

A Radical Reading of Miguel de Unamuno's Political Rhetoric: Ideabreaker and Intrahistorian

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Introduction

Although he was most famous for his books of fiction and philosophy, 20th century Spanish public intellectual Miguel de Unamuno also published more than 3,000 newspaper columns in which he commented on the political landscape of his time. Unamuno lived during a particularly polarized period in Spanish history, witnessing many conflicts, including the Third Carlist War, the Spanish-American War, World War I, and the Spanish Civil War. In the midst of this atmosphere of conflict and polarization, Unamuno turned to the medium of the newspaper to diagnose Spain's problems and to offer scathing critiques of its corrupt politicians.

Unamuno characterized Spain's underlying problem as one of ideology, excess rationalism, and inauthenticity, and he approached it in two ways. First, he acted as what he called an "ideabreaker," or as one who assumes an attitude of skepticism to break down prevailing ideologies. Second, he attempted to create a unified community in Spain through what he called intrahistory, or the history that occurs beneath written history. Intrahistory comprises the everyday bonds between people, and Unamuno suggested that a new intrahistorical rhetoric could strengthen these bonds, supplant ideology, and construct a collective consciousness.

Examining Unamuno's development as a rhetorical public intellectual and his approach as an ideabreaker and intrahistorian offers several new and radical interventions. Primarily, this text illuminates new rhetorical resources for resisting polarization and ideological obsession in our current time. Moreover, in this text I translate Unamuno's political rhetoric into English for the first time, bringing his work to a new audience and furthering Unamunian studies. Finally, it challenges the traditional notion of the public intellectual and provides a new model of the Unamunian public intellectual.



Project Summary

Significance of Project

Unamuno remains relevant today as many countries around the world are facing increased ideological extremism and polarization, and this book sheds light on the contemporary issue of building community in such a political climate. As such, it unearths questions at the forefront of many societies, such as how should we approach polarization and restore community? What is the role of the public intellectual in a polarized state? How does a society repair itself when it is torn apart by extreme political ideologies? Unamuno's columns address these questions and new methods of public intellectualism.

While Unamuno's novels and works of philosophy have been widely discussed, his political articles have not been studied or translated into English. Examining this case offers several interventions in the fields of rhetoric, philosophy, Hispanic studies, and political theory. Primarily, this study offers new rhetorical strategies for resisting polarization and ideological obsession in our current time. Moreover, this work translates selections of Unamuno's political rhetoric into English for the first time, bringing his political thought to new audiences around the world. Finally, it challenges the traditional notion of the public intellectual, providing a new model for public intellectuals wishing to intervene in their own polarized societies.

We continue to face similar political and social crises of polarization around the globe. While the work of some public intellectuals may be too embedded in their immediate contexts, Unamuno's work continues to speak to us, and his insights and methods remain valuable contributions to public life. Indeed, polarization and ideological obsession are timeless and global problems, resurfacing in every epoch and in every society. As a radical activist, Unamuno spoke out against every form of government in Spain during his lifetime. Looking to Unamuno's work, we can gain insight on how to combat today's excesses of polarization and ideology.



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Methodology

In 2016 and 2017 I received grants to study in Spain. I took courses there and spent time working in various archives at the University of Salamanca. I spent most of my time in the archive at the Casa-Museo Unamuno, Unamuno's former home where there is now an archive and library of all of his works. I worked in the archive daily for two summers. I read and translated his newspaper writings and then catalogued them, specifically examining the rhetoric he employed in his political articles. I then analyzed how he characterized, defined, and proposed to solve the problem of political polarization in Spain. This grant allowed me to turn my research into a book that is under contract with a university press. I have dedicated the past four years of my research to this work because Unamuno is one of the most important Spanish intellectuals and one of the most fascinating public intellectuals of the twentieth century.

