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The “Logics” of Violence and Franco’s Mass Graves. An Ethnohistorical Approach

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Abstract

A civil war supposes the end of the whole social order and its traditional social values. Since that moment, an extreme and cruel violence appear against people and communities. The experience of those traumatic facts meant a painful heritage not only for the direct victims, but for the next generations too. The Spanish Civil War produced an important group of unrecognized victims, even today. These people experienced a total alienation, they were treated as an object, and became second class citizens during the so long Francoism. They were the leftist men repressed in the rebel part of the country at the beginning of the War. Those so called reds were exterminated and their relatives suffered humiliations, punishments, expropriations and were deprived of their social rights. The knowledge of these victims and experiences has emerged recently in the present life of Spain because the relatives are claiming for the recover the corpses of those murdered by the fascist groups. The bodies were hidden into mass graves which are becoming to be excavated. The claims are directed to obtain the dignification of those murdered through a new burial and the recover of their memory and biographies. In order to dignify these people, first we need to know and think about the tremendous trauma that the assassinated and their families experienced.

Keywords: Spanish Civil War, Ideological Extermination and its Logics, Social Trauma, Extreme Violence, Mass Graves

I

This paper discusses the cultural framework that underlies the spontaneous social movement for the “recovery of historical memory” spearheaded by the relatives of those murdered and concealed in mass graves at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War. The sites contain a lot more complexity and multiple meanings than their popular name, Franco’s mass graves, seems to entail.

The struggles around the opening of the Spanish mass graves—the ‘mass graves phenomenon’—both signal and follow the emergence onto the public national space of objective facts and of subjective experiences regarding the traumatic ruptures and violence suffered by marked individuals, their families and their communities. The killing and burying of considerable numbers of persons classified as an enemy population was formally denied in the public space, even as most of those who had lived through the period in each community knew that they had indeed taken place. This apparent paradox is precisely what constituted the traumatic experience. If the paradox that underlies the trauma is to be solved, the current attention paid to Franco’s mass graves must go beyond their capacity to provide new figures of casualties or to legitimate historic revisionism from ‘the other’ ideological shore. The protagonist of the story is an invisible, denied and ignored “community of sorrow.” The way that the claims of the affected families have been received by Spanish society and the former conservative government shows the weakness of our

interpretative bases about the recent past, the fallibility of our historic readings, the confusion and manipulation of our collective memory, and the magnitude of our social silences. The mass graves phenomenon reveals the emergence of a deep and traumatic horror over which a sector of Spanish society built an “imagined community” of its own, its social identity, its national project, even particular racist perspectives.

The focus of the paper is on the stories, memories and testimonies of the victims of the nationalist insurgency of 1936 in Aranda de Duero, a town in the northern province of Burgos, where an interdisciplinary team of researchers excavated two mass graves, with 81 and 46 bodies respectively. This is a work in progress: the team continues to work, with the economic support of the municipal government, helping the families recover the remains of their loved ones while uncovering new information about the War, generating new interpretations about what happened there 70 years ago, and going deep into the life- experience of those people who were constructed as second class citizens and ignored during the duration of Franco’s regime until today, dispossessed of their rights and voices: the *Reds*. The people excluded from history.

Conducting research based on social and individual memories of violence is, as so many present works on memory show, difficult and complex. Exploring memories of events that happened 68 years ago presents multiple and magnified challenges—but we can start from the assumption that memories are still alive. In fact, the



contemporary claims of the affected families have produced a renewed interest in these past events, provoking an important debate in Spanish society over a subject that some sectors would rather have cast into oblivion. We consider the public airing of this conflict and struggle of memories and interests is in fact the first step to closure—the strength and intensity of the relatives who seek to set things right show that forced silence and denial did not lead to oblivion: despite appearances, the page was not turned. In addressing the conflict of memories, one invariably addresses the actual repression, the legacy of the regime, the remembrance of the war, and the changes in Spanish society along with the newest social movements.

II

The Spanish Civil War has become a powerful icon, a radicalized symbol with the power to evoke a multiplicity of images, feelings, judgments, ideologies. Leftist narratives about the Second Republic (1931-1936) read as invocations of a lost Arcadia, the moment of the greatest political efforts and drive for a just modernization of the country, the Republic of Letters with the so called *Silver Age* of literature and art. This is, in fact, an untenable representation that silences the violence of the period. The idealization of the republican period hides the daily presence of the violence in the streets and the disloyal role played for the left revolutionary parties with the democratic system. For the Left, the war is romanticized as the tragic embodiment of the dichotomies between democracy and dictatorship, liberty and oppression, ignoring the active support for the insurgency in republican territory and the crimes committed by the republicans against their ‘enemies.’ On the other hand, the traditional Right wing view represents the war as a struggle between good and evil, civilization and barbarism, religion and atheism, Spanishness (the Spanish nation, the Spanish people, the essence of Spain) and foreign, international (and therefore anti-Spanish) Marxism. The Spanish Catholic Church said that ‘the enemy’ was an incarnation of the devil, declaring the war a Crusade under Apocalyptic tropes. This image was propagated during the first year of the war and was intensively reproduced during the long Francoist period. The parallel existence of these two contradictory interpretations and the exclusive, legitimate and opposing truths that each represents, is symptomatic of Spain’s unresolved past and the conflict of memories.

The conflict over representations of the War goes beyond that of the Left and Right— Spanish literary magazines and journals carry a wealth of articles or ads promoting books related to the Spanish Civil War written by journalists or amateurs, about massacres, crimes, disappeared people, etc. The publicity refers to them as providing “the untold

story”, bringing to light “the forgotten events” or finally showing “the truth.” The War sells literature and movies. The film that represented Spain in the 2003 Oscars was “Salamina Soldiers,” based on a novel by Javier Cercas which was a great success despite weak promotion of its first edition. The topic of the Spanish Civil War ever provokes an immediate attention and interest, especially when the story is an intimate one. Some prestigious Spanish historians have protested against the popular idea that these are “untold stories.” Santos Juliá recently wrote an acerbic article criticizing expressions such as “oblivion” or “silence” related to the political crimes perpetrated by Franco’s supporters during the War.¹ He argues that thousands of books have been written about these subjects during the last 25 years. Juliá forgets that he is before two parallel realms: academia, and the street—academic texts and research is usually not accessible nor interesting to those beyond the ‘ivory tower’ of universities and institutions, as the streets and academia mutually ignore each other. As a case in point, Juliá himself does not seem to understand the social demand for accounts like these, or why people think that the Spanish Civil War has been insufficiently discussed. But a look at how those “25 years” of academic writing were experienced by people according to the political climate and the limits of public space offer an important caveat.

The Spanish Transition has been idealized as a model for countries coming out of authoritarian regimes. The main axes of that process included a commitment to reaching agreements and avoiding conflictive situations or discourses through a centrist or “less ideological” approach. This obviously excluded the Civil War as a topic of discussion or redress, although most of the political crimes committed by the dictatorial regime had taken place then. All sides said that it was not the moment for making demands, that the old guard was alert and the military would not allow this counter-history to question their integrity and perhaps to foreground redress. This attitude originated between the politicians before the Transition itself, during the last part of the Dictatorship, when the opposition parties agreed on a discourse of ‘general culpability’ regarding the outbreak of the fight and signed declarations stressing the need to build a new future.

The memory of those who were defeated by the nationalist insurgents, and whose condition of defeat was reproduced under Francoism, continued to be an isolated memory in the historical and political struggle established during the Transition. They have been the forgotten people of our recent history, especially the so-called “repressed” ones. Although

¹ JULIÁ, S. “Echar al olvido. Memoria y amnistía en la transición,” *Claves*, nº 129, January 2003. This article is based on his “Introduction” to the book, JULIÁ, S. et.al., *Víctimas de la Guerra Civil*. Madrid: Temas de Hoy, 1999.

there were some timid measures like pensions for the former soldiers of the republican army or their widows and orphans, for the victims, the Spanish Transition was another period of waiting. At the beginning, the families felt that the moment had arrived for recovering the remains of their dead relatives. But they had to postpone their claims and sacrifice their rights because of the official discourse of the centrist government.

Between 1978 and 1981, with little publicity or public acknowledgment, some families opened mass graves in secret, taking out the remains and reburying them in marked tombs in consecrated land. But the failed coup d’état of the Guardia Civil Lieutenant Colonel Tejero provoked a return of all the old fears, and the process was stopped. Since then, a blanket of silence fell over these claims and memories. The indifference of the Socialist Party during its 3 terms in office that started in 1982 contributed to the frustrated and desperate silencing of the twice-bereaved families.

It was not until the Summer of 2000, after the exhumation of a grave in El Bierzo, in the northern province of León, that the claims of the relatives of the victims of the repression crystallized into the public sphere. Santiago Macías and Emilio Silva, the latter the grandson of one of those exhumed at El Bierzo, founded the Asociación para la Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica (Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory), dedicated to the recovery of the remains of those murdered and concealed in unmarked mass graves during the Spanish Civil War. In a matter of weeks, ARMH expanded like wildfire across the whole country, encouraged by an illustrated report published in the Sunday’s edition of *El País*, Spain’s most important newspaper. That article was followed by a barrage of thousands of letters and e-mails of people around the country asking for guidance in the task of recovering their relative’s remains. Silva and Macías published a book called *Las fosas de Franco* (Franco’s graves) through one of the most important Spanish publishers. It is one of those described as, “the untold story.”

III

There are many wars inside a war, but the general trend is for each side to simplify the conflict’s conditions and effects. In order to justify what are in fact crimes, propaganda naturalizes ideological constructions served up in reiterated and essentialist slogans, chants, phrases, everyday discourses. The enemy is constructed as a non-person, an embodiment of that which acts against the values we hold dear, a monolithic, single-minded being against whom violence is not only justified but necessary. This “war of representations” usually precedes the armed conflict but intensifies once fighting breaks out. When the enemy is not a foreign polity but a part of the national citizenry, the need for

ideological radicalization and ‘othering’ is even more necessary, and potentially more volatile.

The degree to which this became true in Spanish society starting in July 1936 is a case in point. Despite the escalating difficulties and conflicts of the last period of the Second Republic, the degree and level of the violence that swept the country with the invasion of the nationalist insurgents surprised everybody. The previous civil conflicts, the Carlista Wars, still present in the collective memory, and the bloodless establishment of General Primo de Rivera’s 1923-1927 dictatorship, gave no indication that such radical violence could be exercised or suffered in a civil war.

The use of extreme violence was, however, conceived in the rebels’ plans. It was not a spontaneous escalation or the product of circumstances that got out of control, as some right-wing scholars have said. During the first days of the war, the perpetrators made lists of known Reds in the areas under insurgent control—union leaders, social activists, anarchist, socialist or communist sympathizers, etc. Repression was organized as a spider web, each village and county town following military orders to gather and supply intelligence. The fascist groups who took charge of the repression tasks were perfectly coordinated from above, and never acted in their own villages: they were sent to different places in order to reduce their visibility in postwar daily life.

Although this was denied for many years, we can now talk of an extermination plan of the so-called Reds, not only because of the similarity of procedures and practices, but especially when you examine the list of casualties. The insurgents knew there was insufficient support for the coup, as the division of Spain in two main camps showed, and this posed a security problem in the areas under their control. The assassinations of the local Reds were a strategy for the transformation of those spaces in secured zones. On the other hand, this was a radical measure that generated a kind of “blood pact” between the insurgent leadership and a large part of the civilian population that became involved in repressing their fellow citizens. It was a policy of no-return: too many hands were soiled by blood.²

Let us look at a concrete example of the experience of unexpected, extreme violence, and its aftermath in a complicit society. In Aranda de Duero, the conspiracy of 1936 was coordinated from the capital of the province, Burgos, which would later be the capital of the so called nationalist Spain. The main local collaborators with the rebellion in Aranda de Duero were members of the small fascist party Falange Española —at that moment an illegal

² ESPINOSA MAESTRE, F. “Julio de 1936. Golpe militar y plan de exterminio,” in CASANOVA, J. (coord.), ESPINOSA, F., MIR, C. y MORENO GÓMEZ, F. *Morir, matar, sobrevivir. La violencia en la dictadura de Franco*. Barcelona: Crítica, 2002, 61.

party— and some of the local oligarchic families. These people promoted a climate of violence—trying to “accelerate history,” creating the conditions that could justify a coup, a process of semi-organized radicalization that took place all over Spain. Falange Española had offered its support to the Army in the preparation of a coup if the Left-wing coalition won the February 1936 elections—which it did. The daily life before the rebellion in Aranda de Duero as seen in the documentary records was characterized by the actions of a small group of Falangistas, less than 25 people in a population of 9.000, that trained themselves in the use of firearms each Saturday on the same hill we will find the mass graves. The municipal records provide the well-known names of the petit bourgeoisie implicated in these affairs.

Another incident that reveals the degree of the implicated interaction between a coordinated planning from above and active supporters of the conspiracy at the local level: the peculiar phenomenon of the so called “marks.” On July 19th, the doors on the houses of people on the right were marked with white drawings: a cross, an x, or a scratch. The right publicly stated that the marks were drawn by the local Reds, who were waiting for squads from Madrid with commands of extermination of the right-wing supporters. The signs, according to them, stood for “murder, robbery and rape.” Today we still find this interpretation in some articles, without any attempt of researching the claims or the circumstances of their production.³ But comparable instances that separated the right-wing from the Reds took place in different places of the country during this time, ever coinciding with the nationalist conquest of towns and villages. Lists with the names of members of the local right, who were supposed to be murdered, were used as proof of the Reds’ inhumanity, their extreme disrespect for life and social order, which would justify their elimination from society without trials. The present historiography has revealed that these lists were faked.⁴ In Aranda de Duero, we have to consider the strong parallelism between the marks on people’s doors and those described in the Old Testament, when the Israeli people marked their doors with lamb’s blood to avoid the angel of extermination. This idea was more compatible with the political culture of priests or people with very strong Catholic beliefs, than socialist or anarchist activists. Moreover, it is ironic that in fact, those so marked in the ‘faked’ lists of the rightists, or with white markings on their doors, were precisely the ones ‘spared’ by the agents of extermination—their own hands stained with blood.

The eruption of exclusivist ideological beliefs and violent practices in the community produced a new social order. A sense of alterity (otherness) was generated by this polarization among the right-wing supporters which denied the possibility of ‘sharing’ or coexisting in space with the so-called Reds. The war provoked readjustments and inscribed the new order, which would exist for the rest of Francoism, especially in rural communities and smaller cities.

This social reordering had different levels; in Aranda de Duero we find at the first level the people who had been in a better economic position since before the war, who could consolidate their status by collaborating with the new authorities. Most of them were well-informed about the conspiracy and in many cases supported it. At the second level were people who participated directly in the coup d’etat or collaborated in the repression tasks. Some of them were members of the fascists parties Falange or P.N.E. (Spanish National Party, with its sanguinary militia “Spanish legionnaires”), but a lot enlisted in these political organizations after the rebellion began. They were part of a secondary economic class in the pre-war society, interested in the prizes and benefits that would accrue once the new order was established. The insurgents’ victory helped the consolidation of this new class that came from the petit bourgeoisie, characterized by an apparent respect for the traditional social values, but especially concerned with a “national regeneration” that eventually implied their opportunity for promotion to positions of political power in each town. These two first levels—the oligarchy and new political leaders—were not the more numerous in their communities, but they became the heads of the new system.

A third level consisted of the bystanders, people who tolerated the events without any resistance or active support. Closing their eyes to the atrocities and keeping silent, they justified their complicit inaction with a discourse of resignation based on their lack of political interest. A fourth and final level is occupied by the victims: day labourers, workers, small farmers, clerks, most of them committed to parties which demanded socio-economic change. Among them there was a minority with a high ideological commitment—leaders of trade unions and political parties. Some, especially among the poor, used their militancy as a survival strategy, a way to access jobs and better salaries. People in this level became the enemies, and in the post-war society those who survived would be the defeated, those without rights and voice.

IV

The first people assassinated in Aranda de Duero were from the lower class or lower middle-class: small farmers, day laborers, municipal police officers, shop assistants, clerks. Most of them

³ DÍAZ-PLAZA RODRÍGUEZ, M. “La guerra civil en Aranda,” *Biblioteca. Estudio e Investigación* Vol. 11. Aranda de Duero: Ayuntamiento de Aranda de Duero, 1996, 179-206.

⁴ ESPINOSA MAESTRE 2002, 68.

combined two or more different economic activities trying to survive. Their political commitment and activism was dissimilar. Most of the victims in Aranda were affiliated with a trade union with the only goal of getting higher wages. This kind of security was very important in a poor countryside with high unemployment. During the 30s, the development of some public works—railroads and water canals, for instance—made possible the extension of these trade unions, which tried to facilitate access to jobs to their members. Today, almost 70 years later, testimonies of the relatives of the poorest families recall the bad labors conditions, the general poverty and the lack of political commitment of their assassinated relatives. These people were the ones who reiterated that their loved ones had been killed “because of envies and bad feelings.” But for the perpetrators of the national zone there were not different kinds of Reds: all of them were the enemy.

Of course there were also highly politicized people besides the politicians elected to serve in the municipal government; a kind of avant-garde who had especial interest in national affairs. They coordinated the local policies and represented the republican Popular Front, the left-wing coalition which won the national elections on February 1936. Probably, the names of these Leftist leaders were written at the top of the extermination lists. Until today, their relatives still proudly maintain and often share the political commitments of their murdered loved ones.

The July 1936 events started with the declaration of Martial Law by the military insurgents. For Aranda de Duero, that meant that on the 19th the captain of the Guardia Civil read the proclamation in the town hall, dismissed the elected town councilors and appointed another council. Immediately, many men were swiftly detained and imprisoned in the municipal jail. All of them had leftist party identities cards. A certain number of the prisoners were conducted to the provincial jail, in the capital of Burgos, where they did fare any better than those who stayed in the town.

The time prisoners spent in jail was hard and uncertain for the entire family. The younger brothers and older sons of the detained Reds were made to work for free for the new authorities as well as for private individuals favored by the regime harvesting their crops. So were the women of the families. Prisoners themselves were used by the municipal authorities, municipal agencies, etc. as sources of free hard labor.⁵ The local prison did not have enough facilities to house them properly; the

relatives of the detained had to be responsible for their nourishment. Day after day, women and children stood in line in order to enter the jail with food and clothes for their fathers, sons or brothers. This situation was extremely difficult for families deprived of their working men, who were the breadwinners, their main providers. It must have been equally difficult for the prisoners to see their dependents struggling to become the providers and caretakers of the family. Detainees were further emasculated by the public vexations inflicted upon their dependents, particularly the women in their families, whom they were helpless to defend.

Neither the detained persons nor their families received any kind of explanation about the imprisonment and its duration. It often happened that one day the wife, daughter or sister went to the jail with her usual package, and the warden rejected it. Sometimes the official informed them that the prisoner had been transferred to the capital, but soon a rumour spread that such trips ended in the death of the prisoners. The perpetrators then made the corpses disappear into hidden collective graves.

The prisoners were not simply shot—they were more often than not tortured and beaten before being killed. They suffered humiliations, vexations and brutal anxieties in the presence of death. In jail they were denigrated and treated inhumanely for weeks and months. The murders were not swift or “efficient,” the executions were committed against various small groups, with one group watching the other die. Firing was not accurate, producing a long and agonizing death. We have recorded the testimony of a man who saw his brother get shot in the morning. He recalls that the body of his brother fell down over the bodies of those fired the previous night, and “the hands of those laying there were still trembling, they were not dead yet.”

Testimonies insist that the perpetrators were not in normal mental and physical conditions. Several testimonies describe them as drunk, brainwashed by their superiors who provided alcohol to have them obey their commands unquestioningly. That explains the notoriously inaccurate shooting. It also makes it easier for victims to explain to themselves how neighbors were easily transformed into murderers.

The composition of the killing squads in Aranda (and similar towns) was diverse: the main components were Falangists and Legionarios de España, later integrated in the Requeté (Carlists). They were usually joined by members of the Guardia Civil. The severest murderous acts took place during the summer and fall of 1936, the period of “hot terror,”⁶ but they did not stop through the

⁵ *Libro de Actas Municipales de Aranda de Duero*: September 16, 1936: Prisoners employed for repairing streets; November 9, 1936: A town councillor denounce that the water company is using prisoners without any official permission. Municipal Archive of Aranda de Duero.

⁶ This expression was formulated by CASANOVA, J. 2002 “Una dictadura de cuarenta años”, in CASANOVA, J. (coord.), ESPINOSA, F., MIR, C. y MORENO GÓMEZ, F. *Morir, matar, sobrevivir. La violencia en la dictadura de Franco*. Barcelona: Crítica.

duration of the war. The main perpetrators of the crimes were locals, but some Falangist squads came down from the nearby stagnant front of Somosierra, looking for excitement in the towns where a politically-motivated genocidal policy was being carried out. Before murdering people they would eat and drink at their expense.

A few murderers publicly bragged about their crime; their sense of power and the certainty of their impunity was such that they even talked to the relatives of the victims. They would speak of how they had humiliated the victim, kicking or hitting them while they were tied; they were urinated on if they asked for water while they were moribund. Perhaps some of these accounts were not true, and the perpetrators spread them around to hurt the relatives. In any case, these horrible stories were a form of psychological torture that extended punishment to the families of the assassinated prisoners.

Another heavy burden and constant torture for the relatives of the victims during this early period was the impossibility of knowing where their relatives had been sent. Often, they were said to have been taken out of the town jail and sent to the capital's prison. But when the families discovered that their relatives had never arrived at the capital, intense panic fell over them: where were they? What had happened to them? Were they alright? Were they suffering? Who was feeding them? But finally, without any hope, the critical question, where were the mortal remains of their beloved son/husband/brother; in some cases, their sister/their daughter?

The disappearance of these men was a great trauma for the bereaved relatives. First, it generated great anxiety to the family, who could not verify the rumors; several clung to the hope that their detained loved one was still alive, and other family members had to decide between trying to convince them otherwise, or allowing them to continue hoping despite its irrational and potentially damaging effects. Second, even when they knew their loved ones had died, that death without body froze the absent in his last living image and prevented a normalized venue of acceptance. In Spanish Catholic culture, we believe that everybody is part of the community, which is integrated by the living and the dead. Deceased people don't vanish completely, their bodies go to the cemetery, a 'final resting place' where we visit them and perform certain rituals that dignify their memories. The soul goes to a realm beyond Earth: hell or purgatory, purgatory being a necessary stop before heaven. In this no-place souls must be purified of their sins in order to continue the journey to heaven, and people in Earth, normally the relatives, can help them with their transition by praying, paying for masses to be held in their names and lighting candles in churches to guide them. These customs were very common and significant in traditional Castilian communities,

where brotherhoods were constituted in order to pray and accompany the dead, paying for the ceremonies and burial, since at least the XVII century. The rituals are very important, they give emotional support to the relatives, and build up a sense of a community to overcome adversity. The relatives, widows and orphans can rebuild their social roles helped by the funeral rituals. In this sense social conventions such as: wearing black, mourning, and gathering in houses or parishes, create social spaces for widows and orphans. Through these practices the families feel the support of their neighbors and reconstruct their roles in society.⁷

None of the bereaved families during the "hot terror" were able to mourn their beloved, in fact, it was officially forbidden. Instead of receiving the support of their communities, the relatives of the murdered men suffered taunts, humiliations and threats. One of our informants, who became an orphaned child, said that mutterings such as "roots must be pulled out when they're just starting" were said within earshot as a way to intimidate him, disapproving of him for being the son of a red. These kinds of popular sayings convey the totalizing thinking and discourses of purification and extermination about Reds that became naturalized in the communities.

Only the affected families helped and comforted each other, most of the time secretly. The social stigmatization of each family created an excluded social sector, which signified a rupture of the previous traditional social networks and practices and generated a new universe for social relations, based on experiences of suffering and alienation. New friendships, engagements and marriages among excluded people created an underground supportive network, a veritable community of suffering.

Despite changes in intensity and degree, the surviving victims' inconsolable affliction has been permanent, until today. People in their 80's have broken down weeping while saying in an interview that the only reason they are still alive is because they still need to find the remains of their parents or brothers and bury them with dignity in a cemetery. For them the victims cannot rest in peace as long as their bodies are "lying in some field, like animals" instead of being in consecrated ground. Until the bodies receive proper burial, they are not part of the community of the living and the dead discussed

⁷ FERNÁNDEZ DE MATA, I. "Disinterring the Spanish Civil War. Encountering the Victims". Lecture at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (EE.UU), cosponsored by the Latin American, Caribbean and Iberian Studies Program and Legacies of Authoritarianism Circle. 27 October 2003. Id. "Exhuming bones, reintegrating memories. The forgotten victims of the Spanish Civil War. An ethnohistorical approach." Conference of the Society for Social History. Rouen (France), 2004; Id. *De la vida, del amor y la muerte*. Burgos: Librería Berceo, 1997. FOSTER, G. M. *La cultura tradicional en España y América*. Sevilla: Signatura Demos, 2003.

above. The perpetual insult to the dignity of the deceased is a present sorrow for the relatives, a pain that should not be underestimated. Dignifying their relatives is an important life-goal for the surviving members of the victimized families.

But the process of exhuming and identifying each set of remains is always challenging, sometimes impossible. There may be insufficient data, very large graves with too many bodies jumbled inside with little information from witnesses or records to assist the forensic team. When identification is not possible beyond the shadow of a doubt, families have accepted collective burials that include the names of all those who were killed and tossed into the grave—if they cannot give their deceased relative an individual resting place they can at least give them a proper burial in a marked grave with his name inscribed on the stone. Elderly survivors then feel that they have finally satisfied their debts with their ancestors, and kept promises that they made to dying mothers or brothers regarding their murdered husband or son.

The victims of the repression, as we have seen, were not only those who ended up in mass graves all across the fields, mine shafts, ditches, and even cities of Spain; and the perpetrators were not only those who pulled the triggers against them. The women of assassinated Reds—widows, daughters and sisters—suffered particular vexations, punishments, humiliations and labor exploitation. They were forced to clean houses, hospitals and barracks, without any remuneration. Many were arbitrarily imprisoned in schools or town halls, without any kind of comfort, to be provided for by relatives. This long-silenced sector of Spanish society had additional torture heaped upon their already ruptured lives: their public physical denigration as *pelonas*. In public ceremonies of humiliation, their heads were shaved in public by the fascists, they were forced to drink castor oil and then paraded around in ridiculous processions accompanied by a marching band. By removing their hair, the perpetrators stripped the women of an intrinsic feminine feature, marking them as unfit to be proper women. The embarrassment of appearing bald in public was reinforced through constant mockeries. This punishment was also aimed against the men in the family—even the dead prisoner—since women’s bodies are supposed to embody the honor and good name of the Spanish family.

The widows, *pelonas* or not, were defenseless before the law. They were not legally recognized as widows without their husband’s death certificate, which was impossible to procure without the body. Wives were thus married to ghosts—under Spanish law, they could not legally administrate the goods and properties registered in their husbands’ name, nor could they receive any inheritance and, of course, they could not remarry. A later law [1937] allowed for the classification of some of these

disappeared men as dead, but it was limited by the following conditions: first, only a certain number of cases were accepted, in order to avoid the compilation of long official lists of the disappeared; second, the cause of death could not be stated as execution. A lot of people were never officially registered as dead, especially among those who died single or without dependents. Other people were afraid of being identified as Reds’ relatives by the Francoist institutions, so they did not request the inclusion of the names of their disappeared family member. The lack of information about the status of some of the disappeared meant that some children of widows did not qualify to receive even the minuscule monetary aids offered in the postwar period. In order to obtain this small monetary aid, however, children had to sign a document that stated their parents had died because of “war causes,” despite everybody’s knowledge of the conditions of the death of these particular Reds killed far from any battlefield, their hands tied behind their backs before firing squads. Often times the documents were signed because of the extreme conditions of poverty families were reduced to; those who had the privilege to avoid the further humiliation both of signing and of receiving Francoists’ assistance remember their resistance with pride today.

The victims whose experience was perhaps the most traumatic were these children, whose lives were shockingly ruptured and who did not understand anything about the murders or their fathers, whose politics they were often too young to comprehend, the humiliation of their mothers and sisters, their escalating impoverishment their own stigmatization, their mistreatment in the hands of schoolmates and teachers, etc. Many had to leave school to support their families, 8 and 9 year old kids who lost the opportunity to pursue their own lives under their own dreams or wants. The sudden and terrible transformation of the world into a hostile place that pointed at them and their families but not at others. To be the “son of an executed Red” became a social stigma that accompanied them during their whole lives, and made it difficult to get jobs or enjoy social relationships.

Some households suffered the complete loss of working men: the father and several brothers were murdered, and sons or younger brothers of murdered men were pressured to enlist as “volunteers” in the Falangist militias or in the Legión. It was a survival strategy that nonetheless resulted in new deaths in the war-front—both by ‘enemy’ fire and ‘friendly’ fire inside the trenches—and the consequent impoverishment of the families. When the war was over, this same survival strategy was used by Red’s sons in the Blue Division, a military unit sent to Russia to fighting with the Nazi Army against the Soviets.

Finally, it is important to address the arbitrary expropriations of property of the defeated people—

goods, houses, lands and business—the imposition of economic penalties even when the accused person was dead. The desperate situation experienced by the defeated was constituted by the horrible death of relatives who were usually heads of the household, and whose bodies were nowhere to be found; physical violence in the hands of the victorious side; social stigmatization and humiliation; and economic exploitation and outright theft sanctioned by the law. Their memories of Franco's regime are conditioned by the imposition of silence and shame.⁸ The paradox is that, once again, the victims sacrificed the most during the Spanish Transition and after the coup-scare of 1981, delaying their claims in order to "help" the new democracy.

V

Almost 70 years have passed since the Spanish Civil War started, more than 25 after democracy was instituted, and some people are trying to build a bridge between the present and their own past, using their own bricks of memory. But collective and individual memories, like collective and individual pasts, are entangled and constitutive of each other. To build anew with these social materials is difficult and disrupting. Too many walls of memory have been erected to define historical and political identities as things apart—and these walls provide ideological comfort for people who prefer to remain deaf. But it is time to hear the voices that have long been silenced, to look beyond the walled-up homes of those excluded and to encourage the transformation of their relationship with what is, after all, their society, Spanish society.

In order to understand the past it is important to assume that reality and history are complex, fragmentary and multivalent. The simplification of the Spanish Civil War as the struggle between "two Spains" makes comprehension of the varied effects of the violence difficult.⁹ Many important analyses have focused mostly on the war's political, military, and ideological aspects, going as far as analyzing the social and cultural climate that preceded the war—few attempt a social history of the everyday lives of people during the war in the occupied zones uncovering the negotiations, resistance, complicity, consent of townspeople in the face of a polarizing,

radicalizing process. Fewer look at the reproduction and inscription of defeat that survives the war, marking a sector of the population for the duration of the regime. Schematic views of the conflict ignore, and ultimately silence the complex realities of the personal, social, cultural and economic trauma experienced by the many victims. How many Spains are in the stories of the victims?

Simplifications sustain the old walls. The right wing is anchored in its complacent image of a fight for God and the social order, against atheist communism and social chaos. They have refused to acknowledge the inhumane (and rather unchristian) massacres and tortures—recognizing these acts would open the door to reinterpretations of the war, narratives that might undermine their beliefs, which are sustained by their version of the history of the nation. Furthermore, these massacres were perpetrated by their ancestors, their parents and grandparents, whom they respect and love. Such is the fatal legacy of a civil war.

The democratic left has tried to build its wall with "aseptic bricks," neutralized and ideologically unstained. The Spanish left is obsessed with showing that they represent modernity and progress, trying to counteract the stereotypes constructed around on them during Francoism. The Socialists' terms in office (1982-1994) focused on the transformation of the country into a modern European society, putting aside ideological conflicts about the past. Their vision of the past as the tragic, romantic, and enlightened fight for democracy that ended with the imposition of the dictatorship does not give space to the grittier elements of the struggle, the 'casualties' that did *not* die in an honourable fight, but survived in the ignominy of collaboration, or shame, or silence, or fear, uncomfortably alive. The perception of a newborn and fragile democracy helped them avoid or ignore the claims of the non-heroic defeated of the rearguard areas. They froze an image of a republican lost Arcadia and the civil war as a heroic combat against military brutality.

The intervention in the public sphere of NGOs like ARMH is producing the effect of a positive shock in Spanish society, a loud knock at the door of the collective conscience. Some people have interpreted it as a backward step because it has opened Pandora's box, rekindling old hatreds and divisions, rattling bones that had been at peace—they continue to ignore the experience of surviving victims, for whom hatreds and divisions were not 'forgotten,' precisely because there was no closure, bones were not put to rest and they embodied a violence that could not be erased. The recent exhumations have become an inflexion point, a turning in history, similar to the shocking arrest of Pinochet in London for Chilean society. The undeniable evidence of the bones of the victims forces the whole society—beyond the relatives who always remembered and

⁸ "How is the unexpressable to be expressed? Trauma is inherently about memory and forgetting. Awful experiences, especially of loss, are impossible to forget because they are beyond normal human comprehension or existing schemata and cannot be assimilated into personal and collective narratives." RICHARDS, M. 2002. "From War culture to civil society". *History and Memory*. Bloomington. Volume 14, 1/2, Pages 93-120.

⁹ The notion of the "two Spains" was made popular by Antonio Machado's famous stanza, "Españolito que vienes/ al mundo, te guarde Dios/ una de las dos Españas/ ha de helarte el corazón." (Little Spaniard born into/ the world, may God keep you/ one of the two Spains/ is ready to freeze your heart.)

perhaps the scholars who ‘always knew’—to reflect about the past. Walls that neatly separate compartmentalized and concealed memories must be torn down, and their bricks used to build bridges from the present to the past which can help us comprehend the suffering and the cruelty of the war starting from the memories and experiences of the people who lived it, instead of from the myths.

Certainly, the ongoing conflict of memories in Spain will uncover naked, ugly truths—it will not produce a rosy reconciliation; it will unseat and destabilize some people’s entrenched ideas about the past without providing ‘stable’ seats to be at ease—but war is a thorny affair that need not make anybody feel comfortable. The struggle of

memories, moreover, will produce knowledge: knowledge necessary to generate respect and the possibility of building a polyphonic historical narrative, a History that speaks with all of the voices. The demands for remembrance and redress of the victims give us the opportunity to construct a new social consensus around the civil war. The inclusion of those who have been excluded for so long, and the gaze at the past as a multilayered reality with thousands of fragmented and often contradictory stories should enrich us with tolerance and responsibility. Disinterring the Spanish Civil War should be an exorcism of the ghosts of the past, a desired scar to close a painful wound.

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About the Author

Dr. Ignacio Fernández de Mata, Associated Professor in Social Anthropology. Ph. D. in Humanities. His present research project is related with the slaughters happened at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War in the francoist zone. This is a research about traumatic events and social memory, using anthropological and historical methods. Before this topic he has published several works about the origins of the medieval Castile, the identity of the Castilian people, the daily life of peasants during the twenty century, the rise of the ethnology in Castile and the memory of the excluded people from history after 1939.