

REVIEWS

Ronald Fraser, *Napoleon's Cursed War: Popular Resistance in the Spanish Peninsular War, 1808–1814*

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SPAIN'S INVISIBLE ARMY

Along a front that extended from Warsaw to the Adriatic, Napoleon's advancing forces met with famously little popular resistance. At Ulm or Austerlitz, Jena or Friedland, the Grande Armée confronted—and defeated—royalist forces; the treaties of Pressburg or Tilsit were not contested from below. Constitutional and legislative reforms were consolidated across the satellite states ruled by the Emperor's family members—his brother Jérôme, King of Westphalia; his stepson Eugène de Beauharnais, Viceroy of Italy; his sisters, Elisa and Caroline, in Lucca and Naples—as well as the Confederation of the Rhine, the Grand Duchy of Warsaw and the Swiss Confederation, closely linked by treaty obligations. Local elites and populations broadly accepted, and sometimes welcomed, the French imperial system. Between 1805 and 1812, anti-Napoleonic revolts (in Naples, Sicily or the Tyrol, for example) were for the most part relatively localized disturbances. It was only after the debacle at Moscow that significant popular forces were mobilized against the French in the German territories, leading to the Grande Armée's defeat at Leipzig in 1813.

Spain, of course, provides the most dramatic exception. Here Napoleon's forces, initially expedited across the country in 1807 to hold Portugal's ports against the English, encountered an insurrectionary resistance that harried them relentlessly for six years, as the 'accursed war' drained the Grande Armée's resources. Napoleon's brother Joseph, installed as King of Spain, barely dared to leave his palace. The emancipatory reforms announced by

the Emperor remained a dead letter. ‘The system I pursued in Spain would eventually have been for the good of the country, yet it was contrary to the opinions of its people, so I failed’, Napoleon mused later. The reality was a good deal more complicated, as indicated by a now vast literature on the Peninsular War—including a plethora of books, papers and conferences which marked the 200th anniversary of 1808.

Yet, as Ronald Fraser argues in *Napoleon’s Cursed War*, no one had yet delved into the experiences of ordinary people as they struggled, suffered and contributed to the resistance to French occupation. Fraser’s oral history *Blood of Spain* remains unchallenged as a unique insight into the complexities of the Spanish Civil War, by recalling the memories of survivors. In tackling the Peninsular War, he faced a paucity of written sources, given the extent of illiteracy in Spain at the time—perhaps as high as 80 per cent. He thus had to piece together a mass of fragments, untangling social, economic, political and other complexities, from an impressive array of sources: manuscripts in municipal archives and the Biblioteca Nacional; military archives in Madrid and Segovia; manifestos, decrees and ordinances; personal letters, diaries and notebooks; memoirs, pamphlets, broadsheets; theatre-attendance records and censuses, as well as an exhaustive bibliography of primary and secondary material. Unsurprisingly, it has been hailed by leading scholars in Spain as a milestone in the historiography of the war.

Fraser begins with a bravura survey of Spain’s social order on the eve of the Peninsular War, embracing in its sweep the complexities of the country’s principal institutions as well as the outlook and living conditions of its different social estates. Having been the dominant European power in the 16th century, Spain had then suffered 150 years of decline; yet it remained the world’s largest colonial empire, whose bounties helped prop up the absolutist order. At home, Carlos IV ruled over a ‘palimpsest of kingdoms, principalities and provinces’, in which the overlapping jurisdictions of feudalism combined with local particularisms to thwart any attempts at centralization. The Church, untouched by the Reformation, was in Fraser’s words ‘the sole effective national institution’, with considerable sway over the daily lives of the populace, and an income that by the mid-18th century accounted for one fifth of the gross domestic total. The nobility was the ‘essential vertebra’ of a society governed by notions of status; yet, though nobles dominated the army—which was in consequence top-heavy with aristocratic officers—they were largely excluded from the functions of state, their pre-eminence resting instead on landownership and the feudal extractions of *señorío*.

Turning to Spain’s commoners, Fraser notes the growth of wholesale merchant classes in Madrid and the coastal regions. Small in number compared to their counterparts in Britain or France, they were keen to preserve the absolutist order rather than challenge it, since they benefited so

handsomely from the Spanish monopoly on trade with its New World possessions. By contrast, the existence of the rural working population and urban lower orders was harsh and precarious. The late 18th century had brought outbreaks of disease as well as subsistence crises; average life expectancy stood at just under 27 years. Village life was marked by fear of crop failures and hunger, as well as a process of proletarianization that forced thousands off the land: 'by the turn of the century', according to Fraser, 'just under one half of Spain's nearly 1,700,000 land-working population consisted of landless labourers'. Many of these flooded the cities, in which poverty was rife, conditions unsanitary, and opportunities for work fiercely guarded by a socially stigmatized artisanate.

In Fraser's account, the character of the *ancien régime* 'deeply and inevitably conditioned' the war which was to shake its very foundations, before ending with absolutist restoration in 1814. The origins of the war are complex. Spain had joined the royalist mobilization against the French Revolution in 1793, but after this concluded unsuccessfully in 1795, it allied with France's Directorate against Britain. Though the decade of intermittent warfare that followed proved financially ruinous for Spain, attempts to withdraw from the fray brought demands from Paris for an equally onerous subsidy. After the Spanish navy's defeat at Trafalgar in 1805, Napoleon sought to curb British maritime power through a continental blockade; it was for the full enforcement of this that the Grande Armée was dispatched to seize Portugal's harbours in 1807. The Spanish government had agreed to allow 25,000 of Napoleon's troops to cross the country; however, this initial force was followed at the beginning of 1808 by another 100,000 soldiers who remained on Spanish territory, seizing the ports of Barcelona and San Sebastián and taking control of several key fortresses—'without the government's permission or certain knowledge of [Napoleon's] military objectives'.

Yet the French were not immediately received as occupiers. What changed matters was Napoleon's manoeuvring to remove the Bourbons from the Spanish throne. At the centre of events, and acting as a lightning rod for popular discontent, was the figure of Manuel Godoy, Spain's first minister since 1792 and royal favourite (and purportedly the Queen's lover). Universally loathed not only for his undeserved promotion and moral laxity, but also for the sufferings inflicted on the country by his diplomacy, Godoy was removed in a night-time palace coup at Aranjuez in March 1808. Popular revulsion at his ministership was so strong that the king who had empowered him, Carlos IV, was forced to abdicate in favour of his son, Fernando VII. Six months earlier, Fernando—described by his own mother as 'sly and cowardly'—had plotted to have Godoy removed, writing a flattering letter to Napoleon to secure the Emperor's support. The plot failed, but once Fernando had been anointed King, he again sought recognition from

Bonaparte. The intrigues of the preceding months, however, 'had definitively determined Napoleon to be rid of the Bourbons'. In April, he lured first Fernando and then the entire Spanish royal family across the border to Bayonne, and within two weeks had forced their abdication in favour of his brother Joseph. The royal family were to while away the war years on Talleyrand's estate at Valençay, bowing to Napoleon while Spain heroically resisted him in their name.

There had already been outbreaks of popular anger against the French, most notably with the Madrid rebellion of May 2–3. Suppressed by the French commander, Murat, the insurrection was followed by fierce reprisals from the occupiers. News of the Bourbons' removal from the throne spread quickly, however, and within three weeks a series of provincial uprisings had taken place, as the resistance flared into life. In the vacuum left by Fernando's abdication, insurrectionary *juntas* were established in a string of cities. Perhaps the most original and unusual political response to the war, there were eventually some twenty-nine of these scattered throughout the country. Fraser analyses them in some detail, noting their social composition: municipal authorities, local clergy and the military tended to be best represented; the labouring classes and merchants barely figured. They marked a distinct rupture with the old order: 'Spain was again split into its constituent kingdoms and regions, each of them autonomous and sovereign', he remarks. By September 1808, however, these regional bodies had been subordinated to a central Junta Suprema designed to co-ordinate the resistance on a national scale. Later in the century Francisco Pi y Margall, a disciple of Proudhon and an inspiration behind Spain's First Republic of 1873, was impressed by the *juntas*, arguing that Spain had been virtually a federal republic during the war, and called for a revival of the historic provinces along similar lines. It could be argued that Pi was prophetic in this regard, since today's autonomous communities—established in reaction to the centralist Francoist state—closely coincide with those provinces.

Napoleon's Cursed War provides a largely chronological account of the war 'from below', focusing for the most part on its first two years. This was its 'most tormented' period, in Fraser's words, encompassing the spread of the resistance and the devastating response from Napoleon: deployment of 250,000 troops, who were in turn constantly beset by an 'invisible army' of guerrillas. Fraser demolishes a number of myths which, over the course of the 19th century, became part of the historical image of the popular resistance—the figure of the rural guerrilla its most prominent symbol. While it is true that it was the participation of the rural population that transformed the struggle into a 'nationwide insurrection', much of the resistance was urban-based—as most strikingly indicated in the Madrid May 2nd rising.

The urban aspect of the war is reflected in the number of sieges, which makes the Spanish experience unique in comparison with other Napoleonic campaigns. The most famous were the two horrific sieges of Zaragoza, a key city on the eastern line of communication from France, in the summer of 1808 and winter of 1808–09. These are described in graphic detail in Fraser's gripping accounts, which follow at close range the progress of the battles and vividly evoke the atmosphere within the city's walls. On the eve of the first siege, a terse demand from the French encamped outside—'Capitulation'—received a determined reply: 'Cold Steel and War'. French artillery rained destruction on the city. We read of the bombing of the hospital: patients 'ran, hobbled or staggered into the streets in their nightshirts with their bandages, crutches and splints . . . To add to the horror, several lunatics escaped and ran shouting, singing and wildly laughing amidst the corpses. "Hell opened its gates that day", wrote an eyewitness.' Fraser then relates how, after the walls had been breached, the fighting 'turned into house-to-house combat, the French often occupying one floor, the defenders the next; staircases had to be stormed one by one, and party walls knocked through in order to advance'. Zaragoza's resistance held firm, but four months later the French returned. This time the bombardment was still more severe—'in one week in January alone six thousand bombs and grenades fell on the city'—and the fighting within the walls 'even longer and more ferocious than during the first siege'. It raged not only in the streets but 'in underground tunnels, streets, houses and rooftops'. Food became scarce, and typhus and hunger so decimated the city's inhabitants that by the time it surrendered in January 1809, '6,000 corpses were said to be lying in the streets awaiting burial', and 'the infected air was suffocating, dense smoke covered the sky'.

Prominent in Fraser's account are instances of heroism on the part of civilians. For example, 'armed only with a knife, a seventy-six-year-old carpenter attacked two French soldiers who were sacking a house after assassinating its inhabitants; he killed one and, seizing his musket, took the other prisoner.' Another celebrated incident involved Agustina Zaragoza, who, after the gunners—including her fiancé—had been killed, fired a cannon on the advancing French. She exemplifies the extraordinary and unique role played by Spanish women throughout the war, for which there were very few parallels elsewhere during the Napoleonic period. It is noticeable, also, how women were drawn into industry—especially the textile factories in the environs of Barcelona, called the Manchester of Spain, where a proto-industrialism had taken root earlier in the 18th century. Here the character of the resistance was significantly inflected by local particularities—not least among them the prior existence of Catalan self-defence militias, the *sometents*, who provided a strong foundation for guerrilla warfare. Also

specific to the Catalan case was the fact that the French had occupied the largest city, Barcelona; as a result, the insurrection here was from the outset 'more territorially dispersed than elsewhere'.

The war in Catalonia was 'longer, more bitter and more costly in lives and property than in almost any other part of Spain', according to Fraser. It is notable that there were four sieges in the region, including that of Gerona, which held out for seven months in 1809—the longest siege apart from that of Cádiz, which lasted for two and a half years. The latter's ordeal began in the summer of 1810, when for practical purposes the Atlantic port became the capital. The Junta Suprema had by this time dissolved: it had been evacuated from Madrid to Sevilla in December 1808, and then fled before the French advance into Andalusia at the beginning of 1810, handing power to a regency. That September, however, pressure on the regents—most notably from the New World colonies—forced the convocation of the Cortes, a medieval body, rarely summoned, in which only Church and nobles were originally represented. Now, in the midst of occupation, some 233 deputies from a cross-section of Spanish society—minus the lower orders—assembled for a Constituent Assembly in Cádiz. It became the scene of endless, often factious debates on what became the Constitution of 1812 which, whatever its shortcomings—and there were many—became a model for later constitutions in Portugal and Greece and, it has even been suggested, that of the Russian Decembrists of 1825. French attempts to starve Cádiz into submission, meanwhile, foundered on the city's geography: located on an isthmus that was 'virtually impregnable by land', as Fraser notes, it was always able to bring in supplies by sea, and the blockade was eventually lifted in August 1812.

Other significant sieges included those of Badajoz, Burgos and San Sebastián; these were invested by the British, who had landed in Portugal in 1808 and, having secured its coast and broken Napoleon's continental blockade in 1809, remained on the other side of the border until 1812. The storming of Badajoz that April became infamous due to the mayhem and plunder carried out in the captured city. 'It made no difference', comments Fraser, 'to the drunken soldiery that they were murdering, pillaging and raping their Spanish allies; even worse was that Wellington took no serious measures to prevent what, in effect, was the most horrifying night of the British Peninsular War'. So deeply ingrained has been the memory of the horrors of that night that, when the Royal Fusiliers recently requested to erect a memorial, they were refused. The siege of Burgos in the autumn of the same year was a complete failure, partly due to Wellington's misjudgement and the lack of a siege train; he was compelled to withdraw to Portugal in a rout during which discipline collapsed and many soldiers deserted. (Did any British soldiers join the guerrillas, as many Spanish and

French deserters did on other occasions?) In the late summer of 1813, the British besieged San Sebastián, which was also sacked—the victims, once again, being Spaniards.

Mutual antagonism between supposed allies is a theme running through the book. For six continuous years, Spaniards had to resist French occupation, and for much of that time without assistance from their British ally—for centuries, of course, Spain's traditional enemy. British motives were generally suspect, especially when Spain's American colonies began to revolt, as London's merchants were the main beneficiaries of the consequent opening up of trade; for the next century, Britain was to dominate the Spanish American market. The troops of the Protestant power showed little respect for Catholic sensibilities, sacking churches and raping nuns; and Wellington held the Spanish army and its generals in low esteem (though Charles Esdaile has sought to rectify the bad press it has received in his analyses of the latter years of the war). Ordinary Spaniards, for their part, would have been puzzled as to why Wellington should on a number of occasions have retired to the impregnable Lines of Torres Vedras north of Lisbon. Portugal is marginal to Fraser's main concerns, but Wellington would have been at a loss without Portuguese troops which, under the management of William Beresford, had been transformed into an efficient fighting force.

In contrast to their suspicions of the British army, Spanish attitudes towards the navy were very different. Wellington's own view was unequivocal: 'If anyone wishes to know the history of this war, I will tell him: it's our maritime superiority.' Without the navy, the Portuguese royal family and court could not have been evacuated to Brazil when the French army was at the gates of Lisbon in 1807. It was the navy, too, that prevented the French from seizing Cádiz, and was crucial in virtually expelling the occupying forces from the northern coast, capturing Santander, which facilitated the provision of supplies to the army. Operations along the east coast were less successful, failing to break the French hold on Barcelona. The British fleet played a pivotal role by supplying the guerrillas with massive shipments of arms and ammunition, as well as disembarking fighters along the coast, finally making possible, through Navarre, the invasion of south-western France in the autumn of 1813. More mundane, but no less important, was the contribution it made by transporting not only supplies and troops from England, but also bullion: specie was necessary if the army was not to live off the land, as the French did; soldiers' wages had to be paid, and funds were granted to many juntas. The navy also took soldiers to fight in the United States in the War of 1812, bringing back wheat in that famine year.

Napoleon showed very little understanding of Spain. Of all his mistakes, the greatest was arguably his view that armies should live off the land. Nothing so alienated the rural population, which soon became a good

recruiting ground for guerrillas. By 1823, when the grandiloquently-named Hundred-Thousand Sons of St Louis were dispatched by Louis XVIII to support Ferdinand, the French had learned the lesson and, by paying for their provisions, were able to perambulate through to southern Spain with scarcely a shot being fired. Another fatal error was to appoint generals without coordinating their commands, with the result that they were constantly at loggerheads. Nor did Napoleon seem to appreciate the challenge of the guerrillas. At their height in 1811–12, there were 330 guerrilla formations, comprising around 55,000 men—almost as large as the regular army. Fraser devotes a chapter to their composition and achievements in battle. Where origins and occupations are recorded, these were more often than not plebeian. Fraser lists some prominent examples with their *noms de guerre*:

landworkers and small farmers like Juan Martín, ‘El Empecinado’ in Castilla la Nueva; [Francisco] Espoz y Mina in Navarra and Julián Sánchez, ‘El Charro’, from Salamanca; the 18-year-old shepherd Gaspar de Jáuregui, ‘El Pastor’, in the Basque country and the rural parish priest Jerónimo Merino in Castilla la Vieja, alongside the Burgos master ironworker, Francisco Longo, in Cantabria.

These formations, often attired in villagers’ clothes topped with trophy shakos and imperial uniforms, inflicted serious casualties on the French: Espoz y Mina’s divisions killed an estimated 16,745 enemy soldiers between 1810 and the end of the war, or 9.2 a day. In the Ebro valley in 1811–12, the average reached 35 a day. By 1812, some of Napoleon’s generals—notably Marshal Suchet—had persuaded him that guerrillas were now the major threat, and, since the Emperor was preoccupied with Russia, the Army of the Ebro was formed under General Reille, a veteran counter-insurgency general. For once, other generals ordered to help did so, thus creating the largest single army during the war. But by this time, the nature of guerrilla bands had changed: some had become institutionalized into recognizable regiments, most notably that of Espoz y Mina in Navarra.

The Emperor also failed to take Wellington seriously, scornfully describing him as a ‘sepoy general’, after his experience in India. What he never seems to have realized was that Wellington, recognizing intelligence as the key to military success, was working with the guerrillas—most notably through George Scovell (whom Fraser does not mention), a brilliant code-breaker who was able to provide a constant flow of vital information. Furthermore, neither Napoleon nor his brother Joseph learned any lessons from the latter’s apprenticeship in Naples, where he had been king from 1806–08. There can be no greater irony than that his later experience of Spain was foreshadowed during his Neapolitan reign: first of all in the fire-power and efficiency of the British army, which had crushingly defeated a

French force of 6,000 in a matter of minutes at the Battle of Maida in 1806. Second, after the British withdrew to Sicily, 40,000 French soldiers were tied down by formidable guerrilla resistance throughout the whole of Calabria, which was ruthlessly suppressed by Marshal Masséna.

Napoleon bitterly regretted appointing Joseph as king, and constantly interfered with him; despite his desire to demonstrate independence from Paris, Joseph's ability and authority were constantly in doubt, especially among the generals, who objected that he did not value military glory. When Joseph finally did take command of an army at the Battle of Vitoria in 1813, it was a disaster, and he fled to France never to return—and probably never to hear performed Beethoven's 'Vitoria Symphony' celebrating France's last great defeat on Spanish soil. Of all the Napoleonic brood, Joseph was the most attractive. In Fraser's closing words, 'it could be said that he was one of the truly honourable, although ineffectual, protagonists of this long, often savage and, for both sides, ultimately cursed war.'

The book concludes on a pessimistic note, as indicated by the title of its final chapter, 'Military Victory and Political Defeat'. In the end, Spain had fought against Napoleon only to restore an absolutist monarch. In March 1814, Ferdinand returned to universal acclaim, even in Zaragoza, and rescinded the 1812 Constitution; 'six years of ferocious reactionary repression' ensued, in which 'the Inquisition was restored, freedom of the press abolished, the pre-war councils of state re-established and municipal government again left in the hands of the old oligarchies'. During the course of the 19th century, Spain became in many ways the most militarized country in Europe, as armies marched and counter-marched across the central provinces in the Carlist wars, battles over the royal succession which lingered on from the 1830s to the 1870s. The country's image overseas altered, too, as Romanticism gathered momentum, with writers such as Mérimée, Gautier, Borrow, Washington Irving and others regarding Spain as a pre-industrial paradise.

What of the Peninsular War's effects on Napoleon's campaigns elsewhere, especially through the withdrawal of French troops to fight on other fronts? Esdaile has argued that the Peninsular War was always a sideshow for the Emperor, whereas it was seminal to both Spain and Portugal. On the other hand, for David A. Bell, author of *The First Total War* (2007), Spain was 'the famous "ulcer" that ate away at the vitals of the Empire, even before the limbs succumbed to Russian frostbite'—though he gives the ultimate credit for Napoleon's defeat not to the guerrillas but to the British. Whatever the verdict on the War's significance for Napoleon's rule, there can be no disputing its centrality to Iberia, as Spain and to a lesser extent Portugal lost much of their empires in its aftermath. For Spain these losses were drastic: all its colonies gained independence except Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines.

The first of these became an El Dorado for Spain, thanks to the sugar revolution and slavery, which lasted until 1885. Cuban wealth stimulated a flow of immigrants from the metropole, to the extent that there was scarcely a Spanish family without a relative on the island. Indeed, Spain became to a large degree a remittance society—hence the initial but short-lived enthusiasm that greeted the outbreak of war against the United States in 1898.

No one wishing to understand the Peninsular War in all its multifarious aspects can afford to ignore this book. It is dense reading, but its structure includes numerous explanatory interludes which are not simply light relief, but are unusual and highly revealing. There is the case of a Scottish Benedictine monk, recruited as a British agent to repatriate General Romana and 9,000 Spanish troops stranded in Denmark; or that of an ex-friar turned Napoleonic agent, who later achieved notoriety with an anti-clerical novel centring on a lecherous archbishop's designs on an innocent girl. Other episodes include family stories and popular folklore, as well as a balanced analysis of the significance of Goya. Pointing out that Goya spent almost all of the war in Bonapartist Madrid, Fraser notes that his celebrated *Disasters of War* engravings were not, as is commonly supposed, documents of events he witnessed—despite Goya's marginal comment on many of the plates, 'This I have seen'. The artist was 'deeply ambivalent about the war, its aims and means': he was horrified by 'the cruelty of the supposedly "civilized" French', while on the other hand 'the patriots' defence of religion and reliance on the Church did not enamour him to their cause'. He was alarmed, too, by the spectre of popular revolt. Many of the engravings feature armed villagers engaged in brutal acts against French troops; in one, 'a pile of partially stripped corpses, possibly French soldiers by their remaining long trousers', is accompanied by the caption 'This is what you were born for'. Fraser continues: 'above the dead an unarmed villager staggers forward, blood spewing from his open mouth, arms outstretched in a typical Goya gesture and about to fall on—and join—the corpses.' The images, which echo the French engraver Jacques Callot's 1633 'Miseries of War', depicting hangings and rapes in the Thirty Years' War, were finally published posthumously in 1863.

Throughout the detailed political and economic analyses and interludes which constitute the bulk of the book, one never escapes from the realities of war and its crippling costs, both in money and misery. Diseases such as malaria, yellow fever and typhus were endemic; starvation haunted the land throughout, as did violent extremes of weather (unique, it would seem, to Spain). But the dominant feelings are of fear and hatred: fear of all the armies—French, British and Spanish—and of marauding bandits and rapacious guerrillas; and popular hatred for the foreign occupation

forces living off the land, destroying villages and churches and engaging in wanton killing.

In an all too short epilogue, Fraser refers to over 1,000 Spanish exiles living in London. In this connection it is worth mentioning Manuel Moreno Alonso's exhaustive 1997 book, *La forja del liberalismo en España: los amigos españoles de Lord Holland, 1793–1840*, based on seven years' study in the UK. Two people in particular are relevant to Fraser's discussion. The first is Joseph Blanco White, a Sevillian priest who fled to England in 1810, where he stayed until his death in 1841, eventually joining the Unitarian Church in Liverpool, which was in the vanguard of social reform there. He continued to be critical of Spain as a political entity—'miserably oppressed as it was by government and church'—and in an 1835 letter to Lord Holland protested that the country 'would have improved under Joseph Bonaparte, but she is sure to sink more and more under the pressures of the incurable and odious Borbóns'. Another person featuring in Moreno's research, more surprisingly, is Espoz y Mina, the greatest of the guerrilla leaders, who entered into a long correspondence with Holland, requesting his assistance in advancing his own career as a Liberal politician in Spain in the 1830s.

Another point on which Fraser might perhaps have touched is the curious fact that guerrillas scarcely appeared during the Spanish Civil War. In *Blood of Spain*, Fraser shows that the concept of guerrilla war was discredited in face of the need to form a regular army; one also suspects that communists distrusted the freedom of action prized by guerrillas. Ironically, it was the Cuban, Alberto Bayo, who, after leading the republicans' expedition to Majorca in 1936, failed to persuade anyone to take guerrilla warfare seriously. Disillusioned, he then left for Mexico, where he was to train Castro's followers, who put these techniques to more effective use in overthrowing Batista.

In discussing how myths about Spain's 'War of Independence' were used for political ends, Fraser argues that the 19th-century liberals had tried to create a modern nation around the ideal of national unity in the war's 'glorious epic'. He contrasts this with the more sinister purpose behind the early Franco regime's constant invocation of popular resistance to a foreign aggressor—consisting of communism, a Judaic–Masonic international conspiracy—in defence of Spain's 'eternal values': religion, the fatherland and the natural authority of the dictator himself. This last idea represented a return to the figure of the absolute monarch. Indeed, for Fraser the Civil War furnished proof that 'absolutism in a modern authoritarian-clerical form remained alive in the sinews of Spanish society'.

Chance events too were to have far-reaching consequences for Spain. Francisco Franco had planned to follow his father in what probably would have been an innocuous career in the navy; instead, for financial reasons he joined the army, and after a brilliant career in Morocco was appointed director

of the military academy situated in, of all places, Zaragoza. Although his presence there was short-lived—Azaña, first Prime Minister of the Second Republic, closed it in 1931, as it was a hotbed of reactionary militarism—it is a curious coincidence that Franco should have been there at all, in a city where Ferdinand the Well Beloved had been deliriously welcomed on his return to Spain. The wheel had indeed turned full circle.