

Women as Survivors of Civil War Violence: A Comparative Study of Ireland and Spain

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Introduction

This project aimed to study the memory, experience, and discourse of gender-based violence during the Irish Civil War (1922-1923) and the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939).

Its title, "Women as Survivors", encapsulates my aim of centering women and empowering their voices in my research.

Why is it important that we study this topic?

- Women's voices have traditionally been ignored and silenced in the historiography and memory of these civil wars (Aiken).
- Gendered violence is "an unavoidable truth" of these civil wars which disproportionately affects women; thus, its study marks an attempt to break this stigma and taboo and highlight the severe and lasting physical and psychological impact on victims (Connolly 5).
- Mood of public commemoration and reflection: current Decade of Centenaries in Ireland and the ongoing "memory boom" in Spain (Aiken; Faber).



Source: *Sorrow of War Stamped in These Features*, Barcelona; Unknown, 1936; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid

Approach and Methodology

Interdisciplinary approach:

- Military and women's history
- Gender theory, with a focus on sexual violence and rape
- Memory and trauma theory
- Cultural studies
- Modern languages

Methodology:

The following archives were consulted to compile case studies of women's experiences of gender-based violence:

- Military Archives, Cathal Brugha Barracks, Dublin
- Early Printed Books and Manuscripts, The Library of Trinity College Dublin
- UCD Archives, Dublin
- Archivo General Militar, Ávila, Spain
- Archivo Histórico del Hospital Universitario José Germain, Madrid, Spain



Source: *Jamás*, 1936-39, Published by D.E.P.P., Spain; *Soldiers and Civilians: Imagery of the Spanish Civil War*, The Virtual Wright Museum of Art, Beloit College, Wisconsin

Key Terms

Gender: A historically specific, dichotomous, and socially determined category that is imposed on a sexed body (Scott).

Gender-based violence: Acts of violence perpetrated against women as a form of intimidation, an exercise of male power, and a wartime tactic (Brownmiller).

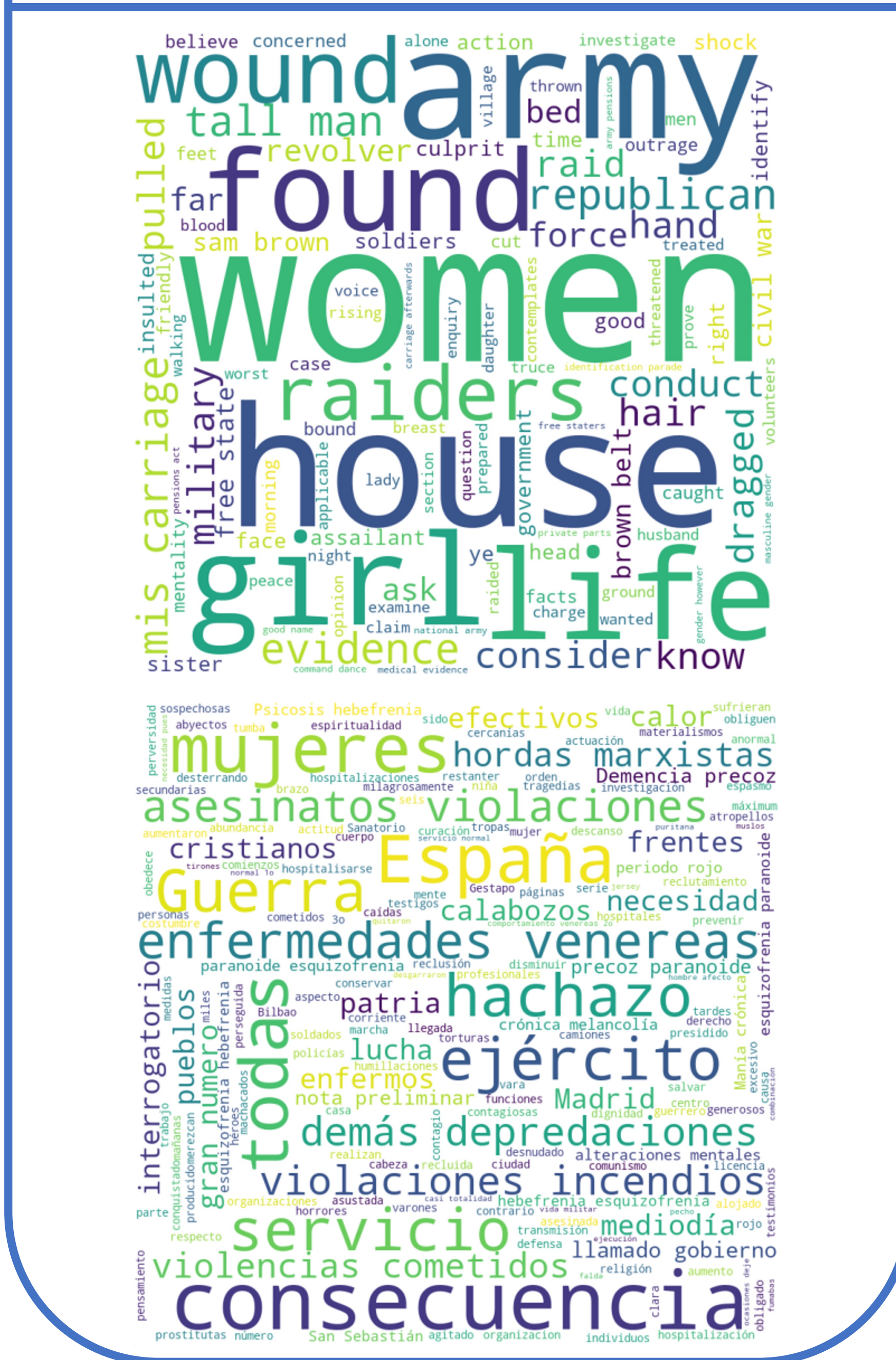
Hegemonic gender roles: Consideration of the dominant conceptions of femininity and masculinity which maintain the prevailing social order (Connell).

Research Questions

1. How did the relationship between womanhood, gendered experiences of civil war, and gender-based violence differ between Ireland and Spain?
2. How were experiences of gender-based violence framed within wider civil-war discourse?
3. In what ways did women narrate their experiences of gender-based violence?
4. What can institutional, personal, and literary sources tell us about contemporary perspectives on gender-based violence during these civil wars?
5. Where are the women's voices in civil-war sources and what can their repression tell us about Irish and Spanish history, society, and culture?

Comparative Word Clouds

Frequency of language used in Irish case studies (above) and Spanish case studies (below)



Thematic Analysis

Discourse

- Focus on women's behaviour in relation to credibility, trauma, and effects on the armies
- Importance of traditional, patriarchal familial order
- Key cross-cultural influence of Catholicism and strict Catholic morality
- Divisive nature of framing this violence with a prevailing dismissiveness within sources
- Propagandistic narratives

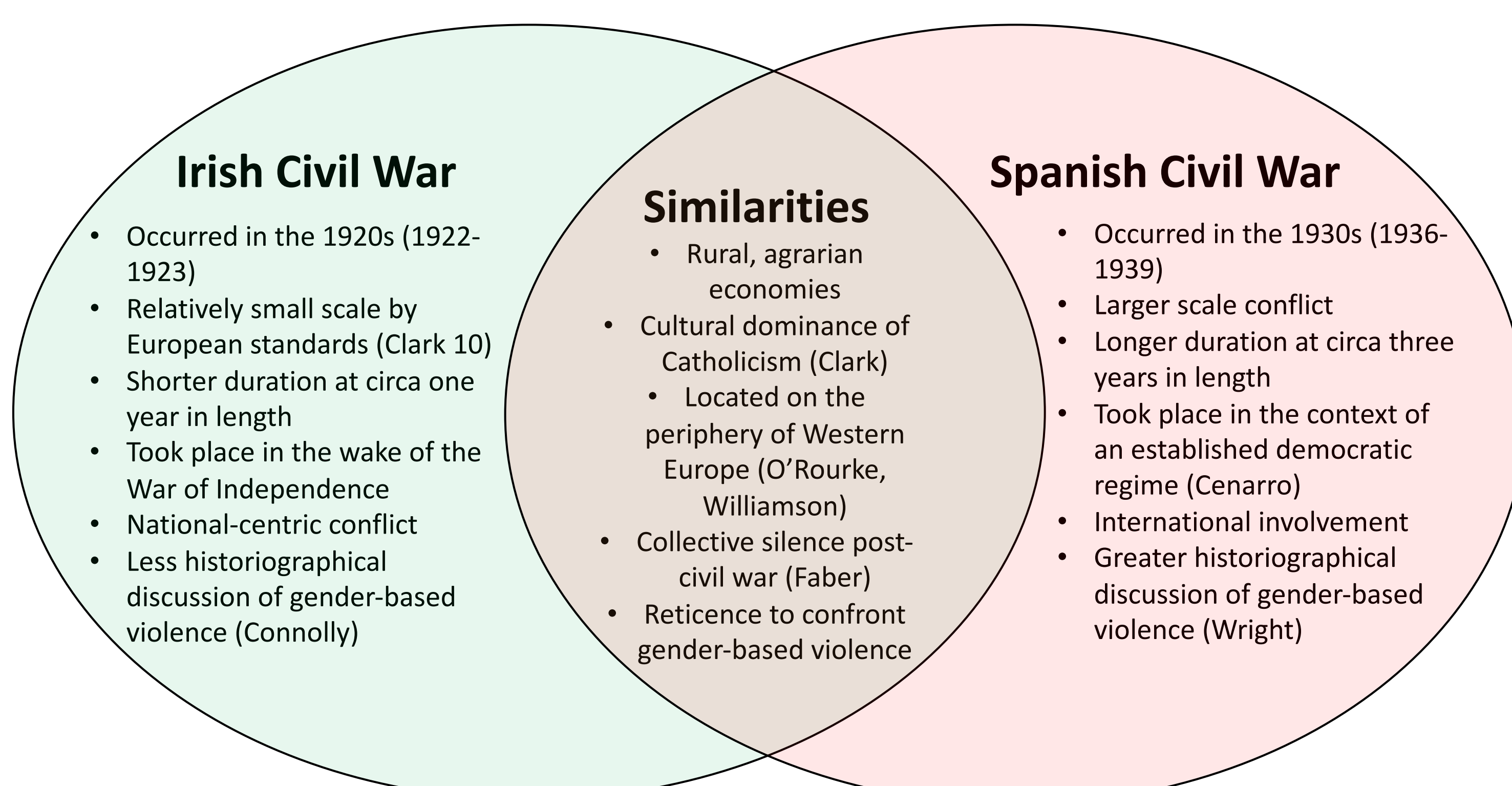
Sources

- Lack of first-hand accounts does not imply such violence did not occur but rather that it was overlooked and silenced
- Need to understand and interpret euphemistic language
- Legalistic military sources in both case studies highlighted the repression of women's voices
- Very limited official records, particularly in Spain
- Spanish psychiatric records used biased, anti-Republican language

Memory

- Women's direct accounts could only be found in the limited witness statements from Irish court cases
- Psychological trauma evident in these witness statements and in Spanish psychiatric records
- Consistent fear of persecution and societal shame
- Lack of sources exemplifies the censorship of women's stories at a personal, societal, and institutional level

Comparative Historical Contexts



Findings and Future Recommendations

Gender-based violence was a feature of both civil wars, despite presenting differently in each context and the limited availability of primary sources. The discourse of femininity and masculinity was pivotal in its execution, understanding, and subsequent memory.

The comparative study of gender-based violence during these civil wars is an under-researched, exciting field. In the future, continuing to utilise a theoretically-grounded approach combined with the exploration of more diverse sources will provide further insights.

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