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Paper outline by Eduardo Romanos (European University Institute, Florence)

Clandestine Memory: War and Revolution in the Anarchist Opposition to the Francoist Regime

The Spanish civil war (1936-1939) was one of the main sources of legitimation for the postwar Francoist institutions and politics. The consolidation of the 'New State' took place in Spain over politics of memory which discourse referred constantly to the victory over the enemy in the past civil war. That discourse was imposed and incorporated in the educational contents by the new political elites. Nevertheless, they were not the only ones who revisited that past. The defeated political forces that became the opposition to the Francoist regime also remembered the war. Apart from confronting the official memory, they devoted many efforts to analyse why they lost the war. Some of them derived from that interpretation political principles that legitimated the tactics in the new clandestine circumstances.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the regime used the remembrance of the civil war and the 'red terror' as a reinforcement of its strategic position in the new international antagonism. Between 1944 and 1947, Franco was afraid about a possible intervention of the allies in Spain and the institutions carried out a "cosmetic constitutionalism" which included a lower level of repression. That decrease facilitated more visible mobilisation of the opposition forces, which intensified recruitment in the hope that the allies would help them.

The anarcho-sindicalist trade union *Confederación Nacional del Trabajo* (CNT) was one of the more active opposition forces in that period. The CNT national committee promoted in 1944 the *Alianza Nacional de Fuerza Democráticas* -the most important attempt to overthrow the Francoist dictatorship in the postwar period. The way in which the "tyrant's removal" should be carried out consisted not in "sporadic acts and useless sacrifices" but in "decisive acts" within the political and diplomatic solution. This tactic was defended within a discourse that aimed to restore the previous regime: the Second Republic (1931-1936). Although many of the CNT members attacked or at least did not support the republican institutions in the past, they tried to restore them in the postwar

period. According to the committees, the war did not end in 1939 and this exceptional situation allowed the temporary postponement of the traditional libertarian principles (e.g. isolation from the political “game” and the political forces) and aims (social revolution).

However, not all the Spanish anarchists supported the political alliances. An important sector in exile disavowed and discredited them. According to the official committees in exile, the past participation of some anarchists in Republican institutions during the civil war was an error that they did not want to repeat. According to them, the political alliances betrayed the spirit of the libertarian revolution, which collectivised farms and factories in Aragon and Catalonia during the war. Whereas the CNT in Spain formulated the alliances as a continuation of what wartime meetings and congresses decided, the CNT-in-exile erased those agreements and based on earlier ones -e.g. the Congress held in May 1936, two months before the civil war had begun. Those two very different criteria provoked a rupture in 1945 in exile. Apart from tactical and ideological differences, personal rows and accusations of responsibility in “the catastrophic ending of our Revolution and our War” were involved. In the process of identity reinforcement that took place among Spanish exiles in the 50s, these confronted groups built different memories interpreting the shared past in different ways.

The political alliances and the discourse on the restoration of the Second Republic both vanished in the 50s, after a strong repression carried out once the intervention of the allies in Spain faded and the postwar democracies rehabilitated the Francoist regime. However, the anarchist mobilisation remained latent and reappeared in the 60s in the form of little groups linked by ideological affinity, age and personal experiences. Some of these groups attempted to formulate a new “humanist and revolutionary unionism” as an alternative to both capitalism and communism. The change in discourse from the Republic restoration to the new syndicalism for a new democratic context was based on the necessity to be in tune with the young generation of dissidents, who did not fight in the civil war, as well as sectors linked to the regime in the past that now supported democratic changes. This democratic turn aimed to substitute the class struggle with a common and global emancipation as well as to replace the violence linked to spontaneous insurrections with a daily and pacific fight. Some of the affinity groups criticised their own use in the past of radical, exclusive and essentialist language that finally contributed towards the civil war, which was defined now as a collective tragedy. The wish to buried the “civil war hatchet” or to close the wartime struggles under “double lock and key” found support in exile,

specially among the groups that dissented from the official CNT-in-exile, which still anchored in traditional principles, tactics and ends.

Although the supporters of the humanist syndicalism aimed to connect the new generations, they failed to a large extent. The effective obstacles for recruitment during the whole dictatorship blocked an intermediate generation that could have effectively connected the 'old guard', who fought in the civil war, and the youth, born already into Franco's Spain. "An intermediate generation able to weld the maturity of experience and the youthful impetus together in a unique block" lacked. Therefore, when both met without transition, they did not understand each other. They spoke different languages, used different vocabulary, and had different worries. Repression hindered the transmission of memory. In the end of the dictatorship, some old revolutionaries considered an important part of the anarchist youth as rebels guided by "a philosophy of inhibition" with "empty contents"; some young libertarians considered certain leaders of the old guard "anchored in the past, their frights, and their intestinal struggles". Others tried to build bridges with meetings at which a unified criterion could spread out, but these failed to yield results. A divorce between old and new generations was manifest.

Lack of communication was a major problem for clandestine anarchists. Apart from cruel repression, the defeat in war meant the interruption of the large war-time debates about how to recover war and revolution, and about how to develop them together. They failed to reach a common agreement on tactics, ideological sources or principles during the war, and the lack of communication facilitated misunderstanding and confrontation in the post-war dictatorship. Thus, memory of the civil war and revolution launch in the 40s such different tactics as political alliances to restore the defeated Republic or to implant "libertarian communism without transition stages". This disagreement remained until the end of the dictatorship. One can thus find in the seventies some groups that remembered the civil war and libertarian revolution as "colossal past"; some others that praised the creative participation of the CNT in them; some others that criticised the reissue today of that past as pipe dream "on the verge of absurdity"; and those that aimed the "honest settlement" of "what remained behind" in order to be able to go forward and give to the new generations "a clean doctrine body suitable for the new circumstances."