

# **Memory, media and spectacle: *Interviú*'s portrayal of Civil War exhumations in the early years of Spanish democracy**

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**Abstract:** The Franco regime promoted a memory of the war full of distortions and omissions. The silenced existence of mass graves with Republican civilians executed by Francoists was among the most outrageous of these. During the transition, the desire to put aside the traumatic memory of the war led to the neglect of these victims. This was particularly visible in the absence of government policies regarding these corpses. In spite of this silence, a first wave of exhumations took place in the transition period. We deal with its unique exposure in one of Spain's most controversial and successful magazines: *Interviú*. Despite widespread extreme-right violence and threats, *Interviú* was one of the very few media that dared to cover this type of information. This article is based on research in *Interviú*'s archives and on interviews with some of the journalists responsible for the reports. We will explain the reasons behind these unparalleled reports and will analyze why, in contrast with what happened many years later, *Interviú*'s efforts failed to unleash a widespread social reaction in favor of exhuming and reburying the remains concealed in these graves. Our study contributes to current debates on the interconnections between the media and complex social memory processes.

**Keywords:** mass media; exhumations of mass graves; traumatic memories; democratizing processes; Spanish transition and civil war; extreme-right violence.

## **Journalism in transition: *Interviú* 1976-1982**

In the last fifteen years, a new debate has emerged in Spain regarding the limitations of what was once considered its exemplary transition to democracy. According to this critical version, more common among leftist citizens, Spanish democracy was based on a "pact of silence" regarding the uncomfortable past. The widespread desire to leave aside the traumatic memory of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and the obsessive search for a common ground on which to build a peaceful, democratic state, led to the relative neglect of the victims of Franco's rule and their rights (Aguilar 2008). This was particularly visible in the absence of any government policy regarding the management of the corpses of the tens of thousands of Republican civilians executed in 'Nationalist' rearguard actions and buried in common graves during the war, as well as the several thousand executed, albeit in different conditions, in the early years of the dictatorship.

Yet, in spite of the official tiptoeing over one of the most uncomfortable Francoist legacies, from the last years of the dictatorship some victims' families spontaneously began organizing to recover their bodies so as to provide them with a

“proper burial”. Indeed, after Franco’s death, despite the overall indifference of the State and the most relevant political parties (including the heirs of the war losers), a substantial number of exhumations of Republican mass graves took place across the country. This first wave of exhumations (leaving aside those conducted by the victors in the war’s aftermath) had a number of features which differentiated it from the better known exhumations that have taken place in the twenty-first century: (a) they were basically promoted by relatives and their impact was mostly local; (b) they were carried out without any kind of technical (e.g. forensic, anthropological), judicial or economic support; (c) they took place in the absence of any official memory policies; (d) they had very limited (and often no) media exposure; and (e) they did not give rise to broader debates regarding Spain’s tortuous relationship with its traumatic past (Ferrándiz, “Exhuming”, *El pasado*).

In this article, we analyze the pioneering exposure of this early wave of exhumations in one of Spain’s most controversial, successful, and long-lived magazines, *Interviú*, first published in 1976 and still ongoing. This weekly magazine, in its early years, came to represent the contradictions and fears, but also the creative potential, of Spanish society after Franco’s death. *Interviú* is well known for its mix of naked women, sensationalist reports and in-depth political critique. Some left-wing reporters—including former exiles and activists—found in it a privileged channel to express their ideas. The political radicalism of some of the reports unleashed the anger of extreme-right groups nostalgic for Franco’s rule. *Interviú*’s revelations and, in particular, the publication of the names and presumed crimes of perpetrators and corrupt individuals cost it many threats (see Figure 3) and lawsuits (for instance, the Vinader case, discussed below).

In the convoluted transitional context, the magazine decided to cover some of the Republican mass-grave exhumations taking place at the time. The resulting reports are extraordinary for a number of reasons. *Interviú* was one of the very few media bold enough to cover this information; no other media gave such broad, ongoing coverage of this uncomfortable subject. Its public exposure of the exhumations was not technically informed but deeply tainted by a sensationalist style. The direct testimony of victims (rarely cross-checked) and the explicit naming of perpetrators (almost unique in Spain’s overall management of Civil War and Francoist atrocities),<sup>1</sup> were dominant features of its reports.

This article is based on research into *Interviú*’s archives and interviews with some of the journalists involved in investigating and writing these early reports. It explores the *journalistic life* of this first wave of exhumations, as they transited from oblivion and abandonment to blunt public exposure in the pages of this magazine. We will begin by explaining the reasons behind these unparalleled reports, unveiling the visual and narrative rhetorical strategies deployed to create a radical imagery of the Francoist repression. We will then go on to look at why, in sharp contrast with what happened many years later, *Interviú*’s sustained efforts failed to unleash a widespread social reaction in favor of locating, exhuming, and reburying the remains concealed in such graves. Our case study seeks to contribute to current debates on the interconnections and dissonances between the media and complex social memory processes.

### ***Interviú*: a unique magazine in an exceptional period**

The Spanish transition to democracy (1975-1982) took place in the midst of a widespread economic crisis. But the high levels of uncertainty and the obstacles that

had to be overcome were mainly due to other factors: a) the presence of crucial institutions directly inherited from the dictatorship (particularly the military, police and judiciary); b) the role played by social, political and economic stakeholders linked to the previous regime; and c) the high levels of political violence deployed by different terrorist groups and by State repression.

The difficulties of stabilizing the new democratic regime resulted in the decision to leave aside the thorniest aspects of the past. This unwritten but widely-backed agreement, sealed with the approval of an Amnesty Law in 1977—which secured some reparations to victims, but also impunity for Francoism—was not only supported by most political groups in the new Parliament, but also by a citizenship fearful of the consequences of stirring up the past, particularly in small towns and villages. The various failed military coups that took place in that period only contributed to keep this fear alive.<sup>2</sup> As a result, no public reflection took place on the responsibilities for the Civil War and subsequent Francoist violence. The enormous legal and symbolic gap between the winners and the losers in the Civil War was reduced by means of various pieces of legislation providing pensions and other benefits to the latter. However, no measures were taken to establish truth and justice for the victims of Francoism.

After the end of the war, the dictatorship provided victims on the winning side with abundant compensation. By contrast, the losers continued to suffer various types of repression and discrimination: whereas the winners enjoyed institutional, legal and ideological support under the dictatorship to exhume and rebury the remains of relatives thrown into mass graves, the losers were not allowed to do so. It was not until the final years of the dictatorship and, particularly, in the early years of the Transition, that some exhumations of defeated Republicans took place, though without any judicial or forensic backing, and with only timid political support (Ferrándiz, *El pasado* 145-74). The leadership of the mainstream leftist parties (socialist [*Partido Socialista Obrero Español*, PSOE] and communist [*Partido Comunista de España*, PCE]), many of whose militants were still lying abandoned in unmarked mass graves across the country, considered that encouraging exhumations would endanger the tacit pact of reconciliation and forgiveness agreed upon with the Francoist reformists. Some minority left-wing parties, such as the *Convención Republicana de los Pueblos de España*, received very harsh criticism from the PSOE and the PCE for getting involved in the exhumation of Civil War mass graves.<sup>3</sup> These exhumations—whose public exposure demonstrated the historical truth and appalling scale of the executions undertaken by the Francoist army and paramilitary agents, something persistently denied in the official rhetoric—received little media coverage.

This tense political climate and the associated media self-censorship makes accounting for the reports published by the magazine *Interviú* on exhumations and mass graves particularly challenging. Despite persistent fear of regression in the Spanish social fabric, between 1976 and 1984 the magazine published at least twenty-eight rhetorically-charged reports on the Francoist repression, half of which focused on actual exhumations (Figure 1). It was also by far the most successful periodical publication of the period (Figure 2). What kind of against-the-grain memory device did the magazine set in motion, and what were its main features?

*Interviú* has been a recurrent topic in debates on Spain's transition. The first author to underline the magazine's importance for the public exposure of the Francoist repression was Alberto Reig Tapia. He emphasized the difficulties that many victims' families experienced in obtaining death certificates for their 'disappeared' relatives, a crucial document if widows wanted to obtain the newly-approved pensions. The Francoist authorities had wanted to hide their illegal executions and did not register

these deaths. Moreover, relatives of these victims had not been allowed to undertake exhumations, which meant that, in many cases, the death could not be proved and so no formal “death certificate” existed. Some of them did not even dare to recognize their condition of victims publicly, out of shame or fear, a situation denounced by *Interviú* (Reig Tapia 101-5).

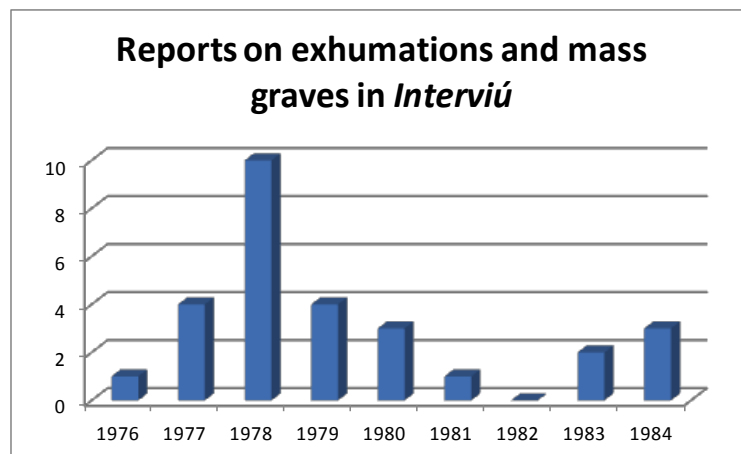


Figure 1: Reports on exhumations and mass graves in *Interviú*, 1976-1984. Data collected by the authors.

Other authors, like the prestigious historian Santos Juliá, have referred to these same reports in order to prove that no “pacto de silencio” existed in the transition to democracy. When analyzing cultural production between 1975 and 1979, whilst recognizing that “muchas iniciativas culturales se caracterizaron precisamente por no querer saber nada de él [pasado], dando por supuesta su liquidación,” he also argues that, as in *Interviú*, references to the Civil War and Francoism “abundaron en diarios, revistas, libros, cines, exposiciones, homenajes” (59).

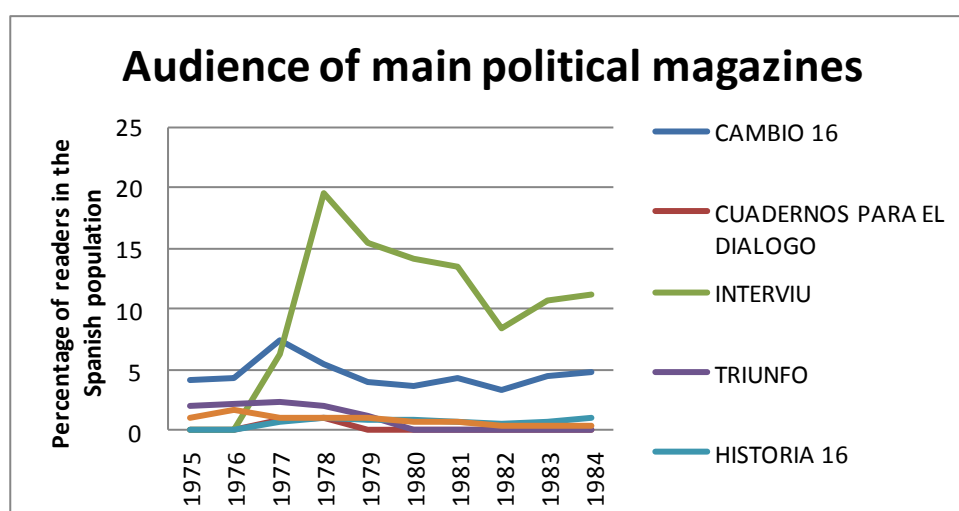


Figure 2: Readership of Spanish main political magazines 1975-1984. Data obtained from the *Estudio General de Medios*.

While it is true that an explosion of interest in the past took place after Franco’s death, Paloma Aguilar has demonstrated that the above-mentioned “pacto” had distinct

implications in different realms. In the political arena it basically consisted of avoiding the instrumentalization of the past in order to prevent polarization (Aguilar, “Presencia”). However, in the cultural realm this agreement did not hold and the interest in the past was overwhelming. It is equally true that some of the most delicate issues—namely, the Francoist repression and the thousands of mass graves with Republican remains, the most extreme instances of the ugliest face of the past—received hardly any attention during the transition’s first years.

Writers who have used the *Interviú* reports to demonstrate the non-existence of a “pact of silence” have overlooked the fact that the magazine was a very exceptional media outlet at that point, and that it was far from easy to publish on such delicate matters at the time. Apart from the pervasive destruction of evidence, the extreme right—whose connivance with some sectors of the police and judiciary at that time has been established (Grimaldos)—became particularly defiant after Franco’s death and committed diverse violent acts, ranging from attacks on bookshops and newsstands where certain books/periodicals were sold (see Figure 4), to circulating threatening anonymous notes to publishers and editors,<sup>4</sup> and to beatings and even killings, some of them involving journalists.<sup>5</sup> Finally, the coexistence of laws inherited from the dictatorship with new liberalizing democratic regulations created ambiguity in the regulation of cultural production. This explains why some judges could eschew the new legislation and remain inflexible in the application of the old legal regulations, ordering the seizure of newspapers and books, and imposing fines or even prison sentences on some journalists and editors.<sup>6</sup> Being an anti-Francoist cultural entrepreneur at the time required a good deal of courage and determination. In fact, journalistic coverage of the traces of repression, so visibly revealed by the exhumations, was a high-risk task.

### La España una

Desde Carratraca (Málaga) recibimos un anónimo dirigido a nuestro director, que reproducimos íntegramente por considerar que es ilustrativo de los nobles sentimientos y atinadas razones que suelen esgrimir determinadas personas.

“He leído la revista INTERVIU varias veces por simple curiosidad para ver cómo se portaban los rojos fanáticos revanchistas, pero es tanta la mala leche que tengo, debido a sus estúpidos artículos, que si no escribo estas líneas reviento.

A usted, capitán de esa compañía de rojos barbudos, le voy a decir que lo que me gustaría sería meterle ocho tiros en la región occipital derecha, pero muy cerquita para poder escuchar cómo crujen sus huesos al ser barrenados por mis balas. Pero tendré paciencia y pido a Dios me alargue la vida para ver llegar a ese dictador justiciero y acabe con todos los rojos asesinos. Su cabeza pelagra, lo mismo que las de esos hijos de putas que colaboran en la redacción de esa revista.

A todos esos fanáticos izquierdistas del puño en alto tengo que decirles que vayan elevándolos cada vez más, pues su caída va a ser terrible. Tengo plena fe de que un dictador cortará esos brazos inservibles, traidores, asesinos.

Sepa usted, jefe rojo, que aunque nuestro Caudillo haya muerto, el franquismo no; ¡jamás morirá!, pues en las personas de buenos sentimientos nunca se les borrará el nombre de nuestro jefe de Estado que levantó España y venció al comunismo. España será una dictadura militar, cueste lo que cueste, y esos criminales que han regresado del exilio tendrán que salir precipitadamente hacia su punto de partida”.

Tome tila.

Figure 3: Early anonymous threat to *Interviú* under the pseudonym *Tome tila*, published by the magazine in the section “Las cartas sobre la mesa”. *Interviú* 82 (08/12/1977): 4

The importance of the mass media in democratization processes has been established in general, and for the Spanish case in particular (Jebril *et al.*; Quirosa). However this article is concerned not so much with the role of the media as such but rather with the presence in that role of social memory. Authors such as Andreas Huyssen have emphasized the huge influence of the media “as carriers of all forms of memory”, while warning us that “the media do not transport public memory innocently” (29-30; see also Erll and Rigney 3), something which is evident in the case of *Interviú*. This “inherent mediality of memory”—“cultural memory research is often simultaneously media research”—together with the lack of neutrality of the “carriers of information about the past” has been also been broached by Erll (113-14).

During the Spanish transition the press and the news played a crucial role (Mainer and Juliá 206). The spirit of the times combined strong eagerness for information with extreme risk-aversion towards political polarization. *Interviú* challenged this status quo. Several factors help to explain its success and exceptionality. The first of these, according to the main *Interviú* analyst (and former reporter) Santiago Miró, is its successful combination of the following mix: “un 25% de reportajes de sexo, un 25% de sangre, un 25% de política y un 25% de escándalos (denuncia, reportajes de investigación impactantes, etcétera) (17).<sup>7</sup> Curiously enough, with the exception of sex/nudity, the exhumation reports did indeed combine the other elements of blood/violence, politics and scandal singled out by Miró. Using this formula, *Interviú* took advantage of a Spanish thirst for news, political scandals and gruesome contents born of forty years of censored media, official lies, and political and sexual repression. Overall, *Interviú* traded in different kinds of nudity and explicitness, and the display of naked female bodies was inseparable from its exposure of wounded bare bones lying in mass graves.

Yet media impact on social memory depends on a variety of contextual conditions. It is particularly telling that, in 2000, one single report in a local newspaper, “Mi abuelo también fue un desaparecido”, by Emilio Silva, considerably more moderate in tone than *Interviú*’s reports, eventually unleashed the second—much more extensive and intensive—wave of exhumations after Franco’s death (Ferrándiz, *El pasado*), whereas in the 70s and 80s, several reports in the most important national magazine, with incendiary headlines and narratives and illustrated with disturbing images, failed to generate such a momentous socio-political reaction. We would argue that during the transition, Spain’s incipient democracy was not prepared to look at the past in such a straightforward way (in fact, survey data confirms this; see Aguilar, *Políticas*). By contrast, in the twenty-first century, a stronger civil society, generational renewal, the advent of the information society and a profound transformation of the international understanding of these issues in the framework of the global human rights paradigm, created the conditions to allow a radical change in the effect of media coverage on exhumations.

By September 1977, *Interviú* had a weekly circulation of one million copies, and in 1978, as shown in Figure 2, it became the most widely-read magazine by far. After that year, when the new democratic Constitution was approved, *Interviú*’s readership began to decline. However, the sharpest drop took place just after 1981, the year of the failed *coup d’état*. Some authors, such as Santiago Miró, have argued that the extent of the anxiety created in a society already traumatized by its past by this unsuccessful attempt to reverse the democratization process explains the increased level of media self-censorship when dealing with delicate issues as well as the widespread social and political silence about the past.



Nonetheless, there is another crucial event in the life of the magazine that may account for its decline. In December 1979, reporter Xavier Vinader<sup>8</sup> wrote two consecutive articles about violent extreme-right groups in the Basque Country, providing the names of their members and many other details. According to some interpretations, the pro-independence and terrorist group ETA then used this information to kill two of them in the following weeks (5 and 23 January 1980), in the most lethal year of Basque separatist terrorism in Spain (ETA killings dropped drastically in 1981). These killings generated a huge nationwide scandal, unleashing a wave of extreme-right violence, in which several press newsstands in different cities were burned and destroyed for selling *Interviú*. Vinader was charged with crime-abetting and left Spain. After his return in 1981, he was sentenced to seven years imprisonment. Most of the media protested against this sentence and the reporter was finally granted a pardon in 1984. This sequence of events expresses the volatility of the political and media situation in the country, and the extent of *Interviú*'s transgressive editorial line.



Figure 4: Detail of a report on extreme right attacks to newstands after the Vinader case. *Interviú* 196 (14/02/1980): 9.

*Interviú* was forced to take some major decisions to help mitigate this wave of extreme-right violence towards it, including the replacement of its main editor. This was accompanied by a statement from the magazine's owner, Antonio Asensio, announcing "una tendencia más rigurosa, aunque sin abandonar la línea crítica", acknowledging that "sabemos que hemos cometido errores, pero éstos han sido involuntarios y humanos" ("Cambios"). According to Miró, this "giro hacia la prudencia" was accentuated after the *coup d'état* of 23 February 1981, which took place fourteen months later:

Con él, se culmina el giro de la revista, que termina por herir y rematar su inicial línea ideológica .... A partir de esta fecha se nota un cambio en el enfoque editorial y en las fotografías de la revista, que aplica la autocensura. Me imagino que entre los temas tratados ya no abundan los relacionados con la Guerra Civil, muchos de los cuales son eliminados o tratados con más prudencia de cara a la censura (written interview of Paloma Aguilar with the author, 13 and 14 October 2014).

The decline in readership seems to be related to a combination of two different circumstances: forced moderation after the journal's earlier excesses and reasonable caution after the most serious *coup d'état* of the democratizing period. In any case, the violent reactions of the extreme right and the military threat seemed to succeed in deterring some journalists from publishing further information about the most unsettling facets of Francoism.

Other crucial peculiarities of the magazine were the character of its management and the ideological profile of a significant part of its staff. To begin with, Antonio Asensio, an extremely ambitious entrepreneur, founded the major Spanish communication group ZETA in 1976, and created *Interviú* two months later. He has been described as an unscrupulous, opportunistic man, without a clear ideological stand. Until the drop in sales in the aftermath of the above-mentioned "Vinader case" forced him to change the editorial line and adopt a more cautious attitude,<sup>9</sup> his approach to publishing can be described as *kamikaze*.

This was reflected in his choice of staff for the magazine. Antonio Álvarez Solís, the first editor (May 1976 – April 1979), was a member of the PSUC. In the early years, Álvarez-Solis was *Interviú's* most visible face, and one main expression of this was, in tune with the magazine's scandal driven policy, his constant presence in court. According to Miró, "tenía un promedio de cuatro comparecencias semanales en los juzgados, y había sufrido hasta treinta y dos procesamientos por algunos de los reportajes publicados bajos su dirección" (52). His obsession, like that of his successor after May 1980, Giménez de Cisneros—who also lacked a clear ideological stance—was to increase the magazine's sales, whatever the cost.

In keeping with this aim, the magazine's uniqueness and its exceptional interest in the Francoist repression and mass graves was the direct result of hiring many extreme leftists as reporters, some recently returned from exile and/or ex- political prisoners. At least two of the reporters who covered exhumations during the transition—José Luis Morales, the co-author of the first two reports, and José Catalán Deus—had even belonged to the terrorist organization FRAP. Morales had been imprisoned and severely tortured during late Francoism, and still today bears the visible marks of that abuse on his body. A third—the anarchist Cipriano Damiano—was the son of a famous anarchist who also worked on the magazine and had made an attempt on Franco's life. Damiano co-authored his exhumation report with Carlos Enrique Bayo, son of Eliseo Bayo, one of the magazine's key reporters, who wrote the first article on the legacy of Francoism



(the Valley of the Fallen, a huge mausoleum containing Franco's body) in November 1976. Also a former FRAP militant, Eliseo Bayo had been imprisoned a number of times. He seems to have played a pivotal role, which explains the presence of so many reporters previously persecuted by Francoism. As he confessed to Miró, "Yo metí allí [en *Interviú*] a un montón de gente. Todos los *anarcos* de Barcelona entraron en Zeta. Y, como había dinero, Asensio pagaba a todo el mundo. Hasta miembros del ejército republicano traían informes para ser publicados" (123). He also claimed that *Interviú* played a very positive role in a period when political parties were silencing many issues, as the magazine was "la única publicación que ha intentado hacer un ajuste de cuentas histórico con el franquismo y la represión" (Miró 117 n. 82). Among the reporters who wrote about exhumations was another anarchist, Emilio Lahera.



Figure 5: A report by Eliseo Bayo on the *Valle de los Caídos* announced on the front cover of the magazine. *Interviú* 28 (25/11/1976).

All of these reporters were allowed to get even with the dictatorship by writing reports on the Francoist repression and corruption. According to Ricardo Cid-Cañaveral, another left-wing journalist also interviewed by Miró:

*Interviú* tocó a los hombres intocables hasta aquel momento ..., aireó los grandes mitos sociológicos ocultos del franquismo; destapó escándalos y señoras; mostró crímenes y sangre... En el único terreno en que se podían pedir [cuentas] era en el de la información. Los partidos habían declarado su propósito de no hacer balance de lo que habían sido los cuarenta años de franquismo. E *Interviú* se aprovechó de esta ventaja sacando a la luz ... hasta los cadáveres enterrados de los fusilados. (145-6)

Not coincidentally, people formerly linked to the FRAP (as some *Interviú* reporters were) played an active role in supporting some families in their titanic efforts to exhume Civil War mass graves. According to José Catalán Deus, "éramos una colección de francotiradores... éramos los exhumadores de la realidad del régimen anterior, ese era nuestro papel oficial".

We would argue that it is the confluence of all these unusual elements that created what might be called a "perfect storm" in the Spanish media environment during

the transition. This chain of coincidences allowed for the emergence of a highly successful magazine that became the most widely read periodical publication just two years after its creation, and for the publication—together with photographs of naked women and political scandals—of reports on various taboo topics, including the tens of thousands of people executed by Francoism and buried in mass graves, some of whose relatives were trying to exhume and rebury them.

### **Repression and journalistic evidence: excavating mass grave reports**

Our analysis of *Interviú*'s transition-period coverage of the exhumations of mass graves of the Civil War's losers, and of other commemorative acts relating to the graves, runs from 1976, when the journal was founded, to 1982, when the socialist party (the political heir to the war's losers), led by Felipe González, won the general elections for the first time since Franco's death. Our findings are based on archival research (which yielded thirteen reports related, in different ways, to the recovery of bones), and on interviews with two key reporters: José Luis Morales, a hardline political activist who played a crucial role by participating in the writing of five of them, and José Catalán Deus, who penned one of the most compelling exhumation experiences in 1978.<sup>10</sup>

The articles under scrutiny are only a fraction of the reports that, during the magazine's early years, visited the sites of the Civil War and of the postwar repression, massacres and executions. Yet taken together, the accounts from the Canary Islands, La Rioja, Extremadura, Castilla y León, Navarra and Asturias analyzed in this text form a cohesive analytical *corpus*, because they deal with the mass graves and bones of those maltreated, incarcerated or executed as part of Franco's repressive policies, displaying these human remains as unequivocal "evidence" that violent acts took place and that some form of accountability and reparation remained crucial. It is important to stress that these reports irrupted into decades of silence and ellipsis regarding the repression of those defeated in the war. In this context, *Interviú*'s task was to document, unveil and denounce a hidden and uncomfortable history. According to Morales, referring to his reports on Extremadura, the journalistic research strategy deployed on the ground was fivefold, based on the gathering of:

testimonios, documentos, cartas, hemerografía y procedimientos judiciales ... antes que nada buscábamos a los testigos, eso era lo primero que tuvimos en cuenta ... si van a morir, vamos a empezar con los testigos. ... El periodismo de investigación es duro, pero es precioso. ... La fosa es lo último del trabajo, hay que buscar primero quiénes son, dónde y quién podía saber, hacer un mapa, ver cómo se podía hacer aquello legalmente ... en algunos sitios no hubo ningún problema ... pero en pocos sitios (interview of Francisco Ferrándiz and Emilio Silva with the author, 27 December 2012).

In engaging in this kind of research, *Interviú* was clearly working against the grain of the transition's hegemonic "pacto de silencio", sealed by the Amnesty Law of 1977, the same year that the first report on a killing field in the Canary Islands appeared in the magazine.

The social memory displayed in these reports is heavily imprinted with the magazine's sensationalistic style—the "media trace" as Earl calls it (116). All the articles are presented as "exclusivas" and, by conveying the point of view of the defeated, they explicitly cover different modalities of the Francoist repression: rearguard executions, concentration camps, torture and abuse. Overall, they also build up a complete repertoire of violent practices in Spain's different regions. The stories

also share the use of incendiary prose—modulated to a greater or lesser extent depending on the author—and a general tendency to provide gruesome detail, as well as the names of presumed perpetrators, drawn mainly from direct victim testimony. Also, in tune with the magazine's signature style, explicit photographs became a crucial part of most reports. Our informants agreed that the power to shock was given priority over accuracy, particularly in terms of figures—mostly rounded-up numbers—and in the naming of perpetrators and collaborators, where no double-checking was deemed necessary. Looking back, *Catalán Deus* openly admits that their reports contained some errors and unverified information. By helping to consolidate *Interviú*'s journalistic approach, this collection of articles created a new rhetoric and mode of visual display of the Francoist terror in Spain's transitional period, fostering an uncompromising and melodramatic imaginary of violence, fear and repression, unparalleled at the time.



Figure 6: The *Interviú* research team descending into the Jinamar's gully to retrieve the evidence of the killings. *Interviú* 66 (18/08/1977): 24.

In view of their foundational status, we will start with an in-depth analysis of the first two articles published in *Interviú* in August 1977 (issues # 66 and 67), both written by Morales and Miguel Torres. Although the journalistic style of the texts signed or co-signed by Morales is perhaps the most excessive of all, we would argue that the initial series of reports on the Jinámar gully in the Canary Islands is crucial, establishing the overall tone for subsequent articles on mass graves. Morales was born on the islands and, along with Torres, managed to create an archetypal landscape of repression and terror by mobilizing uncompromising testimonies, powerful metaphors, horrific descriptions and dramatic twists in their journalistic account. The authors claim that when they started researching this report, the very name “Jinámar” still provoked “un indescriptible pánico y un sudor frío que trae los más siniestros y patéticos recuerdos ” among many contemporary islanders (Morales and Torres, “Jinámar (1)” 24). They state too that post-Francoist paramilitary groups sent anonymous notes threatening left-wing politicians with continuing the unfinished task of filling the gully with “gentuza como tú, cabrón rojo, hijo de puta madre. ¡Te avisamos!” (Morales and Torres, “Jinámar (1)” 25). This claim by the magazine is fully consistent with our analysis of the lingering fear and very explicit threats in the early transition period.

In the first report (issue # 66), Morales and Torres remind us that Franco was in the Canary Islands the day before the 1936 military uprising and that, although Republican resistance soon disbanded and historiography had largely ignored the suffering of the defeated in this enclave, the repression and murder of 5,000-6,000 people was so bloody that it became the “la antesala histórica de los campos nazis y de las refinadas violencias practicadas por la Gestapo” (Morales and Torres, “Jinámar (1)” 25). This early connection of the Francoist repression with other brutal events that took place later elsewhere in Europe—and in Latin America—was to become a common trait of the *Interviú* articles under discussion, and would be revived a few decades later in the debate around the current twenty-first-century exhumations. In the context of the very cautious mainstream narratives about the past in the public sphere, *Interviú*’s reporters do not spare adjectives when describing the cruelty of the reprisals meted out to those who remained loyal to the Republic or were deemed complicit with it. Falangists, “después de sus macabras rondas, y con las camisas empapadas de sangre”, ended their work days in bars, boasting about their favorite sport, “el deporte de asesinar” (Morales and Torres, “Jinámar (1)” 27-28). One such thug was “Bárbaro” Olegario, who allegedly killed a man by wedging an ax in his head and castrated another before putting his genitals in somebody else’s mouth. After this harsh torture and maltreatment, many of the members of the “resistencia antifascista” were thrown to oblivion, dead or alive, either down wells, off cliffs or into the Jinámar gully.

In the second report (issue # 67), the authors actually descend into the volcanic gully together with professional speleologists in search of evidence. This was no easy task. In 1940, a renowned Austrian speleologist had failed in his attempt and was forced to climb back when he became suffocated by the smell of “la cantidad de cuerpos en descomposición que había en el fondo”, which he misinterpreted as toxic gas. This grim precedent and the context of fear and threats did not stop the journalists. Once at the bottom of the hole, in the midst of a fetid and “oscuridad tenebrosa”, they imaginatively visualize for the reader the crawling agony of the dying men and women after they were thrown injured into the gully, and managed to find human remains, personal objects and even German ammunition (Morales y Torres, “Jinámar (2)” 27). They collected some of these objects to bring back to the surface. One of the images displayed in the report shows the moment when bones are being gathered at the bottom of the gully. There is



already in this early report a skull with a bullet hole, an image that was to become paradigmatic of *Interviú*'s evidentiary visual iconography of the Francoist repression. Rather than cover a local exhumation, then, in this "reportaje histórico" it is the reporters and their assistants who themselves climb down to the bones in a bid to transform their narratives of terror into irrefutable evidence and historical truth. In the absence of legal coverage or forensic assessment on the ground, they achieved the necessary expert authority by turning the bones over to an unnamed anatomist at the *Museo Canario*, who testified that these were indeed human remains with signs of torture and execution.

We can therefore interpret Morales and Torres's early reports on Jinámar as an unprecedented, trend-setting and heroic trip into the heart of darkness of the Francoist repression, embodied by a volcanic gully that continued to symbolize that repression and was described by the authors as a subterranean counterpart to the universally-recognized horror of the aerial bombing of Gernika. According to Morales' testimony, with their reports "empezamos a desbrozar y limpiar todo eso ... queríamos romper, romper, romper .... No importaba quien iba primero .... Se trataba de ir sumando, sumando, sumando." It seems clear that a number of reporters had their own political agendas which, at that time, did not clash with that of *Interviú*.



Figure 7: Detail of homage at the mass grave at in La Barranca's (Lardero, Logroño). *Interviú* 74 (13/10/1977): 88-89.

Subsequent articles elaborated on some of the traits displayed by Morales and Torres, while adding new features and characters to the magazine's ever-expanding catalogue of the Francoist terror. The 1977 report on *La Barranca* (issue # 74), written by Martínez Estebas, deals with a huge mass grave near Logroño in the region of La Rioja. The report begins by announcing a figure of 2,000 people buried in the grave, although contemporary research scales the actual figure down to around 400, with 2,000 being the total number of civilians executed in the region. Overstating the figures of the repression was another common trait of these reports. The main thread in the report on

La Rioja was the historical creation of a recognized *memoryscape* in the region. One of the noteworthy aspects of this story is the prominence it gives to the leaders of a “comisión gestora” who carried out their own research, questioning the validity of the official figures for people executed in the region—who are referred to by both relatives and the reporter as *disappeared*, in an early use of this victimhood concept in the Spanish context. Another striking aspect is that a full section of the report is devoted to the “verdugos”—known in the region as “la escuadra de la muerte”—and their *modus operandi* (89). Finally, the report underscores the heroism of the widows who, against all odds, managed to preserve the site intact throughout the duration of Francoism. In a dramatic twist, one of them surreptitiously approaches the reporters to hand them “una carta muy vieja” written by her husband as he awaited execution, before disappearing back into the crowd in tears. “Vito, por todos los medios, te ruego en mis últimos momentos no des padrastro a nuestros hijos”, declared the man, “me quitan de vosotros, lo que más quiero en el mundo, para mandarme a otro: el de los olvidados para siempre” (90). Formerly silenced voices, consigned to “eternal forgetfulness”, suddenly resurfaced in the public arena.

The 1978 report on Albatera (issue # 105), written by Cipriano Damiano and Carlos Enrique Bayo and entitled “Sólo dejaron los huesos”, travels to one of Spain’s then-forgotten postwar concentration camps, where an “ensayo general para el exterminio” took place (40), with more than 600 prisoners executed and many more—up to 20,000 according to the magazine’s estimates—dying or contracting disease in the most insalubrious environment possible. Again connections were made to detention camp experiences across the world, specifically to the Nazi, French and Chilean camps. To our knowledge, this blatant establishment of such transnational connections was absent from public debate in Spain at that time, and it would be decades before historiography began to deal with them systematically (Rodrigo 16). Amidst random killing and extreme cruelty, expressed in gory terms, the report emphasizes the different diseases suffered by the prisoners. In a section called “Morir entre mierda” (42), the reader is provided with gruesome details of the consequences of food-poisoning, vitamin deficiency, scurvy, scabies, typhus, chronic peritonitis, lice, ulcers and purulence. The health conditions were so poor that a medical inspection had to be performed with binoculars. As in Jinámar, “*Interviú* araña ahora la Historia [sic] para relatar aquella triste barbaridad. Arañó también la tierra y estrajo un montón de huesos.” (40) A skull and jaw excavated by the journalists in the vicinity of the former camp was displayed in the main feature picture and, according to the journalists, provided “las primeras pruebas fehacientes de la matanza organizada que se llevó a cabo.” These indisputable proofs could be offered thereupon to those negationists “que piden pruebas de las evidencias salvajes” (40).



Figure 8: Bones exhumed and exposed in 1978 at Casas de Don Pedro, Badajoz. *Interviú* 109 (15/06/1978): 86.

The more restrained report by Catalán Deus (issue # 109) on Casas de Don Pedro (Badajoz) was the first full-fledged coverage of a locally-organized exhumation. It contained extraordinary and very explicit photographic material: the earth being removed, bones piling up, and relatives paying tribute over the coffins with their fists raised, in an unusually courageous political statement in a rural environment at that time. “Se trata de una historia simbólica entre cientos semejantes,” the author warns the reader, “con kilos y kilos de restos humanos, con testigos vivos, con nombres y apellidos” (86). Catalán Deus exposes the historical circumstances leading up to the execution of around a hundred people and the logic of local revenge, which included not only killing but also the abuse and public humiliation of women. A crucial section entitled “De orden de la autoridad, prohibido llorar” opened a fresh window in the magazine onto yet another salient feature of the suffering of the war losers: the ban on



mourning (87). “La losa de un miedo incrustado en el cerebro” had confined such stories to whispered confidences and nightmares for decades (Aguilar, *Políticas*). The focus on the impossibility of mourning for those defeated in the war no doubt hit a nerve in many readers who had experienced this at firsthand. The report ends with a short description of the excavation, authorized by the civil governor, the mayor and the landowner, on condition of discretion and an absence of political commemoration —a condition not respected, as some of the pictures testify. Catalá Deus writes that rumors circulated in the village warning retired people that they might lose their pensions, and that a right-wing caravan was on its way to stop the excavation. “Pero el pueblo al fin despierta y seiscientas personas acompañan al cementerio a los que hace treinta y nueve años fueron asesinados salvajemente” (88).

In this particular case the magazine had actually been contacted by one of the organizers of the exhumation, Felisa Casatejada. Catalán Deus remembers how this happened: the editorial office received a letter he quoted from memory, stating something like: “Señores de *Interviú*, en nuestro pueblo estamos haciendo esto, estamos exhumando, hemos sacado parte de los huesos en una finca, ahora estamos preparando un monumento y vamos a hacer un traslado ... y queríamos que *Interviú* contara esto .... Entonces yo la llame por teléfono y le pregunté ‘¿cuándo vais a hacer esto?’, y me dijo, ‘tal día’, y ese día me presenté en el pueblo.” This shows that, by that stage, *Interviú*’s steady coverage of the traces of the Francoist repression had transformed the magazine into a privileged resource for those searching for journalistic exposure of their memory recovery efforts. In other words, *Interviú* had become a crucial “agent of memory” (Aguilar, “Agents”) in transitional Spain: the one most willing to systematically expose the dirty linen of the past in public. Yet, despite its commercial success, the journal’s *lone-wolf* stance and overly dramatic narrative line remained largely non-hegemonic at the time. Regarding *Interviú*’s role in transitional Spain, Catalán Deus believes there were two simultaneous processes at work: the word was out and anybody with a shocking story to tell (sometimes untrue) could contact the journal; at the same time, he also sensed that certain *Interviú* journalistic lines and reports led to a significant copycat factor. Morales also referred to this domino effect: “nos llegaban muchas cartas [de los represaliados]. Cuando empezamos a sacar cosas, empezaron a venir, era una forma de fuente de información ... con miedo unos, otros con menos miedo, [en otros casos] no sabías quién era el que te mandaba la carta”. In this regard, five months later the magazine published a truly telling anonymous letter to the editor (issue # 131), in which the author stated that, “con el reportaje en la mano”, PSOE (socialist) militants had started to ask for pensions for “miles y miles de mujeres que perdieron a sus maridos de esta manera”. The unsigned letter, highlighted by the journal with an image of bones piled in coffins after an exhumation of eight men and two youngsters in a village in Palencia, also pointed to two simultaneous processes expressing both social tension and a newly gained legitimacy to retrieve bodies from mass graves: on the one hand, unspecified “amenazas” were made against those who had passed the information on the Casas de Don Pedro exhumation to Catalán Deus; on the other, thanks to the report, “este verano y otoño España ha sido un permanente trasiego de desenterramientos de fosas comunes”, reburials, dignifying ceremonies in mass graves and new memorial monuments. At the current stage of research into these exhumations of the transition period it is not possible to verify the accuracy of these unsigned claims, let alone the presumed role of the Casas de Don Pedro report in triggering such imitations.

The non-scientific and largely intuitive identification by relatives of some of the exhumed bodies is also noticeable in the next report (issue # 136), which focuses on excavations in various villages in the region of Navarre. The opening image shows a man holding two skulls: that of one of his brothers and that of a neighbor. Other identifications—made through signs of torture, false teeth, coins or footwear recognized by relatives—are mentioned in the text, where the exhumations are labeled “un patético ritual, una de las escenas más dramáticas de la Historia de este país”. The Navarre case stands out among the exhumations of the transition period because of the participation of local priests, who even helped to organize the excavation and offered mass for the

souls of those killed, asking for forgiveness for the Spanish Catholic Church's complicity with the Francoist repression.

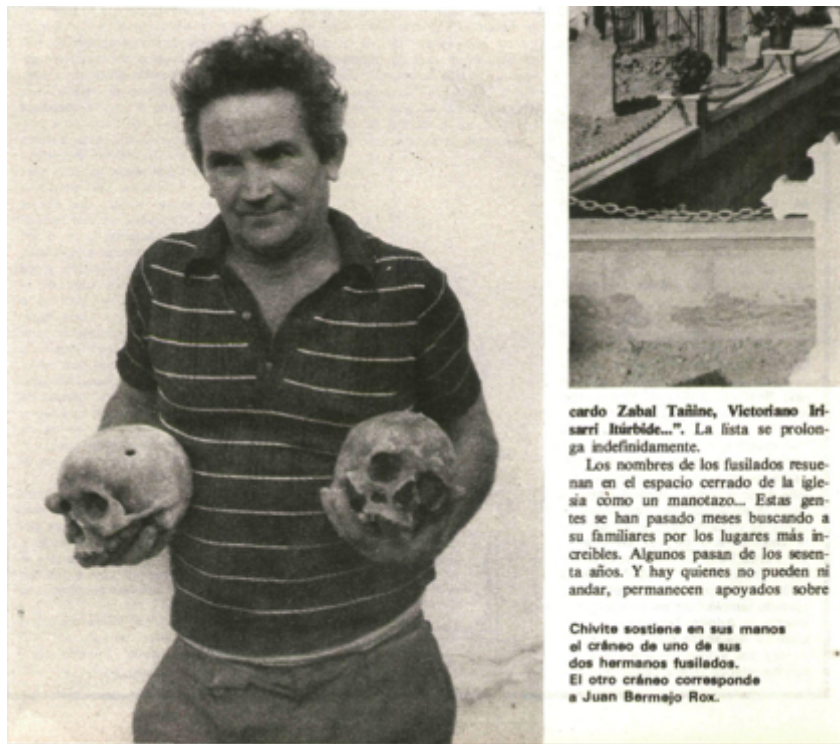


Figure 10: Detail of the report on exhumations in Navarra, including the image of a man holding the skulls of two identified victims: one of his two executed brothers, and one neighbour. *Interviú* 136 (21/12/1978): 76.

In the 1978 Christmas special edition, the report “*Madrugadas de sangre*” focused on the province of Valladolid as one of the *Falange*'s strongholds and describes some of the bloodiest crimes committed there by this paramilitary group. The article is illustrated with a drawing reconstructing a mass grave on graph paper, and, to the magazine's existing repertoire of Francoist cruelty, it added the allegedly festive mood at public killings, including some cases described as open-air dances and picnics, while the crowd witnessed “cómo se abrían en sangre los pechos y las cabezas de los condenados”. As seen in Figure 11, this report included a stand-alone section with the names of the “asesinados” and, more importantly, also the “verdugos”, divided into the categories of “ejecutores” or “confidentes”. After this, reports on mass graves and excavations began to slow down. More than a year later, in January 1980, a new article dealt with the exhumation of 211 soldiers buried in the cemetery of Torrero in Zaragoza, whom *Falangistas* had accused of planning to desert *en masse* to the Republican army. The report focuses on the account of his adventures by Felipe Martín, the “único superviviente” of the execution (27).

This point marked the return of José Luis Morales, who, in partnership with other journalists, wrote the next three reports involving mass graves and exhumations (issues # 233 and # 235 on the repression in Badajoz, and # 275 on the massacres in Asturias)—the final reports in the period under analysis. It is particularly relevant that the Asturias report was written barely six months after the failed military coup of 1981. In contrast to the commonsensical belief that the coup attempt sent shivers through the social fabric, paralyzing or downscaling most critiques of Francoism, the rhetorical tone





Figure 11: Partial list of victims and perpetrators in the municipality of Olmedo, in a report on Civil War massacres in Valladolid. *Interviú* Extra de Navidad 1978.

remained uncompromising, as the journalists evoked “relatos espeluznantes” of massacres, rapes and cries of agony, the sudden appearance of bloodstained heads and the alarming sight of executed bodies hanging upside down from trees in certain villages. But more important for the consolidation of the magazine’s overall *memoryscape* of the Francoist terror are the two 1980 reports on the city of Badajoz, the site of one of the worst episodes of Francoist repressive violence during the war.

As with the pioneering 1977 reports, Morales and Mackay added shocking conceptual ammunition to the portrayal of the Francoist repression against civilians. Besides the deliberate use of the concept of “genocidio”, liberally building on the *legendary* elements of what was a real massacre (Espinosa 205-50), the authors used archetypal images to establish the old Badajoz bullring as one of the worst black holes of the repression, in the same league as the Jinámar gully and, consequently, Gernika. The case called for bull-fighting metaphors: thousands were treated like cattle in the bullring—including being speared with “banderillas de fuego”—before being gunned down from the stands. Carnage was the rule of the game when the death column entered the province (“la sangre corría por las calles como si fuese agua”) (Morales and Mackay, “Un genocidio” 47-49); the Moroccan troops sowed terror, killing people like rabid dogs; many were slit open with bayonets with their innards then pulled out or with soldiers sticking their heads in the wounds. With such abominable acts, the bullring “se tiñó de sangre” and became “la cima de la sicopatía general, del asesinato hasta la saciedad, de las sádicas y morbosas liquidaciones humanas” (Morales and Mackay, “El ruedo” 34, 36). Again, the exhumations taking place in different villages in the province of Badajoz, some of them witnessed and photographed by *Interviú*, provided crucial evidence of the reality of these atrocities, whose revelation was deemed necessary to prevent this from happening again.

# El ruedo se tiñó de sangre

Por J. L. MORALES y R. MACAY

*El silencio extremeño sigue rodeando las matanzas de la plaza de toros de Badajoz. Reconstruir esta sangrienta historia era absolutamente necesario para entender por aproximación la situación crítica de aquella zona deprimida. INTERVIU ha tratado de reconstruir aquella historia, hablando con testigos, supervivientes y familiares, recabando documentos, repasando crónicas periodísticas, y, por fin, asistiendo al levantamiento de cadáveres en una de las muchas fosas comunes donde están enterrados los republicanos. Esta es la segunda parte de aquella terrible historia.*

Desde que las columnas de Asensio y Castañón, comandadas por el teniente coronel Yagüe, salieron de Sevilla, y desde que las tropas al mando de Yelba habían tomado Mérida, a la capital extremeña llegaban cada día grupos de personas horribles y temerosas. Huan-

los Espada en el 36. Exiliado clandestinamente en Venezuela, cuando volvió a Extremadura publicó un libro en Badajoz titulado «Tres en uno». En el capítulo dedicado a agosto de aquel año señala entre otras cosas que «la relojería Parra estaba siendo asaltada por solda-



INTERVIU presenció el levantamiento de cadáveres en una de las muchas fosas comunes que flanquean los caminos de Badajoz.

Figure 12: The second report on the killings in Badajoz, by Morales and Mackay. *Interviú* 235 (13/11/1980): 34.

## Conclusions

The powerful role of different “cultural vehicles”—predominantly the press—in shaping traumatic memories of the past has been underlined in the seminal work of Michael Schudson. But he also claims that the past, particularly when “palpably alive in the present”, “cannot be reorganized at will” (218). The Franco regime used all available means to instill a memory of the war that was full of distortions and omissions. The silencing of the existence of mass graves full of Republican victims was among the most outrageous of these.

Initially, the Spanish transition was a period of extraordinary creativity and courage, when many bold efforts were made. In its early years, *Interviú* managed to cut a swath through the fearful social and political mentality of the transition, not without internal tensions and external threats. It did so by selecting the most spectacular cases available, by using overly inflated and politically incorrect visual and narrative rhetoric, by digging up hard evidence (particularly wounded bones), and by giving commercial considerations priority over factual accuracy. Yet, in so doing, it succeeded in creating a somber imaginary of the repression, openly exposing the crimes of the rebel army in the Civil War, and giving a voice and political agency to a group of victims who were virtually absent from the public arena of the day.

However, despite these efforts, few other media covered exhumations, civil society—severely weakened by forty years of repression—failed to organize beyond specific local contexts, institutions looked the other way and, in consequence, a nationwide response to the exhumations did not materialize. The contextual and

structural conditions in Spain would not be ready for this until many years later—and even then, in a climate of tense public debate (Ferrándiz, *El pasado* 70-74).

During the transition, those who dared to talk openly about the thorniest issues of the past were not only branded as dangerous radicals, but ran tangible risks and were barred from access to sources of information. At the same time, the dramatic existence of politically-motivated violence, and probably also the failed *coup d'état*, increased fears of a repetition of the past. All of this helps to explain why a veil of silence was redrawn over the past and politicians prioritized future-oriented strategies. Cultural products became less bold and the already slight interest in social endeavors such as exhumations became more low-key until the year 2000, when a new memory boom based on the reporting of mass grave excavations took off (Ferrándiz, “Exhuming”, *El pasado*). It is evident that, at the time of *Interviú*'s early reports, the consensual injunction “not to stir up the past” also impacted on the will “not to stir up the earth” into which where the most troubling dead had been thrown by the repression. In such a complex environment, *Interviú* opted for non-compliance with the catchphrase, but its own excesses and the drift of the country's political mood prompted them to gradually let go of certain research subjects. It is true that “[i]f stories about the past are no longer performed in talking, reading, viewing or commemorative rituals, they ultimately die out in cultural terms” (Erll and Rigney 2). But it is also true that, sooner or later, open wounds festering beneath the surface will eventually allow for new kinds of irruptions of memory (Wilde), as would happen in Spain after 2000.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The legal consequences of naming perpetrators in different cultural endeavors have been exposed by Espinosa (2013).

<sup>2</sup> Besides the better known coup of 23 February 1981, other prior and subsequent coups were organized but successfully dismantled in advance.

<sup>3</sup> Personal interview of the authors with José Luis Morales and Manuel Blanco Chivite. According to the latter (a former member of the *Frente Revolucionario Antifascista y Patriota*, FRAP, an extreme-left organization created by the PCE-ml that killed two members of the security forces in 1975), this practice was criminalized because it allegedly undermined the politics of reconciliation (personal interview, 13 November 2013). Certainly, mainstream left-wing parties obsessively avoided being stigmatized as having a rancorous, resentful or vindictive attitude towards the past, but took their approach to the extreme of ignoring their "own" victims.

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<sup>4</sup> Several threatening notes (not always anonymous) were received by, for instance, *Interviú*, *Triunfo* and *Cuadernos para el Diálogo*. These notes were aimed at dissuading the editors from publishing articles critical of the dictatorship and from exposing the crimes committed by Francoism.

<sup>5</sup> On 20 September 1977, the extreme right sent a bomb to the satirical magazine *El Papus*. In consequence, the receptionist died and seventeen people were injured. On 30 October 1978, another bomb sent by the extreme right this time to the newspaper *El País*, killed one worker and injured another two.

<sup>6</sup> José Luis Cebrián, editor of *El País*, was prosecuted on four occasions between 1977 and 1978.

<sup>7</sup> Vázquez Montalbán had already mentioned the odd mix of “tetas” with “fosas comunes para rojos ‘paseados’ en la zona franquista” and “denuncias de corrupciones mil de caciques de vieja y nueva andadura”. He also claimed that, if “*El País* significaba la satisfacción a una vieja aspiración de diario parademocrático de *cejas altas*”, then “*Interviú* fue el otro fenómeno hegemónico de los mass media españoles durante la transición” (Montalbán 101). The truth is that both of these key media published reports on exhumations, but with crucial differences: if *El País* was the paradigm of the spirit of national reconciliation, *Interviú* adopted a sensationalistic approach and tended to use a militant and provocative tone. Another difference is that *El País* only reflected on certain initiatives undertaken by the relatives of Republican victims (on very few occasions related to exhumations), whereas *Interviú* undertook its own fieldwork, provided new evidence and published informants’ testimonies, naming both victims and perpetrators.

<sup>8</sup> Vinader was a member of the Catalan communist party, *Partido Socialista Unificado de Cataluña* (PSUC).

<sup>9</sup> Vázquez Montalbán (101) referred to Asensio as “un jovencísimo aprendiz de Ciudadano Kane”, and Miró (28) considered him a “pescador de escándalos”. For Miró, Asensio “no era, pese a *Interviú*, un personaje de izquierdas” (Miró 116).

<sup>10</sup> We interviewed José Luis Morales in December 2012 and October 2013, and José Catalán Deus in November 2013.