix of domestic professionals and foreign mercenaries that historians like to picture. But it *was* better supplied, led with greater expertise, and superior in areas such as 'group dynamics' and morale, crucial to a war won by a myriad small, improvised defensive engagements more than up-to-date equipment or carefully-planned offensives (pp. 111ff., 237). By the end of 1936 the Republic had lost the important food-producing zones; six months later they lost the outstanding industrial region as well. The campaign on 'the Basque front' was a disaster, partly through internecine squabbles between political, syndical and ethnic 'allies' of the pro-Republican coalition (pp. 91ff.). As Seidman states in a well-weighed sentence: 'The way the north was lost, especially the lack of commitment by the rank and file to the grand causes of the revolution or the Republic, anticipated the rest of the conflict' (p. 154). Thousands of activists were dedicated to victory, but even here personal qualities such as fanaticism and altruism were more important than ideology (pp. 14–73 *passim*). Elsewhere, the individual triumphed over the group, village over city, regiment over army, region over Republic. The book stands deterministic theories about large-scale social function on their heads—but then, war is the acid test of all societies and civil war burns deeper still.

VI

Pío Moa, and his work in altering perceptions of the Spanish Civil War, have an undeniable significance in the history of historiography. This has happened despite, perhaps partly because of, the disdain with which he has been treated by many academics. Indeed, the carapace of wilful ignorance adopted by the profession has exposed it to ridicule.⁴⁵ Moa's books do not pretend to monographic status. Yet, his history of the Second Republic is replete with analysis and argument to a degree which subordinates (without eschewing) textbook-style narrative. It

44. P. Vilar, *La Guerra Civil Española* (Barcelona, Ed. Crítica, 1986), 61–2.

45. In 2005 a compendium of research by ten younger experts contrived not to mention the name of Pío Moa: C. Ealham & M. Richards (eds.), *The Splintering of Spain: Cultural History and the Spanish Civil War 1936–1939* (Cambridge U.P.).

belongs broadly to the genre of multi-volume synthetic survey which, largely moribund elsewhere, continues to find a place in Spanish letters. Here, too, the tradition of the non-academic intellectual subsisting as a freelance writer has retained vitality, a function of the fact that universities are managed by the state to an extent which many find difficult to negotiate. Moreover, like other foreign hispanists, the present writer has long been concerned at the lack of rigour which besets Spanish historiography, especially the low priority given to archival investigation.⁴⁶ By these standards, Moa is no amateur. He follows required procedures in terms of source apparatus. Not only are his arguments more solidly set on archival foundations than the work of many 'professionals', but he also writes better than many of his prominent critics—a point conceded even by Professor Graham. Finally, there is a deeper and more lasting element to the shame of the specialists. Moa's most trenchant pages expose the mental torpor which underpins orthodoxy. It seems that no one in the academic establishment was equipped to provide a convincing response to his challenge. Few could grasp the ethical basis of Moa's mission, any more than they could conceive of an ethical basis for Francoism. These things are at the centre of the whirlpool, and it will be long before the swirling waters subside. In a manner which, as a young revolutionary, he could never have imagined, Pío Moa may have launched a revolution.

Penarth

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46. A disturbingly low proportion of history published in Spain evinces experience of more than the local archives where the author studied for a higher degree.