

Faber, Sebastiaan. *Memory Battles of the Spanish Civil War: History, Fiction, Photography*. Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 2018.

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In *Memory Battles of the Spanish Civil War: History, Fiction, Photography*, Sebastiaan Faber offers readers what he terms “a diverse, even eclectic approach” to Spain’s complex sociopolitical and cultural legacies of the Spanish Civil War (7). For Faber, how the Spanish Civil War has been defined and portrayed over the years, especially in academia, has not always been particularly productive, and in fact, it has oftentimes generated more confusion than clarity. By engaging the work of activists, scholars, photographers, filmmakers, and writers, he aims to provide an expansive view of the last few decades of the Spanish Civil War debate that has been fueled by the historical memory movement and its various strands of political activism and social critique. The idea behind the work, then, as Faber proposes, is not to produce yet another academic monograph on the topic that appeals to a small segment of readers, but rather, offer an accessible, innovative book that can speak to both specialist and non-specialist audiences alike.

The book is comprised of an Introduction, thirteen chapters (divided into 5 parts), and an Epilogue. In Part 1, which consists of Chapters 1 and 2, Faber delves into the visual archive of the Spanish Civil War and does a magnificent job of demonstrating how photography and other visual media circulated throughout left- and right-wing magazines and were even strategically edited (especially through photomontage) to fabricate varying perspectives of war, violence, and victimhood. His analysis of the so-called Mexican Suitcase (a lost archive publicized in 2008 containing approximately 4,500 negatives of the Spanish Civil War by famed war photographers Robert Capa, Gerda Taro, David Seymour, and others) is both sophisticated and thought-provoking and underscores the growing interest in the last few years in revealing not only the journalists’ world behind the lens, but also the intricate commercial relationships among photojournalists, photo agencies, and photo editors that gave rise to modern photojournalism.

Chapters 3 and 4 make up Part 2, which tackles the constellation of debates surrounding the Spanish Civil War that have raged since roughly 2000 (although most of these recent debates, as Faber rightly argues, have acquired new vigor after the passage of the Law of Historical Memory in 2007). Faber is

clearly knowledgeable about these debates and deftly outlines their implications within Spain's social and intellectual orbit, yet in attempting to establish a coherent perspective of so many profoundly complex issues in Spanish society dealing with the Civil War, including objectivity, witnessing, victimhood, memorialization, collective memory, and the theory and practice of history itself, these chapters come across as somewhat fragmented and schematic. Needless to say, untangling any one of these issues with care would require a book of its own.

Faber offers something more creative in Part 3 when he rearranges excerpts from interviews with historians of the Spanish Civil War in Chapter 5 to assemble what he calls a "virtual group conversation" (89). The historians included in this conversation are Gabriel Jackson, Ángel Viñas, Paul Preston, Helen Graham, and Pablo Sánchez León. The objective of this chapter is to underscore the complex practices of historians and the numerous difficulties associated with defining their relationship with culture and social change. In Chapter 6, Faber revisits the flexible conversational approach of Chapter 5 to explore various topics, from the exhumation of mass graves to documentary films about the Spanish Civil War and Francoism. While Faber's conversations with social anthropologist Francisco Ferrándiz, journalist and activist Emilio Silva, war photographer Gervasio Sánchez, and documentary filmmaker Montse Armengou are illuminating and provocative, they are fairly short and lack some of the contextual framing that would allow less-informed readers to critically connect their diverse topics and better grasp their importance within Spanish Civil War historiography. Take the question of mass graves, for instance: what constitutes a mass grave in the Spanish Civil War context? How many have been discovered and publicized? Were both Nationalists and Republicans responsible for mass graves? What has been the public's reaction to the discovery of mass graves?

Part 4, extending over Chapters 7, 8, and 9, deals with intellectual history, and is comprised of three review essays of Andrés Trapiello's *Las armas y las letras. Literatura y Guerra Civil (1936-1939)*, Gregorio Morán's *El cura y los mandarines*, and Antonio Muñoz Molina's *Todo lo que era sólido*. Faber's appraisal of the texts is compelling and aims to reveal the possibilities and limitations of recasting historical events and circumstances from a late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century context. However, it would have benefited from a clearer initial explanation on why these texts were chosen specifically for such close analysis versus the dozens of equally popular and controversial ones published on

the Spanish Civil War and its aftermath in the last twenty years. The last part of the book, Part 5, focuses on narrative fiction and the impact of the war on Spanish writers. It offers not only an overview of Spanish literary trends after the war, but also close readings of Javier Cercas's and Javier Marías's works. Faber's core argument is that literature cannot be taken at face value when confronting the phenomenon of collective memory or the complex social and political structures of modern Spain.

Memory Battles of the Spanish Civil War is engaging, perceptive, and enlightening. Faber's writing style is approachable and his work is strewn with questions designed to stimulate readers' interest on the enduring impact of the Civil War on Spanish society. Although Faber's aim is to make his book accessible to a general audience and avoid the pitfalls of academic publishing (academic works, he remarks, are "slow to come out, barely distributed, and not reader-friendly to a general audience"), it clearly adopts the form and spirit of an academic work for the most part (178). The book, after all, is published with a university press. Ultimately, for a general reader to get the most out of this fine book, s/he would need to be quite conversant with the social, historical, and theoretical intricacies of Spanish Civil War historiography.