

Rivalry and Revenge

What explains violence against civilians in civil wars? Why do groups kill civilians in areas where they have full military control and their rivals have no military presence? This innovative book connects pre-war politics to patterns of violence during civil war. It argues that both local political rivalry and local revenge account for violence against civilians. Armed groups perpetrate direct violence jointly with local civilians, who collaborate when violence can help them gain or consolidate local political control. As civil war continues, revenge motives also come into play, leading to spirals of violence at a local level.

In an important contribution to the study of the Spanish Civil War, Balcells combines statistical analyses with ethnographic and qualitative research to provide new insights to scholars and academic researchers with an interest in civil war, politics, and conflict processes. *Rivalry and Revenge* is theoretically and empirically rich, and it offers a theory and method generalizable to a wide set of cases.

Laia Balcells is Assistant Professor of Political Science at Duke University.

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Rivalry and Revenge

The Politics of Violence during Civil War

LAIA BALCELLS

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To all the victims of civil wars

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Conventions

- a) Throughout the manuscript, I make reference to several oral sources. Between 2007 and 2009, I conducted over nine months of fieldwork in Spain, which involved archival and bibliographical research, and semi-structured interviews to survivors of the civil war in different provinces throughout the country. Following an institutional review board (IRB) protocol for the protection of human subjects, I refer to these interviews anonymously in this book (an anonymized list of interviewees is provided in Table A.4.12 of the Appendix). This research was approved by Yale University's FAS Human Subjects Committee under IRB protocol number 0704002514.
- b) Names of locations (e.g., municipalities, counties, and regions) are included in English. When there is no translation, the name in the original language is included.
- c) All quotations from written and oral sources in Catalan, French, or Spanish have been translated into English by the author.

Preface

When I was a kid, my brothers and I used to spend some weeks of each summer with our grandparents in a small town on the Catalan coast. One summer, my grandmother's uncle from Santander, el Tio Manolo, came to spend a few days with us. El Tio was a bachelor in his seventies, highly energetic, cheerful, and witty. He could spend hours talking, recounting the story of his life, which was marked by a civil war and a dictatorship. Tio Manolo was conscripted by the Republican army when he was 17 years old – he was a member of the so-called “baby bottle's draft.” He survived the battlefield, but he lost his brother (our great-grandfather), an officer of the Republican army, in a battle with the Italians in the province of Burgos in August 1937. After the end of the war, the Francoists imprisoned Tio Manolo and he was condemned to death several times; he used to tell us that he was alive by pure chance because, for some unknown reason, the prison guards never called his name at the time of execution. He spent at least seven years in prison camps. When he was released, he was almost 30, and in his adult life had known little more than violence, torture, and hunger. He was a true survivor and a paradigm of resilience; no wonder we were fascinated by him.

The story of Tio Manolo and his brother was one of combatants who fought for the Republic and lost. In addition to our uncle's stories, our grandmother would often tell us about her grandfather, who adopted her when the coup split her family in the summer of 1936. El Abuelo was a Catalan landowner and thus a conservative, and for a while he had to hide in the Pyrenees mountains, threatened by anarchist militiamen who intended to kill him. He became the mayor of his small locality after the civil war ended. When Tio Manolo arrived in his village at the end of the war, fleeing from the Francoists, he tried to help him. El Abuelo could not influence Tio Manolo's detention, but we believe that his local political power allowed him to intervene in his favor and probably help him evade execution. He might have had some agency within the apparent chaos and arbitrariness of Francoist repression.

When Tio Manolo was on the battlefield, he had switched to the Nationalist side for a while in order to try to save his life. Yet, close to the end of the war, he decided to defect back to the Republican side, even though it was clear that they were going to lose the war. When El Abuelo asked him why he had done such an irrational move, he responded, “they knew I was not one of them.” Apparently, within Francoists ranks, they called him “el Rojo” (the red). Tio Manolo thus had a strong leftist identity, which was visible to others. He could mask his ideology for a while, but this falsification was not sustainable for a long time. Also, his ultimate commitment was to the Republican army.

The stories of my ancestors speak to different theoretical themes I develop in this book: the role of local political elites and civilian agency in the perpetration of violence during civil war and its immediate aftermath; the importance of political mobilization and political identities in a civil war context – even when these identities are not based on ascriptive traits; the role of emotions in explaining wartime behavior. In a way, the story of my family made me realize from an early age that civil wars are deeply complex phenomena, and spurred my interest and passion in the study of civil wars at the micro level. It is at the micro level, after all, where the different life stories transpire, where gray areas exist, where the most human and the most inhuman facets of conflict unfold.

At the end of that summer, I told Tio Manolo that one day I would write a book about his life. I never did so, but I ended up writing this book, which speaks about the war he fought, and its victims.