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978-0-521-89934-5 - After the Civil War: Making Memory and Re-Making Spain Since 1936

Michael Richards

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## After the Civil War

The Spanish civil war was fought not only on the streets and battlefields from 1936 to 1939 but also through memory and trauma in the decades that followed. This fascinating book reassesses the eras of war, dictatorship and transition to democracy in light of the memory boom in Spain since the late 1990s. It explores how the civil war and its repressive aftermath have been remembered and represented from 1939 to the present through the interweaving of war memories, political power, and changing social relations. Acknowledgement and remembrance were circumscribed during the war's immediate aftermath, and only the victors were free to remember collectively during the long Franco era. Michael Richards recasts social memory as a profoundly historical product of migration, political events, and evolving forms of collective identity through the 1950s, the transition to democracy in the 1970s, and the bitterly contested politics of memory since the 1990s.

MICHAEL RICHARDS is Associate Professor of European History at the University of the West of England. His previous publications include *A Time of Silence: Civil War and the Culture of Repression in Franco's Spain, 1936–1945* (Cambridge 1998) and, as co-editor, *The Splintering of Spain: Cultural History and the Spanish Civil War* (Cambridge 2005).

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For Edward

and in memory of Robert James (1907–2000)

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## Preface

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The origins of this book lie in an invitation several years ago to produce ‘a social history of the Franco years’. There exists no broad such history and it seemed that a study of society during the Spanish dictatorship would fill a significant gap in the historiography and map a future agenda for research. Several substantial problems beyond the normal questions about the identification and selection of themes, the location of source material and the weighing of evidence quickly became obvious. The first problem was how to establish the chronological parameters of the project: at which point should the story begin and where should it end? The simplest solution was to begin with Franco’s victory in 1939 and work forwards, more or less letting the civil war take care of itself as a looming but relatively undelineated backdrop to what came after. Both the dictator as focus and 1939 as starting point felt instinctively unsatisfactory, however, being essentially political points of departure for what was projected explicitly as a *social* history. This unease was significantly reinforced by the phenomenal surge in the recording of memories related to the civil war since the late 1990s and current debates in Spain over assimilation of testimonies of ‘ordinary Spaniards’ into the history of the country’s often painful twentieth century. To many of the public it seemed that the civil war could not easily be left behind, primarily because much of the conflict’s violence was intimate, occurring within communities and leaving a distressing legacy. It also seemed to many that this legacy had not been broached at the end of the Generalísimo’s regime and therefore that Franco’s death in 1975 marked a more problematic demarcation point than had usually been assumed. For these reasons, this study begins with an account of the Second Republic and civil war (the ‘event’ remembered) and includes a substantial final section on the era running from the transition to democracy in the late 1970s to ‘the return of memory’ since the 1990s.

The second problem was that although the regime and the state were not to be the primary area of concern, the weight of politics, particularly during the dictatorship itself, could not be ignored. Life under a

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non-democratic authoritarian regime is lived in relation to political power in a way which is different to that lived within a broadly free civil society, though the nature of this dictatorship–democracy distinction is complex and may not necessarily match up to popular images. Although there were several fundamental features of the Spanish dictatorship which were constant and repressive – and political change was stubbornly resisted – the relationship of state to society under Franco was not an unchanging one. Politics could therefore not be excised from any history of the post-war era, ‘social’ or otherwise. This would be confirmed by analysis of the memory ‘boom’ in recent years, an often avowedly political movement within civil society (producing a political counter response) which itself came on top of a historiography shaped in part by the politics of the war and its legacy.

Third, if it was therefore essential to incorporate questions of power and politics, how precisely was this to be done? The path chosen here is to explore the interweaving of war memories, political power, and social relations, through time, as a cumulative and combined process by which representations of the past have been created (‘making memory’) and power has been reconstructed (‘remaking Spain’). Although the rupture of civil war was integral to the process, the intertwining through time of power and memory (and thus, simply put, of state and society) allows for a critique of the image of post-war Spain split apart along a single political fracture between two homogeneous collective identities: ‘the victors’ and ‘the defeated’. This image has rarely been interrogated, but the testimony examined here suggests the more complicated reality. To begin with, the binary division originated in the ideological exigencies of fighting the war; Franco’s victory then institutionalised the division by categorising everyone, in theory and often in effect, as part either of ‘Spain’ or of ‘Anti-Spain’. In the aftermath this dualism expanded, both in terms of experience and of the representation of reality. Nevertheless, although they appeared simply to reinforce the dualism, the combined pressures of war memories, of finding ways to protect oneself from punishment (as an ‘enemy’ of the new power), and of the evolution of socio-economic relations, in fact obscured a more convoluted mesh of social and cultural responses made to survive materially, to attempt to make sense of the war and its aftermath, and to look to the future.

Whilst the labels (‘victors’ and ‘defeated’) and the political regime were static, society did not stand still. The rural poor, most significantly, began to migrate as a result of the war and its outcome. The war had represented a social watershed and, although by no means all migrants in poverty in the 1940s had been active Republicans, thousands responded to the political and economic repression imposed by early Francoism by

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leaving the past behind and embarking on an urban future, accepting the hard sacrifices which this entailed. That migrants were depicted (or ‘constructed’) by urban middle-class observers as ‘the defeated’ suggests much about the unspoken assumptions made and the relationship between war, memory, and post-war change. The experience of flesh-and-blood historical actors, the choices they made, and their commentary upon these actions, all reveal the nature of the assumptions inhabiting the post-war era. Strands of tolerance, conscience, compassion and reconciliation cut across demonisation, denunciation, the grasp for power and the exercise of war-related grievances, even as early as the 1940s and certainly during the rest of the Franco era and beyond. Although memory has been a dominant theme of cultural debate and political action since the 1990s, much of the story of civil war complexities, social fracture, marginal urbanisation, the Church’s turn towards society, and the social context of the post-Franco transition to democracy and rapid modernisation has not previously been told and least of all in relation to the evolution since 1939 of the mythscape and social memory of the war. The chapters which follow seek to do this by integrating the dynamics of civil war with elements of continuity and change during all phases of the Franco regime and the later attitudes and assumptions of the democratic era.

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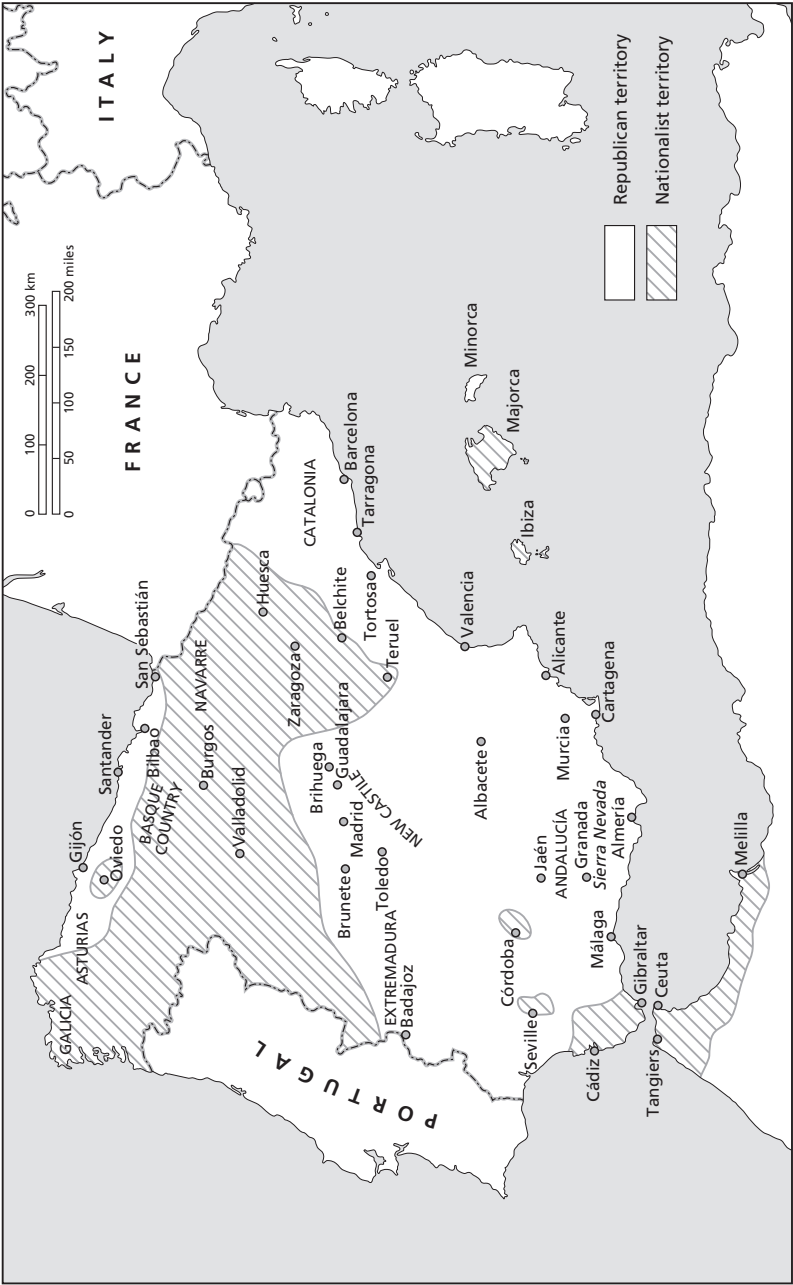
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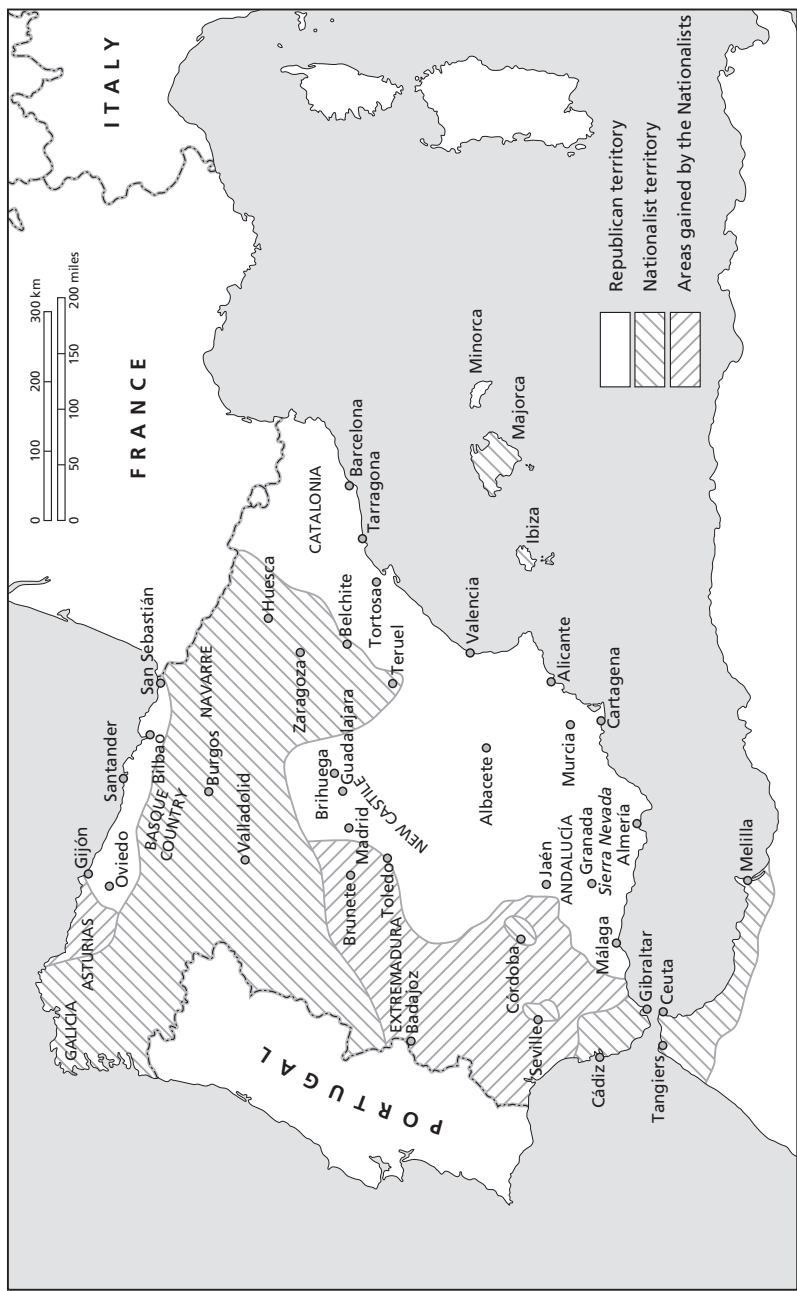
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Finally, I would like to acknowledge the love and encouragement of my parents, Ken and Diana Richards, and to thank my wife, Nancy Shelton, and our children, Edward, Eve and Anna. To my family I owe the greatest debt of all. Without their sacrifices while living with this book (and its author) during the past six years, it might never have materialised.

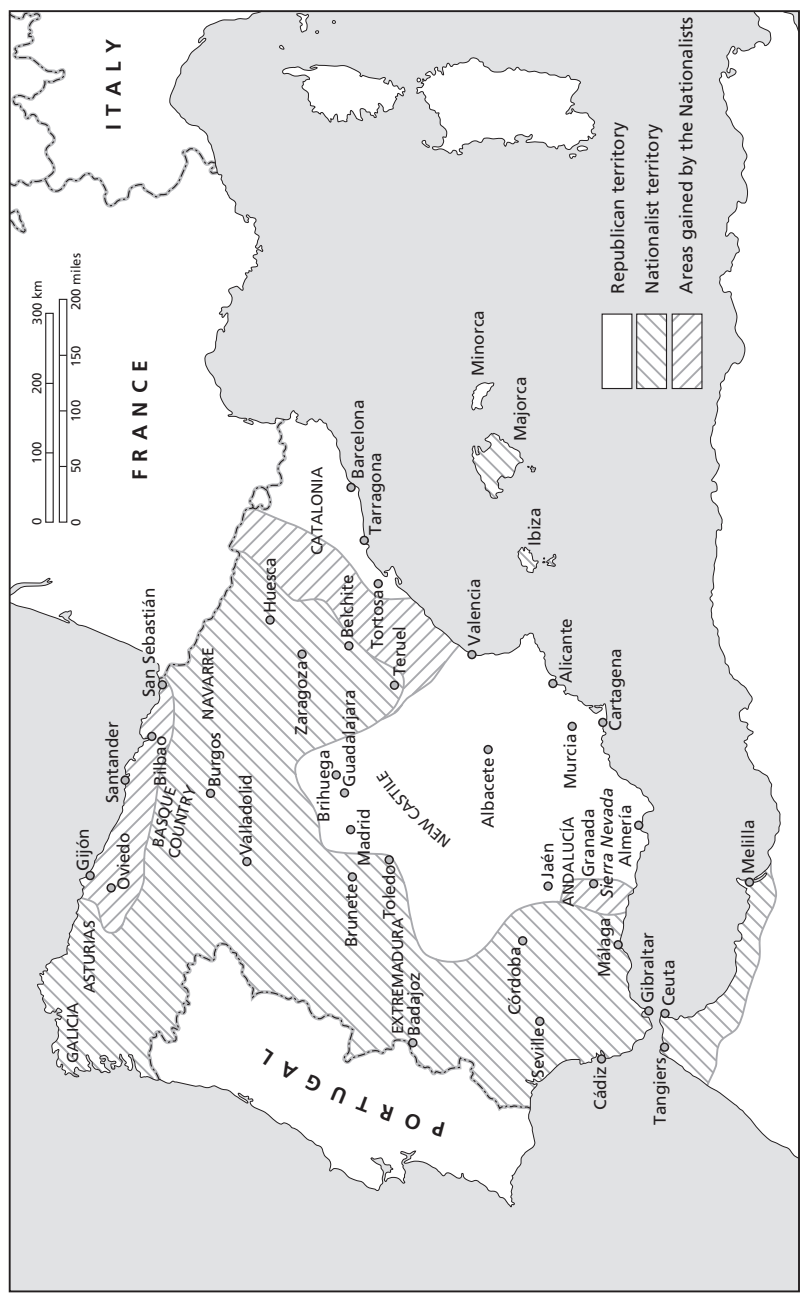


Map 1 The division of Spain following the military rebellion: 20 July 1936

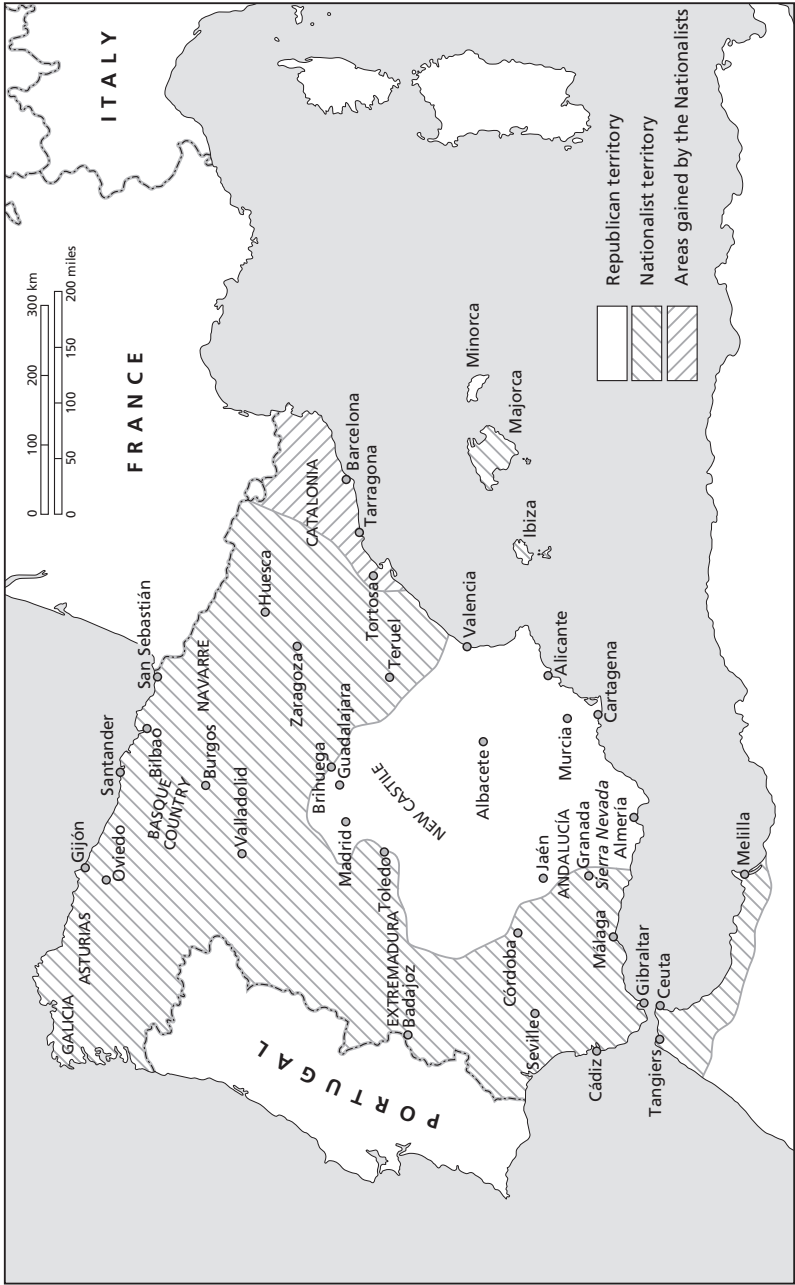


Map 2 The divisions at the beginning of February 1937





Map 3 The division of Spain, April 1938: Republican territory split in two



Map 4 The division of Spain, March 1939, towards the end of the war

