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Review of: Aurora G. Morcillo, *The Seduction of Modern Spain: The Female Body and the Francoist Body Politic*

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Aurora G. Morcillo, *The Seduction of Modern Spain: The Female Body and the Francoist Body Politic*. Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2010. 338 pp.

Aurora Morcillo's new book is a theoretically informed and well researched study of sexual politics and the commodification of the female body during the Franco dictatorship. It focuses on the growing tensions between the regime's static conceptualization of gender roles and the rapidly modernizing social and economic context of the 1950s and 60s. Morcillo develops and extends the arguments she made in her first book, *True Catholic Womanhood: Gender Ideology in Franco's Spain* (Dekalb, IL., 2000), a pioneering analysis of National Catholic gender ideology and its role in buttressing the authoritarian political and social structures of Francoism. One of its major achievement was to complicate prevailing narratives by showing how some conservative Catholic women were able to carve out independent identities within the official institutions of the regime; in the process, they unintentionally undermined the dominant system of gender relations to which they at least nominally subscribed and inadvertently laid the groundwork for the democratic transition of the 1970s. In *The Seduction of Modern Spain*, Morcillo further explores the disconnect between the authoritarian aspirations of the dictatorship and the rapidly evolving social and cultural forces that eventually frustrated its efforts to discipline and control the body politic. Characterizing the Francoist regime as "neo-baroque," she documents the centrality of corporeal gendered metaphors in its political discourse. Like the absolute monarchy of the seventeenth century, the dictatorship resorted to theater, ritual, spectacle and other cultural instruments of political and cultural manipulation to transmit and instill its conception of the "mystic body politic." Morcillo makes effective use of the Foucauldian concept of "bio-power" to analyze both the dictatorship's "somaticized" political discourse and the legislation, social policies, institutions and cultural practices that commodified, regulated and nationalized female bodies and behavior. In examining the ways the regime sought to control the body politic by controlling women's bodies, both discursively and materially, she sheds light on the obsessive compulsion to monitor and restrict women's freedom that was so striking to those who lived and worked in Spain in the 1960s.

In chapters dedicated to prostitution, motherhood, health, sport, and physical fitness, and the cinema, Morcillo describes the theoretical and actual limitations on female bodies imposed by the regime. But she also contends that

the social and cultural changes that accompanied Spain's economic modernization in the 1960s undermined the credibility of both "organic democracy" and "true Catholic womanhood," the two ideological pillars that helped sustain the dictatorship over almost 40 years. Demographic growth, the expansion of the labor market, tourism, immigration, the rise of consumer society and the growing influence of the popular media all delegitimized the stale rhetoric of early Francoism, enabling women to imagine alternative lives. The regime responded with some unconvincing attempts to "modernize" its legal and cultural constraints on women and gender relations, but without really affecting the central core of the National Catholic ideology that had governed gender roles and expectations from the beginning. In a brief but intriguing epilogue, Morcillo suggests that the transition years multiplied the personal and professional possibilities open to women—as part of the widening opportunities for all citizens—without necessarily transforming embedded cultural notions about the feminine body.

One of the strengths of the *The Seduction of Modern Spain* is its historical perspective. Rather than isolating the Francoist regime as an object of study, the author links its ideology and technologies of power to religious and political discursive traditions that dated back to the early modern period and that acquired further elaboration as well as somewhat different meanings in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Linking these political formulations were somatic metaphors that represented society as an organism and political and economic crisis as a disease that demanded a therapeutic response. Imposition of a strict gender order that disciplined "unruly women" had characterized earlier efforts to order and control the body politic. As the product of a violent civil war, the Franco regime built on this rhetorical and ideological heritage to consolidate and justify its own repressive policies.

Morcillo consulted a wide range of published and archival sources for this study. She provides thoughtful analysis of the legislation regulating marriage, prostitution, education and the media through which the Francoist regime sought to regulate sexuality and public morality. To test official ideals against actual behavior, she turns to police reports, demographic and economic data, memoirs, photos, advice columns, and oral interviews with Spanish women. These sources expand the definition of the "political" by showing how seemingly private acts (sex outside of marriage, birth control, shopping, courting, and leisure activities) subverted, often unintentionally, the official norms that governed gender roles and hierarchies. To the experiences of the elite women she portrayed in her first book, Morcillo now adds a sophisticated analysis of the evolving values and aspirations of less privileged women. Her sensitive reading of popular culture, particularly cinema, advertisements, and women's magazines, provides her with insights into

the constraints and opportunities that ordinary women encountered. Morcillo's deep familiarity with Spanish culture allows her to use these materials with sensitivity and insight.

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