



**Louie Dean Valencia-García.** *Antiauthoritarian Youth Culture in Francoist Spain: Clashing with Fascism.* London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018. Illustrations. 272 pp. \$120.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-350-03847-9.

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### Youth Against Fascism

Louie Dean Valencia-García shows in his deeply engaging and analytically eloquent monograph, *Antiauthoritarian Youth Culture in Francoist Spain*, that the study of dissent and protest cultures remains an intellectually dynamic field of research. The book is concerned with the Spanish turn from Francisco Franco's authoritarian regime (1939-75) toward a pluralistic, modern democracy. However, as Valencia-García demonstrates, the majority of Spaniards of the 1960s were never engaged in resistance but desired peace in an effort to avoid directly challenging the power structures of the dictatorship. Although the regime's legitimacy was founded on the victory in the Spanish Civil War (1936-39), Francoist Spain favored a sort of general amnesia and self-censorship that suppressed the bitter memories and shielded the people of Spain from the recurrence of violence and bloodshed. Change was, however, incipient with the arrival of a new generation born in Francoist Spain that—crucially—had no personal experience of civil war (or the “War of Liberation” as it euphemistically was named by the dictatorship). They dared to imagine an alternative future and sought ways to challenge the dominant authoritarian structures. This book is about how acts of everyday opposition and dissent emerged within Spanish youth, and investigates how inven-

tive tactics were employed to challenge the stagnated “national-catholic” Francoist system.

While previous research has focused on the Spanish transition to democracy during the late 1970s and 1980s, Valencia-García convincingly argues for the need to go back to the youth culture of the 1950s and 1960s to understand Spaniards' push toward a more pluralistic society. While many scholars have argued for a sharp shift around Franco's death in 1975, Valencia-García maintains that democracy in Spain could never have been successfully implemented merely from above. Such perspectives overlook the agency of young Spaniards who had been subverting the regime especially through their everyday lives. Like most dictatorships, Francoist Spain was highly sensitive to even the smallest forms of critique. This means that scholars must also be extremely attentive to the smallest signs of pluralistic countercultures that developed in the margins. These need to be taken seriously, and although some of these subcultures might seem insignificant in hindsight, Valencia-García invites us to reconsider them as crucial societal developments that helped Spain in its rapid transformation to democracy. Spanish youth managed to create alternative spaces for cultural dissent, but to survive in such hostile circum-

stances, it was of vital importance that they did not pose a direct threat to the regime. The beauty of a pluralistic youth culture was its ability to implicitly challenge authority. The aim of the book is hence to study “Spanish youth culture and queer culture during and after the dictatorship, with an emphasis on that of Madrid and its role in the transition to the modern Spanish democracy” (p. 2). Valencia-García defines this as an “antiauthoritarian youth culture” that due to its implicit nature is best studied through alternative sources that provide revelations about agency, everyday life, and print culture, including the production and copying of small newspapers, journals, music, pamphlets, films, and comic books.

The focus on everyday acts of dissent thus analyzes how “even seemingly apolitical young people” in fact challenged patriarchal, conservative, and authoritarian norms. As Valencia-García states, the *Movidad Madrileña*, or the “Madrid Scene,” of the 1970s with its carnivalesque character and partying in the streets managed to create a counterpublic or a subculture that through its adherence to plurality challenged Francoist normative notions of gender, sexuality, and nationalism. Antiauthoritarianism could therefore be articulated by basically nonpolitical acts, such as partying in the streets. This “carnavalesque and pluralistic culture” enabled ordinary people to subvert ideals of the conservative regime through “a culture of drugs, sex, drinking and art performed in the streets of Madrid” (p. 3). As distinctions between private and public largely collapsed under the authoritarian security state, dissent found new and unexpected forms and shapes. Indeed, as Valencia-García thoroughly shows, “the lasting impact of the Movida ... promoted the creation of pluralistic, autonomous and democratic spaces despite the Falangist desire for a homogeneous, conservative and Catholic Spain” (p. 4).

When contextualizing antiauthoritarianism it is of utmost importance to understand the close entanglement between fascism and authoritarian-

ism. As the book is concerned with everyday forms of dissent, the pervasive power of everyday fascism becomes equally relevant. Although Franco’s dictatorship is better described as authoritarian than fascist, Valencia-García makes an elaborate point about the endurance of fascist tendencies within authoritarianism. These tendencies encompass, according to Valencia-García, among others, the glorification of purity, an obsession with youth, the use of hegemonic and binary categorizations, fervent nationalistic ideology, a longing for homogeneity, the idolization of militarism, the centralization of power, an extensive use of surveillance and violence, and a general rejection of enlightenment ideology and democracy. Fascist tendencies, moreover, embraced misogyny and heteronormativity. Paradoxically, it was queerphobic at the same time that it idolized the strong male figure and the male body. It rested on rituals and mystic symbolism; it pushed critical thinking and intellectualism to the margins of society; and it advanced chauvinism, nationalism, racism, and anti-intellectualism, while also imagining geographical expansion and colonialism or expressing a nostalgia for lost empire. These fascist tendencies provide us with a blueprint for antiauthoritarian and antifascist dissent as they define the main qualities that the antiauthoritarian youth culture sought to oppose. By advocating plurality instead of homogeneity, internationalism instead of racism and purity, feminism instead of misogyny and heteronormativity, it gives us a taste of the incipient Spanish culture of dissent.

The reader is also invited to consider the impact of textbooks used in Spanish schools. Chapter 2 serves as a welcome contextualization of how Spanish youth was forced to grow up, how they were indoctrinated and limited in their possibilities to oppose the system. From elementary schools to universities, conformity and traditional Spanish values were propagated. However, a young intelligentsia nevertheless soon emerged that imagined and invented new spaces for dissent. According to Valencia-García, such tactics de-

ployed by those without power against a mighty authority were at the heart of Spanish antiauthoritarianism. When authority controlled all public space, dissent clustered in the smallest of fissures. A prerequisite for its existence was to be marginal in order to avoid repression, but at the same time it showed that no authority was total, and that in unsuspected spaces dissent could be galvanized in the margins, where it could prepare and imagine a better, more pluralistic, and democratic future. In chapter 3 Valencia-García continues the analysis by revealing how students turned the funeral procession of philosopher José Ortega y Gasset into a protest. In a similar way, the rediscovery of Miguel de Unamuno's *Last Lecture*, originally delivered in October 1936 when he was the rector of the Universidad de Salamanca, was used by antiauthoritarian youth during the 1950s as a historically meaningful memory of dissent.

In chapter 4 Valencia-García turns to the topic of banned books, and especially the role of Superman comic books in the 1960s. It investigates the underground comic book market and the regime's partially unsuccessful efforts to stifle the underground comic book scene. Under such extreme conditions of authoritarian rule, the reading and trading of banned Superman comics became a part of everyday dissent. Reading Superman would of course not lead to the fall of the dictatorship, but it provided, according to Valencia-García, an important opportunity for Spanish youth to imagine non-confrontative ways to subvert the authoritarian system. Chapter 5 looks in turn at the role of political-literary magazines of the 1960s and analyzes how these recreated the tradition of the Spanish *tertulia*. In cafés, important spaces for the discussion of literature and politics emerged, or rather re-emerged, that reminded Spaniards of their pre-Francoist pluralistic traditions. Still it is important to keep in mind the limits of this dissent as the authorities monitored cafés with undercover police and, when necessary, disrupted developing networks of dissent. Chapter 6 turns our attention to the independent youth publications of the

1970s, such as *El Rollo* or *Vicios Modernos*, that directly challenged normative constructions of sexuality and incorporated elements from American and British punk culture. In the final chapter, Valencia-García continues with an analysis of the underground cultures created around the punk band Kaka de Luxe and the films of Pedro Almodóvar and Iván Zulueta.

In conclusion, this book makes a significant contribution to the history of youth cultures and to the scholarly consideration of "the youth" as a crucial political and social category with its own agency. It makes a compelling—and hopeful—argument that not all dictatorships need to be toppled in the battlefield but can also be slowly defeated through dissent articulated in the streets, through subversive comics, and in the minds of young people. Valencia-García therefore shows that "fascist tendencies" are best fought in our everyday lives, be it in Francoist Spain, or today's America. All in all, this book offers a very welcome addition to the study of everyday forms of resistance in authoritarian societies. It is therefore a pity that the compelling introductory chapters that discuss in depth questions related to anti-fascism, dissent, everyday forms of resistance, and the different fascist tendencies in authoritarianism are not matched by a concluding chapter in the same high caliber. The all too short conclusions neglect the possibility of gazing beyond the Spanish antiauthoritarian context and comparing the results with situations elsewhere around the world. The vast literature on youth activism within fascist or authoritarian societies, from Nazi Germany and fascist Italy to authoritarian regimes of the Cold War period where young people certainly also imagined relevant ways to subvert their own regimes, would certainly have enhanced the final analysis. The lack of conclusions and missed opportunities to advance comparative outlooks partially conceals the fact that the book also constitutes a significant contribution to the broader international research field related to anti-fascism, everyday resistance, and cultural dissent in au-

thoritarian and fascist societies. Valencia-García's study certainly deserves a distinct place within that larger historiographical framework.

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