

"I want to make a contribution that helps the two sides reconcile," said the 62-year old, whose 850-page book draws not only on the research of Spanish historians but also includes testimony from the few witnesses that are still alive. Preston took 10 years to finish his book.

The Spanish Civil War, which pitted followers of Francisco Franco against the defenders of the Republic, is arguably the greatest drama in Spain's history, tolling more than half a million people killed.

"In Spain, there are just too many mass graves and not enough documents," said Preston, the first historian to examine atrocities committed on both sides. Approximately 300,000 people died during the fighting. But as Preston reveals now, almost as many Spaniards died during ethnic cleansings far behind the front lines. Atrocities continued even after Franco's dictatorship had been firmly established.

"The war brought out the lowest instincts on both sides," said Preston. His motto was to sugarcoat nothing and, at the same time, try to include as much specific material as possible. The historian shows how crimes committed by each of the conflicting sides differ not only in terms of quantity, but also in nature. The Republicans killed about 50,000 Franco followers and rebel sympathizers, including many priests. The other side massacred about three times as many people.

Republicans, Franco loyalists pursued a clear goal: the complete obliteration of the political enemy. Every method was acceptable to achieve this goal: random executions, torture and even mass rape.

Preston explains how African militias, fighting on the side of Franco, systematically tormented women and girls after they conquered a city. This was seen as the most important part in psychological warfare and was intended to break the last remaining resistance.

"The legionaries showed the Red cowards and their women what it means to be a man. This is justified because these anarchists and communists advocated free love," said Gonzalo Queipo de Llano, one of Franco's infamous generals.

The Republicans committed most of their crimes within the first five months of the Civil War, when the uprising of Franco loyalists effectively did away with the rule of law. In the chapter that deals with this phase, Preston meticulously details cruelties committed against priests and nuns.

"It was a spontaneous kind of violence that was designed to satisfy feelings of revenge. It was just as despicable as the kind committed by those on Franco's side," said author Marcos Ana, who was incarcerated in Franco's dungeons for 23 years. There, Ana saw how a priest hit an inmate with a bronze cross because the man refused to confess.

Franco's terror not only lasted until the end of the Civil War, but far into the post-war years. "They wanted to kill everyone who did not think like them," Preston explained.

Manuel Gómes Cantos, an officer with the para-military *guardia civil*, was a particularly brutal enforcer of this strategy. In his book, Preston describes how the leading Franco follower shadowed a Republican doctor on his walks, taking note of every person who greeted him. Gómes then jailed all of the sympathetic acquaintances before ordering that the doctor himself be executed.

Amparo Barayón, the wife of Spanish novelist Ramón J. Sender, was arrested with her seven-month old baby because she dared to protest her brother's detention. In prison, she was tortured and executed. Her daughter was sent to an orphanage and given up for adoption.

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“A Holocaust is a massacre of a people. After the war, another 20,000 Republicans were shot. And even more died from hunger and disease in work camps,” said Preston. “Five hundred thousand fled into exile where they often ended up in French internment camps or Nazi concentration camps. In my opinion, all this constitutes a Holocaust.”

Read the original article (<http://www.welt.de/politik/ausland/article13379985/Autor-nennt-spanischen-Buergerkrieg-Holocaust.html>) in German

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