



Youth Agency and Ideology: *La Movida* and the Demise of the Francoist Regime

—Julia Lin Thompson

Valencia-García, Louie Dean. *Antiauthoritarian Youth Culture in Francoist Spain: Clashing with Fascism*. Bloomsbury, 2018. 272 pp. \$120.00 hc. ISBN 9781350038479.

Louie Dean Valencia-García's monograph *Antiauthoritarian Youth Culture in Francoist Spain: Clashing with Fascism* reflects on the role of Spanish youth during Spain's transition from an authoritarian regime to a democratic state following the death of Francisco Franco in 1975. With a specific focus on Madrid, Valencia-García's work demonstrates how young Spaniards growing up during the dictatorship of Franco (1939-75) had nonetheless contributed to the development of an antiauthoritarian and carnivalesque culture during the last two decades of the regime. By the early 1980s, this antiauthoritarian youth culture culminated in *La Movida Madrileña* (the "Madrid Scene"), or simply the *Movida*. The Madrid Scene was primarily a cultural movement, or rather, a countercultural movement that clashed with the fascist culture promoted during the Francoist regime and, at the same time, accelerated the nation's transition to democracy.

The development of this antiauthoritarian youth culture, as Valencia-García suggests, was largely related to young Spaniards' capacity to create and adopt what Michel De Certeau calls "tactics" to subvert the regime's authority in spaces where the regime's power seemed weaker. Tactics, according to De Certeau, are those calculated actions undertaken by the powerless in their everyday life to undermine the power of the oppressor; they form "an art of the weak" that, "blow by blow," chips away at and creates "cracks" in an existing system of power (37). To illustrate how young Spaniards managed to identify and make use of such spaces to subvert the authority of the Francoist regime in their daily life, Valencia-García incorporates an impressively vast range of sources. These include official censorship

records, surveys, textbooks used during the regime, comic books read by young people, youth magazines and pamphlets that circulated during the *Movida*, as well as the author's communications with participants in the *Movida*. The rich sources of information collected in this volume enable the author to distinguish between the overlapping concepts of "fascist youth" and "youth under fascism." While the former refers to "how the state saw young people," the latter refers to "how young people lived their everyday lives under the state" (Valencia-García 16). Despite this volume's focus on Francoist Spain, Valencia-García's differentiation of the two concepts could nonetheless prove useful to scholars studying the development of youth culture in different socio-political contexts. The realistic picture of youth life during Francoist Spain achieved through the author's integration of broad and varied sources also renders this volume valuable to scholars interested specifically in contemporary Spanish history and youth culture.

In the introduction, Valencia-García states that the book will investigate "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" (2). Nevertheless, despite the work's focus on the Madrid Scene, the author stresses the importance of not considering the *Movida* in an isolated manner. Instead, through the preface and the epilogue attached to the volume, Valencia-García highlights not only the inextricable connections between the *Movida* and Spanish youth movements today, but also the fact that Spanish youth culture forms an essential part of the development of global youth culture. On the one hand, the antiauthoritarian youth culture developed during the later Francoist years was heavily influenced by the burgeoning global youth culture of the 1960s and 1970s that connected the American civil rights movement, British punk culture, and American popular and underground culture. On the other hand, young Spaniards' turn to Spanish *tertulia* and carnivalesque traditions within antiauthoritarian culture also made for a unique Spanish youth culture experience. Moreover, the initiatives undertaken by young Spaniards during the *Movida* and their creation of democratic spaces to voice dissenting opinions, as the author suggests, has also provided a valuable historical reference for youth movements today, as young people cope with the current global economic and political crisis.

Chapter 1, “Making a Scene,” lays out the theoretical framework of this investigation, as Valencia-García queries, “what prepared young Spaniards for what would become known as the ‘transition to democracy’?” (9). He argues that the process by which young Spaniards learned to occupy and reappropriate public spaces as a way of cultivating pluralism and undermining the regime’s fascist ideology started as early as the mid-1950s, long before the end of the dictatorship. To investigate how such a process had taken place, Valencia-García sets up a theoretical framework that draws from youth studies, urban studies, critical theory, space theory, queer theory, and the study of everyday life. Rooted in these conceptual frames, the subsequent chapters trace the daily life of young people during the later Francoist years, uncovering the process by which young Spaniards embraced liberal democratic values and prepared themselves for the *Movida*, despite the repressions imposed by the regime.

Chapter 2, “To Study is to Serve Spain,” offers an overview of the fascist education programme promoted by the Francoist government. By drawing on key textbooks included in the school curriculum, Valencia-García highlights the regime’s efforts to form its future citizens via a National-Catholic education that not only provided a biased version of the history of the Spanish Civil War (1936-39) but also contained nationalist, patriarchal, sexist, and heteronormative messages (57-58). If, through the examination of the textbooks, Valencia-García has curated an image of the fascist youth that the Francoist regime had attempted to cultivate, then the author’s analysis in the subsequent chapters largely contributes to the retrieval of a realistic image of young people living under fascism. Chapters 3 through 6 address, in a chronological order, the everyday life of young Spaniards from the mid-1950s until the late 1970s and highlight the repressions that young Spaniards had to endure during the Francoist years, including state censorship and surveillance. At the same time, he also demonstrates how young Spaniards managed to identify spaces, both physical and virtual, where the power of the Francoist regime seemed weaker and to reappropriate such spaces to voice and perform dissent.

Based on the works of Alon Confino and Paul Fussels, chapter 3, “The Revolt of the Youth,” examines collective memory as one space that the authoritarian regime could not fully control, regardless of its promotion of a biased version of Civil War history and its use of coercive

power. Valencia-García argues that the collective memory of the bloodshed and horror during the Civil War and the desire to have peace prompted Spaniards to consent to Franco's dictatorship, as well as its revisionist version of history, during the post-Civil War years. Young Spaniards born after the Civil War, however, lacked this memory of the horrors of the war. Thus, for young Spaniards, the revisionist history promoted by the regime and the regime's legitimacy did not carry the same weight as it had with previous generations. Additionally, with the support of such prominent Falangist intellectuals as Pedro Laín Entralgo, the pre-Civil War tradition of political-literary dialogues was revived within Spanish universities during the 1950s. This revival was achieved mainly through the organization of secret poetic encounters in the universities, at which anti-fascist authors and their works could be explored and discussed by students, who then romanticized the history of the pre-Civil War tradition to legitimize contemporary dissent. Valencia-García offers two case studies to support this argument. The first looks at the mythologizing of the Spanish intellectual Miguel de Unamuno's stand against fascism in 1936, as featured in Luis Gabriel Portillo Pérez's short story "Unamuno's Last Lecture." The other examines the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset's funeral procession in 1955, which was turned into a protest by university students. Through these case studies, Valencia-García illustrates the vital role that the collective memory of the pre-Civil War democratic tradition had played in shaping student dissent during the 1950s.

Chapter 4, "Truth, Justice and the American Way in Spain," explores young Spaniards' reading of banned comic books during the 1960s, with a specific focus on the *Superman* comics. The censorship of *Superman* comics was mainly due to the regime's conviction that *Superman* promoted values and visions of society that were deemed incompatible with the regime's National-Catholic agenda. The regime considered the main characters' behaviours queer and protofeminist, which contravened the heteronormative and patriarchal gender stereotypes that it had attempted to establish and promote. At the same time, notions of democracy and justice as represented in the *Superman* comics also alarmed the regime to a considerable extent as such ideas tended to raise questions regarding the legitimacy of the Francoist dictatorship. The popularity *Superman* achieved among Spanish readers, particularly children and young readers, only further aggravated the regime's uneasiness, subsequently

leading to their complete ban of *Superman* comics in the early 1960s. Nevertheless, as the author illustrates, despite the official ban, young Spaniards continued to possess, read, and exchange *Superman* comics throughout the 1960s. Through their reading of the banned comic books, and sometimes even roleplaying the characters, young Spaniards not only subverted the authority of the Francoist regime, but also prepared themselves to embrace an alternate vision of society.

Chapter 5, “The Penetration of Franco’s Spain,” examines young Spaniards’ production and distribution of political-literary magazines in the 1960s, inspired by the pre-Civil War tradition of the *tertulia*. *Tertulias*, as Valencia-García explains, were occasions for the public to gather and engage in dialogue and discussion over literary and political issues. Not surprisingly, disruptions of this practice occurred during Franco’s dictatorship, as the regime attempted to eliminate dissenting opinions. Despite the regime’s suppression, the democratic tradition of the *tertulia* was reimagined and revived by young Spaniards in the 1960s through the production and distribution of political-literary magazines. With a specific focus on the magazine *Cuadernos para el diálogo*, Valencia-García demonstrates the extent to which young Spaniards, particularly the educated elite, managed to turn these political-literary magazines into virtual spaces where alternate views of society could be explored and criticism of the regime could be expressed, though still in a subtle manner.

Chapter 6, “Clashing with Fascism,” proceeds with the examination of the emergence and development of antiauthoritarian punk culture in Spain in the 1970s. As Valencia-García illustrates, the development of this Spanish punk culture was heavily influenced by the burgeoning global youth culture and punk culture of the 1960s and 1970s, especially that developed in the UK and the US. Spanish punk culture contributed in turn to the development of global youth culture with a unique Spanish dimension. Valencia-García demonstrates that, in the course of creating Spanish punk, young Spaniards managed to combine elements of global punk culture with the Spanish carnivalesque tradition, despite the latter’s heavy suppression during Franco’s dictatorship. The formation and development of Spanish punk allowed young Spaniards to further subvert the rigid societal norms of the regime through the production and distribution of underground punk comics and the (re)appropriation of public

spaces such as bars, cafés, streets, and plazas to perform transgressive ideals. These acts of transgression performed by young Spaniards from spaces, both physical and virtual, eventually converged into the *Movida*. Chapter 7, “Madrid Kills Me,” concludes this study by exploring some of the most famous symbols of the *Movida*, including the films of Pedro Almodóvar and the punk band Kaka de Luxe. It elaborates on the eventual dissipation of the *Movida* following Spain’s transition to democracy in the 1980s.

In *Antiauthoritarian Youth Culture in Francoist Spain*, Valencia-García offers a comprehensive and realistic picture of the everyday life of young Spaniards growing up during the Francoist regime. By adopting the perspective of the young people, Valencia-García highlights Spanish youth culture as a force that has shaped political changes in Spain’s recent past rather than a mere component of the general political milieu—the achievement of a “counter-narrative” (Valencia-García 27). The author convincingly demonstrates the vital role that collective memory of pre-Civil War pluralistic and democratic traditions played in legitimizing and shaping antiauthoritarian youth movements under the regime. Valencia-García’s construction of this counter-narrative indeed forms a major strength of the work; however, in his attempt to set this counter-narrative apart from what he recognizes as the Francoist regime’s perspective of young people, the contradictions and inconsistencies present within the regime’s cultural policies seem to have eluded his attention.

Valencia-García demonstrates the kind of fascist youth the regime attempted to form through its National-Catholic education curriculum. The author correctly observes that the textbooks used during the regime are “reflective of their time and place” (50) and include materials that would be considered racist, sexist, and highly nationalistic today. Besides this, however, the regime’s textbooks also feature messages that are often inconsistent and contradictory, which Valencia-García does not sufficiently address. For instance, in its teaching of the Spanish Civil War history, although the regime emphasized the importance of children being obedient and never challenging the status quo, it also attempted to justify its overthrow of the Second Spanish Republic (1931-39) as an act that was nonetheless necessary and just. These contradictory messages subsequently led to the regime’s awkward explanation of its military uprising against the republican government as an act of *revolución constructiva*,

or a constructive revolution, as opposed to all other kinds of social revolutions that were considered undesirable (Anonymous 41). Also, in a post-Civil War context, while the regime had attempted to teach children of the need to extend a fraternal love to all fellow Spaniards, at the same time, it invited children to reflect on such questions as whom, preferably, one should love and whether or not one should also love those considered “bad” Spaniards (Mailló 13). Given such contradictory messages in the regime’s textbooks, Valencia-García has missed an opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of its National–Catholic indoctrination in forming his counter-narrative in this volume.

Although Valencia-García correctly identifies state censorship as a major suppressive force imposed by the regime to eliminate dissent, he overlooks the fact that the regime’s censorship system was primarily a bureaucratic practice that often involved censors’ inconsistent and arbitrary decisions. The regime’s arbitrary and inconsistent censorship practices have been explored in detail in works by Ian Craig, Marisa Fernández-López, Pedro C. Cerrillo and Victoria Sotomayor, Julia Lin Thompson, as well as that by Georgina Cisquella, José Luis Erviti, and José A. Sorolla. If, through its National–Catholic ideology, the regime had attempted to impose a worldview that was supposed to be coherent and durable, then such contradictions and inconsistencies, as seen in the cultural policies promulgated by the regime, without a doubt, also constituted the weak points of the regime’s power. An exploration of whether or not young Spaniards growing up during the regime were able to recognize such weaknesses within the regime’s repressive cultural policies and to adopt corresponding tactics to challenge the regime’s power would have added to the depth of Valencia-García’s counter-narrative.

Despite the above reservations, Valencia-García’s informative work contributes a significant dimension to the study of youth culture during Franco’s dictatorship. By tracing the emergence, development, and lasting impact of the *Movida*—a history that spans thirty years—Valencia-García’s study examines this Spanish antiauthoritarian youth movement in a way that problematizes scholars’ often rigid division of a “Franco era” and a “post-Franco era.” The volume instead highlights the often-overlooked cultural changes that transcended the artificially divided eras. Further, by constructing a narrative that gives primacy to the perspective of young people, Valencia-García has shed light on the role and agency assumed

by young Spaniards in the process of Spain's transition to democracy, which tends to elude historians' attention in their focus on the general socio-political landscape of contemporary Spanish history. Moreover, Valencia-García's approach in contrasting the image of the fascist youth as encoded in the regime's school curriculum with the realistic image of the young Spaniards living under a fascist state also provides an essential reference for scholars whose works focus on the relationships between politics, ideology, and the production of texts for children and young people.

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