

CHAPTER 9. MONUMENTS TO THE FALLEN AND ‘MEMORY WARS’ (2000-2022)

‘There is a crack, a crack in everything. That’s how the light gets in’.
Leonard Cohen, ‘Anthem’ (1992)

In 2000, the first exhumation of victims of Francoist violence by archaeological and forensic experts took place in the village of Priaranza del Bierzo (León). The moment was of course shocking for the families of the victims, as well as for those who conducted the excavation. It is nonetheless often seen as a key moment in the revival of what has come to be known as ‘democratic memory’, and in hindsight can be seen as the origin of the movement for the recovery of historical memory in Spain. From this point onwards, associations began to form throughout Spain, which would eventually come together to form the *Asociación para la Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica* (ARMH - Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory), and from which other associations would follow, most notably the *Foro por la Memoria* (Forum for Memory). The excavation in Priaranza del Bierzo also prompted a new wave of locating and opening mass graves from the civil-war period, a process which sought with the greatest care to recover the remains of victims, to identify them and to give them a decent burial. A parallel feature of this process was an attempt to dignify the memory of the victims through acts of remembrance, plaques and memorials.¹

In 2000, of course, Spain was a democratic country and one which was fully integrated into Europe. To say the least, therefore, the images of family members and expert

¹ Emilio Silva, *Las fosas de Franco: crónica de un desagravio* (Madrid: Temas de hoy, 2005); Encarnación Barranquero Texeira & Lucía Prieto Borrego, *La derrota bajo tierra. Las fosas communes del franquismo* (Granada: Comares, 2018), pp. 3 and notes.

volunteers recovering bodies from mass graves stood in stark contrast to the image of progress that the country wishes to present to the world. The mass graves which still covered the whole of Spain, and the bodies within them still awaiting acknowledgement and redress, represented one of the ‘Ghosts of Spain’ that the British journalist Giles Tremlett perceived still haunted half the nation, while the other half cheered on Spain’s progress and modernity.² After all, the conservative Partido Popular (PP) under José María Aznar had obtained an overall majority in the Spanish national elections of March 2000. It was a party that refused calls to disinter the dead from the Republican side of the Spanish Civil War, but which was nonetheless simultaneously willing to pay for the exhumation of the bodies of many Spanish volunteers from the Blue Division, which had fought alongside the Nazis against the Soviet Union in the Second World War.³ In no small part it was this lack of governmental interest in the remains of the victims of Francoist violence that prompted the emergence of a genuinely social movement for the recovery of these bodies, which remained in ditches and mass graves more than twenty-five years after the death of Franco.

Spain’s experience was part of a much broader global interest in memory in this period. It has been suggested that we are living in a period where there is a ‘saturation of memory’, not confined to Spain, nor merely to Europe, but a phenomenon experienced globally. Andreas Huyssen has argued that these discourses of memory have appeared as a result of decolonisation and new social movements that have sought new models to challenge established truths. The Holocaust also remains an essential reference point in this explosion of interest in memory. Its shadow and its significance shaped memory of other genocides, and profoundly influenced historical developments (and memories of

² Giles Tremlett, *Ghosts of Spain: Travels through a Country’s Hidden Past* (London: Faber & Faber, 2006), pp. 3-33.

³ Omar G. Encarnación, ‘Reconciliation after Democratization: Coping with the Past in Spain’, *Political Science Quarterly*, 123 (2008), pp. 449-450.

them) in the later twentieth century, not least of all the process of European reunification, the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the end of the Soviet Union and the Communist Bloc. Memories and understandings of the Holocaust have also shaped reactions to myriad global issues that have concerned human rights.⁴ In short, memory has emerged from the late-twentieth century as a pivotal cultural and political concern in many societies. Memory has become a global phenomenon. It has challenged and arguably overcome those visions of modernity that saw forgetting and turning a page on the past as the route to progress. Concerns over memory are rooted in issues which beleaguer the present, such as the process of globalisation, the crisis of the nation-state, the struggle for democracy and human rights.⁵ Contemporary societies often display a marked public panic at the prospect of forgetting, which they seek to counteract through strategies of ‘memorialisation’ which involved creating public and private reminders of the past. Societies have shown themselves to be obsessed with personal, local, national, and even global memories. This ‘memory boom’ has led to the proliferation of new museums, to the success of films and historical television series, historical novels or comics. Perhaps understandably, it has also involved monuments, not only in the sense of constructing new markers with which society can identify, but also in the destruction, alteration or resignification of existing monuments which are deemed to celebrate an uncomfortable past.⁶

Spain’s experience in the last two decades sits within this broader context. It is a country that is speaking once again about its past, but as always, in a way shaped by its own preoccupations and peculiarities. The diverse movement that has emerged to campaign

⁴ Andreas Huyssen, *En busca del futuro perdido. Cultura y memoria en tiempos de globalización* (México: FCE, 2002), pp. 14-18.

⁵ Gilda Waldman, ‘La cultura de la memoria: problemas y reflexiones’, *Política y Cultura*, 26 (2006), pp. 12-15.

⁶ Andreas Huyssen, *En busca del futuro perdido. Cultura y memoria en tiempos de globalización* (México: FCE, 2002), pp. 22-24.

for the recovery of historical memory in Spain not only seeks the recovery and dignification of the victims of Francoist violence. It also demands that the state plays an active role in this task and makes it a priority. Alongside its aspirations, the movement denounces the long-standing abandonment of the victims and their families. It also questions the inhibition of the first democratic governments after Franco's death to address this issue, which of course implicitly, and often explicitly, entails a critique of Spain's political transition to democracy. There is no doubt these denunciations of the governments of the transition – and the wider questioning of the 'myths' of that period – have often involved both exaggerations and simplifications. We have already noted, for example, how some measures were indeed taken in terms of memory policies. To be sure, they were often limited or discreet, but they were taken within a context in which many wished to leave the past behind and to protect the process of political transition. Nonetheless, there remain justifiable question marks over the reluctance of governments of that period to address the issue of recovering and creating a democratic memory, particularly for those governments from the mid-1980s until the turn of the century. In other words, a memory that would address and respect historical knowledge, whilst creating an atmosphere in which all citizens can find and commemorate their loved ones.

This tendency shifted in Spain in the new millennium. Prompted by demands from civic society, the Spanish government belatedly unveiled an active memory policy for the first time since the return of democracy. Government always relies upon an understanding of the past, but also involves the construction of new memories of the past.⁷ Shortly after emerging victorious in the national elections of March 2004, the socialist leader José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero announced the promulgation of a law which would allow for the

⁷ Juan Sisinio Pérez Garzón, 'Entre la historia y las memorias: poderes y usos sociales en juego', in Juan Sisinio Pérez Garzón & Eduardo Manzano Moreno (eds.), *Memoria histórica* (Madrid: La Catarata, 2010), p. 40.

recovery of Republican memory. The passage of the legislation would not be simple, however. An inter-ministerial commission was quickly created to overcome the difficulties in shaping the law. The delays to the work of this commission and the passage of the law reflected similar divisions within Spanish society. Media outlets also reflected the divisions, often adopting positions which combined history and memory, or to put it another way, individual, social and collective memories. The debate also unfurled within Spanish society more broadly. To take one very prominent example, a ‘war of obituaries’ erupted in the Spanish press in this period. In 2006, the left-leaning daily newspaper *El País* published an obituary in memory of a Republican air force captain who had been killed on 17 July 1936. In response, a series of ‘counter-obituaries’ were published in conservative-leaning newspapers by families of the victims of Republican violence. Through the obituary notices, families of those who had fallen victim to Francoist as well as Republican violence were defending the memory of their loved ones, trying to find closure and seeking to achieve social reintegration for those whom they felt had been excluded. Of course, the obituaries were not speaking to history, to what had happened. Rather, they are evidence of a dialogue with the past, an outward representation of a way of understanding and explaining the civil war and the Franco regime.⁸

Even though this process led to undeniable tension within Spanish society and politics, this debate was healthy. One of the mainstays of any democratic society ought to be an ability and willingness to speak about a traumatic past, to discuss interpretations of it and to remember it. This is not a case of opening ‘old wounds’, as some have maintained. For many Spaniards, the wounds from the past had never healed, originally thanks to the

⁸ Ignacio Fernández de Mata, *Lloros vueltos puños: el conflicto de los desaparecidos y vencidos en la Guerra Civil Española* (Granada: Comares, 2016), pp. 119-120, 128-151; Helena López, ‘The Spanish Civil War and the Politics of Affectivity in the New Millennium: La guerra de escuelas as an Act of Memory’, in Anindya Raychaudhuri, *The Spanish Civil War: Exhuming a Buried Past* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013), pp. 96-98.

vengeful and non-conciliatory policies of the Franco regime, and more recently owing to the reluctance of democratic governments since 1975 to facilitate an inclusive and democratic memory. One academic study seeking to gauge sentiment on the subject at the time revealed that very few Spaniards were indifferent to memory of the events of the civil war, the Franco regime, and more broadly political violence in that period. It is also clear that the majority in Spanish society were not afraid to tackle the need to heal this wounding memory of the past. In a poll conducted in 2008, a majority showed their approval for policies associated with ‘transitional justice’. That is to say, more than 50% of those polled confirmed that they considered the Law of Historical Memory to be a ‘very good’ or ‘good’ measure. By contrast, just 27.6% of respondents considered that the law was ‘not an appropriate measure, because it revives past resentments’.⁹

Memory policies are always more closely linked with memory than with history itself. The aim is usually to develop a series of policies, discourses and interpretations of the past, which will then influence the present. In Spain, this applies equally to those measures developed by the state as it does to those developed by the ‘movement for the recovery of historical memory’. Indeed, government and civic society have been mutually interdependent here. The Spanish government has responded to the demands and pressure of social movements, but both have responded to existing collective identities and existing political realities. Many years ago, as this wave of memory was emerging in Spain, the historian Julio Aróstegui warned of the inherent dangers when memory is simply converted into ‘historical memory’. The latter is made up of memories, of course, but also images. The myth and power of the past is based largely upon the ability to produce those images from memories. In other words, he was warning that the memory

⁹ Paloma Aguilar, Laia Balcells & Héctor Cebolla, ‘Las actitudes de los españoles ante las medidas de justicia transicional relativas a la guerra civil y al franquismo’, *Revista Internacional de Sociología*, 69:1 (2011), p. 64.

fashioned and disseminated in Spain in these years was, like any other, a memory built from the perspective of the present. It was, like any other memory, mythical. Perhaps it could offer justice to the victims of Francoism, but it would also run the risk of mythologising them, homogenising them, and thus in some ways silencing them. Ironically, they might be seen as nothing more than a collective, much like those who had fallen victim to Republican violence.¹⁰

The process of recovering historical memory in Spain produced an absolute transformation in relation to those who had been victims of violence during the civil war and the Franco regime. This shift could be seen in political policies, in the activities of memory associations, and even publications emerging from the left. For the first time, the victims of Francoist violence were brought firmly into the public consciousness in Spain, but simultaneously it could be argued that this process left those who had fallen victim to Republican violence rendered invisible. To borrow the phrase of Enzo Traverso, this represented an ‘asymmetry of memory’, or in other words ‘the sacralisation of the victims previously ignored, and the forgetting of those heroes previously idealised’.¹¹ For now, those ‘fallen for God and for Spain’, whose memory was idealised and sacralised by the Franco regime, have lost their hegemony over memory. In their place stand the victims who were ignored for so long, those Republicans killed by supporters of the coup and by the Franco regime. They now occupy centre stage in historical memory, and they are now the ones eulogised.

This is the background to the final chapter of this work, which will address the so-called ‘memory wars’ in Spain and how the role of the monuments to the fallen within those

¹⁰ Julio Aróstegui, ‘Traumas colectivos y memorias generacionales: el caso de la guerra civil’, in Julio Aróstegui & François Godicheau (eds.), *Guerra Civil. Mito y memoria* (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2006), pp.62-63.

¹¹ Enzo Traverso, *El pasado, instrucciones de uso* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo, 2011), p. 18.

struggles. The fate of the monuments in the last two decades highlights the multi-layered meanings that the memory of the civil war might contain, made more powerful in some ways by the preoccupations of the present. Starting with the emergence of the movement for historical memory, the chapter will interrogate the battles over memory (or more accurately, memories) which continue to rage in Spanish society and Spanish institutions. The chapter will assess what happened to the monuments in this period and in particular the (sometimes particularly heated) conflicts which arose over the fate of the monuments. The chapter ends by reflecting on more recent controversies which have arisen around monuments to the fallen in those areas where alternative nationalisms have emerged, namely Catalonia and the Basque Country. As always, conflicts over ‘the past’ are linked in these regions in no small part to the political projects of the present.

Monuments and memory wars

In the space between the debate over the Law of Historical memory and its approval in December 2007, there was a renewed impetus in many towns for the removal of Francoist symbols and monuments to the fallen. The town hall of Alfaro (Logroño), for example, was at the time run by the socialists. In November 2006, it moved the town’s monument from the La Nevera promenade to the municipal cemetery.¹² Sometimes, pressure upon the authorities came from residents. The town council of Lleida, for example, had already made plans in 2005 to demolish the monument to the fallen, but following a spate of graffiti on the monument, as well as demonstrations organised demanding its demolition,

¹² *La Rioja*, 6 November 2007, ‘Traslado forzoso’, <https://www.larioja.com/20071106/rioja-region/trasladoforzoso-20071106.html>, last accessed 28 October 2020.

the monument was taken down in 2008.¹³ The approval of the Law of Historical Memory in December 2007 naturally generated further momentum to the removal of monuments. In 2008, for example, the municipal council of Santa María del Camino (Mallorca) ordered the removal of the cross of the fallen in the town.¹⁴ The monument at Peña Lemona (Vizcaya) remained standing until 2014, next to a chapel which commemorated a Carlist victory on their advance towards Bilbao. The cross contained a legend, which had already been destroyed after the death of Franco, which read ‘To those who gave their life for God and for Spain on this rock in defence of civilisation. 5 June 1937’. In 2014, the town’s council, led by the nationalist, left-wing coalition Bildu, and with the support of the PNV, agreed to demolish what was left of the cross. They defended the decision on the basis that the monument was ‘something designed to exalt the memory of martyrs and fallen, and not really a religious symbol in any sense’.¹⁵

The new law sought to avoid the exaltation of the ‘military rebellion, the civil war and the repression of the Dictatorship’.¹⁶ It aspired for ‘public symbols to be objects of coming together, and not confrontation, offense or insult’. The wording of the legislation was hardly precise, however, and said little about what should be done with monuments to the fallen, or Francoist symbolism more generally. Article 16 of the law, which concerned *El Valle de los Caídos*, was a useful barometer of how far the government was

¹³ Segre, 19 January 2005, ‘La Paeria planteja demolir el monòlit franquista de la plaça Cervantes’, p. 6; *El País*, 13 November 2008, ‘Lleida derriba el último símbolo franquista de la ciudad’, p. 10

¹⁴ *La Memoria Viva*, 13 April 2009, ‘L’ Ajuntament de Santa Maria retira la franquista Cruz de los Caídos’, <https://lamemoriaviva.wordpress.com/2009/04/13/1%e2%80%99ajuntament-de-santa-maria-retira-la-franquista-%e2%80%99cruz-de-los-caidos%e2%80%9d/>

¹⁵ *El Correo*, 16 January 2014, ‘El Ayuntamiento de Lemoa derribará este año la “Cruz de los Caídos”’, <https://www.elcorreo.com/vizcaya/v/20140116/vizcaya/ayuntamiento-lemoa-derribara-este-20140116.html>

¹⁶ While commonly referred to as the ‘Law of Historical Memory’, its full title is ‘Ley 52/2007, de 26 de diciembre, por la que se reconocen y amplían derechos y se establecen medidas en favor de quienes padecieron persecución o violencia durante la guerra civil y la dictadura’, BOE 27 December 2007. The quotation derives from the preamble of the legislation.

prepared to go. The Valley would be allowed to continue as a place of worship, in effect therefore retaining the purpose that had been bequeathed to the site by the dictatorship. The law decreed that in no part of the monument could be held ‘acts of a political nature, nor exalting the civil war, nor its protagonists, nor the exaltation of Francoism’, seeming to ignore that this ‘national’ monument was itself an exaltation of the dictator and his regime.¹⁷ There was a similar degree of ambiguity and timidity in relation to the other monuments and symbols still standing in Spain. Article 15, for example, declared that ‘Public Administrations’ would take ‘the appropriate measures for the removal of crests, insignias, plaques and other objects or commemorative statements of exaltation, whether personal or collective, of the military rebellion, the civil war, and the repression of the Dictatorship’. Exception was made, however, for those symbols which were deemed to embody ‘strictly private memory’, or where artistic or heritage considerations favoured the preservation of a symbol. In practice, town councils would decide which symbols ought to be removed but would be expected to do so without any financial assistance from government.¹⁸ The ambiguity of the legislation and the relative timidity of the government in constructing a new public memory sowed the seeds of further conflict over memory in Spain.

Often, even after the passage of the law, town councils found themselves powerless to remove monuments to the fallen. Appealing to the Law of Historical Memory, for example, a man named Francisco Villena requested in 2016 that the cross to the fallen at Hornachos (Badajoz) be removed. He considered that his mother should not have to live next to a monument, which explicitly honoured those ‘fallen for God and for Spain’, when her father (Francisco’s grandfather) had been shot by Francoists in 1940 for the ‘crime’

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid. Administrations could also remove subventions and the creation of a ‘catalogue of remains of the civil war and Dictatorship’ was announced but never completed.

of having been President of the local workers' association. The socialist town council of Hornachos had already removed all of the town's Francoist street names and all signs honouring the military rebels, as well as building a monument to honour the victims of Francoism. It was unable to remove the cross to the fallen, however, since it lay within Church property. Appeals to the Bishop of Badajoz to help resolve this issue proved unsuccessful. Indeed, the diocese refused to offer any statement on the matter to the press.¹⁹

Contestation of the monuments 'from below' continued to be evident, notwithstanding the new governmental law. By now, those seeking to expunge the remaining symbols of the Franco regime's official memory were prepared to accept full responsibility for their protests, whether in the form of graffiti or other action against the monuments. Increasingly, such acts were also reported in the media, which generated extra publicity for these protests and used them to foster discussion and public debate over sites of memory. A good example of this tendency came in Lérida in 2006, for example. There the 'Assembly of Youngsters of Lleida' (Asamblea de Joves de Lleida: AJILL) organised a protest before the monument to mark the anniversary of the death of Franco.²⁰ Attacks upon Francoism's most notorious symbol also continued in this period of fierce contestation of memory. In the early morning of 7 April 1999, the terrorist group GRAPO placed an explosive device in the basilica of *El Valle de los Caídos*, setting fire to a dozen wooden benches and various confessionals. In May 2005, an unidentified visitor to the monument placed a home-made explosive device inside. A telephone call was made to the daily newspaper *Gara*, in which someone claiming to be a member of ETA claimed responsibility for the attack, but the Police did not credit this information and were unable

¹⁹ Olivia Caballar, 'Honrarás al franquismo sobre todas las leyes', *La Marea*, 25 January 2016, <https://www.lamarea.com/2016/01/25/honraras-franquismo/>, last accessed 28 October 2020.

²⁰ *Segre*, 19 November 2006, 'Pintades contra el monòlit de Cervantes', p. 8.

to find the perpetrator after lengthy investigation. An interesting feature of these incidents is not only the persistence of attacks against this ‘national monument’ to the Spanish fallen, but also that these attempts prompted a public reaction from organisations and personalities who remained nostalgic for the dictatorship. After the attempt in 1999, for example, acts of atonement were organised, obituaries appeared in the newspaper *ABC*, and Mass was held in the Basilica of the Conception in the well-to-do Salamanca district of Madrid. Franco’s daughter, Carmen Franco, took part in the service, as did Blas Piñar and other admirers of Francoism. Upon departing the Mass those assembled sang the *Cara al Sol*. Meanwhile, the *Fundación Nacional Francisco Franco* (National Francisco Franco Foundation) condemned the attack against the Valley of the Fallen, labelling it ‘an attack against a symbol of reconciliation’.²¹

Graffiti and paint attacks against monuments also continued in this period as a means of contesting or eradicating the memory that the dictatorship had tried to set in stone. Even so, such attacks would also, in effect, represent attacks on the memories of those families who had lost somebody in the civil war on the rebel side. For these families, the erasure of names on a monument and the destruction of Francoism’s official memory effectively entailed a *damnatio memoriae* of their loved ones, without any attempt to construct an alternative narrative through which their memory could live on. In Corrales de Buelna (Cantabria), for example, the monument to the fallen and its surroundings were covered in graffiti. Many of the depictions were Republican flags, clearly seeking to reclaim the memory of the half of the dead from the civil war who had been omitted for so many decades. In 2019, the area was subject to even more graffiti, and this time even more

²¹ Fernando Olmeda, *El Valle de los Caídos. Una memoria de España* (Madrid: Península, 2019), pp. 382-386, 404-406.

explicit. The word ‘Immoral’ was painted in black above the cross.²² In the city of Lérida, meanwhile, the monolith built in honour of the fallen in the 1970s was known locally as ‘the suppository’, a nod not only to its appearance but perhaps also to the way the Franco regime imposed it on the population. The monument was the target for explicit graffiti on numerous occasions. Written in Catalan, some remarks mentioned the violent Francoist past (‘this monument is stained with blood’), while others pointed to the fascist nature of the dictatorship (‘died for fascism’), and others called for its immediate demolition (‘this should be torn down’).²³

Graffiti could of course be used to reaffirm the official memory of Francoism, and not only to contest it. Some monuments to the fallen thus became symbolic fields of battle, attracting mutually opposing graffiti, inscriptions and symbols. The monument of Posición San Simón (Huesca) is particularly interesting. It was situated on the Puig Ladrón hill in the sierra of Alcubirre in Aragón, where an important confrontation had taken place in April 1937. A Republican battalion had captured the hill in a surprise attack, which had resulted in the death of eighty Falangists who had been defending the position.²⁴ The monument only recorded the names of the fallen from the rebel side and was built to perpetuate the heroism of the Falangists who had died. It had been common during the Franco dictatorship for Falangists to gather at the monument to commemorate their victory in the civil war and to remember their absent comrades. The monument survived the transition to democracy and remains a site for far-right gatherings to this date. Simultaneously, however, it represents an extraordinary source for examining

²² *Valle de Buelna FM*, 17 July 2019, ‘Los grafitis emborronan la Cruz de los Caídos de Los Corrales’, <http://www.valledebuelnafm.com/index.php/noticias/item/19831-los-grafitis-emborronanla-cruz-de-loscaidos-de-los-corrales>

²³ *El País*, 13 November 2008, ‘Lleida derriba el último símbolo franquista de la ciudad’, p. 10. For the graffiti, see *Segre*, 30 January 2006, ‘Pintades’, p. 6; and *Segre*, 19 November 2006, ‘Pintades contra el monòlit Cervantes’, p. 8.

²⁴ José María Maldonado, *El Frente de Aragón: la Guerra Civil en Aragón, 1936-1938* (Mira: Zaragoza, 2007), p. 150.

battles over memory in Spain. The inscriptions are quite explicit and reflect the mutually exclusionary positions of those who made them (figure 56). Some graffiti is clearly designed to contest the original Francoist meaning of the monument, not least the person who inscribed ‘I SHIT ON THOSE WHO DIED FOR GOD AND FOR SPAIN’. Other slogans, such as ‘SPAIN ARISE!’ are clearly intended to praise Franco’s victory in the civil war and the subsequent dictatorship. There is also graffiti incorporating the symbols of the Falange, and various ‘Victor’ signs imitating the dictatorship’s iconography. The painted slogans are placed one on top of the others. There are also numerous layers of white paint which mark attempts to erase the graffiti, but a combination of time and the elements serves to remove the paint slowly, so that eventually the slogans begin to emerge once again. This monument is an excellent metaphor for how memories can overlap and perhaps enter into conflict, but in any case cannot be stifled.²⁵



²⁵ My thanks to Javier Rodrigo for the information relating to this monument, as well as the image.

Figure 56. Monument to the fallen at the Posición San Simón (Sierra del Alcubierre, Huesca). Source: Fernando Rodrigo.

In the last two decades, there has often been graffiti on the monuments which says very little about history but nonetheless speaks volumes about memory. In 2020, for example, in the context of the far-right Vox party winning seats in town councils, as well as the national and European parliaments, graffiti referring to this party began to appear on monuments to the fallen. On the monument next to the church in Sasamón (Burgos), for example, slogans and symbols were painted in red, white and black. They included communist insignia, crossed-out swastikas, as well as phrases such as ‘1 Warning Vox’, ‘Nazis Out’, and ‘Glory to the Red Army’. These interventions were not aiming to contest history, but were rather a form of understanding the present through the memory of the civil war. The past was being mobilised to confront the politics of the present.²⁶

It is clear from the examples cited here that the problem is not to be found in the history of the war and the Franco regime, but in memories of them. Memory is anchored in, and conditioned by, the present. It is part of a political agenda with an eye to the society of the future. As we will see, the ‘memory wars’ over crosses to the fallen tend to pivot around two key points. First, there is a struggle between those who wish to recover the memory of fallen Republicans, and those who would rather leave things (and therefore the monument) as they are, so as not to open ‘old wounds’. Second, the contestation of the monuments is often best understood as part of wider struggles over competing nationalisms, which, particularly in the twenty-first century, have become a space of

²⁶ *Noticias Castilla y León*, ‘Vandalizan el monumento a los caídos de la iglesia de Santa María la Real de Sasamón (Burgos) con pintadas contra Vox, ensalzando el comunismo y contra el nazismo’, 12 October 2020, <https://www.noticiascyl.com/t/2118640/burgos-sucesos-burgos-vandalizanmonumento-caidos-iglesia-santa-mariareal-sasamon-burgos-pintadas-contra-voxensalzando-comunismo-contra-nazismo>; *ABC Castilla León*, 12 October 2020, https://www.abc.es/espana/castillaleon/abci-monumento-caidos-sasamonburgos-amanece-pintadas-contra-ynazismo-202010121813_noticia.html

intense political conflict in Spain, and indeed elsewhere in Europe.²⁷ Debates and divisions over the monuments are often, at root, struggles over how to interpret the dead, the civil war, and indeed the nation itself. As struggles over the past, they are both obsessive and essential. But within these battles it is not really history that is at stake, but rather the memory used to construct identities in the present, and competing aspirations for the future. In terms of the memory politics that emerges, what is at stake is whether such battles result in an exclusionary or inclusive memory.

Conflicts over the memory of the fallen and the Spanish Civil War

Some time ago, the historian Tony Judt warned of the risks of excessive commemoration of a traumatic past, whether the focus be on perpetrators or their victims. As the experience of Europe has shown since 1945, the attention devoted to the victims of Nazism and Communism has perhaps meant that other, less-well-known histories and memories have received too little attention. The situation was arguably very similar in Spain. The recent ‘memory wars’ raging over those who lost their lives in the Spanish Civil War and the Franco regime have produced a flood of generalised historical surveys, sometimes presenting the past in black and white tones, which have sought to present a hegemonic or ‘definitive’ account of what happened.²⁸ In truth, what has happened since the turn of the century is a continuation of longstanding conflicts over the memory of the fallen and the Spanish Civil War, albeit having become much more intense. The Law of Historical Memory gave town councils power to remove Francoist symbols, as noted above. In addition, eleven of Spain’s autonomous communities also approved legislation

²⁷ Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), pp. 3-4, 40-41.

²⁸ Tony Judt, *Postguerra: Una Historia de Europa desde 1945* (Madrid: Taurus, 2012), pp. 1180-1181.

relating to the recovery of democratic memory, all of which either endorsed or strengthened the provisions of the 2007 law.²⁹ Nevertheless, the stories of the monuments to the fallen in the years since highlight a struggle to promote a memory that was far from being inclusive or consensual.

Much more so than in the years of Spain's transition to democracy, the recent 'memory wars' have heightened social tensions over what should be done with Francoist symbols. In the late-1970s and early-1980s Spain's leftist parties were much more cautious (or timid) in their approach than their successors in the twenty-first century. In the context of a fragile transition, they sought to avoid moves that might provoke a reaction from those who had supported the Franco regime. But the parties of the Spanish right have also become much more belligerent on this issue in recent years. This has involved not only an argument that the past should be left to one side so as not to reopen 'old wounds', but a consistent and public defence of symbols which they consider to have little relation to the Franco regime. These stances are shown very clearly on those occasions when a suggestion is made to renovate or remove a monument, often owing to a state of disrepair or because they have become the focus of graffiti, which, as we have seen, is often itself highly symbolic or explicit. The story is almost always the same. When a town council is in the hands of the leftist parties, measures are usually taken to dismantle or remove the monument. In those councils led by conservative parties, by contrast, it is much more likely that the authorities would hurry to clean the monument or make repairs, with a predictable complaint from local leftist groups about the use of public funds for such work. The story of the monument at Corrales de Buelna (Cantabria) illustrates the process almost perfectly. It was a regular target for graffiti and paint, and on at least one occasion

²⁹ So far, such laws have been passed in Andalucía, Aragón, Asturias, the Balearic Islands, the Canary Islands, Castilla y León, Catalonia, Extremadura, Navarra, Valencia and the Basque Country. See <https://www.mpr.gob.es/memoriademocratica/normativa-y-otros-recusos/Paginas/index.aspx>

a Republican flag appeared above the cross. When the local PP mayor ordered that the monument be cleaned up ‘to avoid wounding sensibilities’, local leftist groups inevitably protested the decision.³⁰

There were also disputes in towns where the local authorities did not consider the monuments to the fallen to sit within the ambit of the Law of Historical Memory. In Cáceres, for example, the socialist government had already removed all the Francoist symbols and inscriptions from the city’s monument. They had been changed in favour of phrases that included all the dead from the civil war, but the cross had been kept in the square where it had always been sited. If this cautious solution had been fit for the years of the transition, it was regarded by many to be too timid in the context of the early 21st-century, not least because the monument remained a meeting point on every 20 November for those wishing to commemorate Franco and his regime. On such occasions, wreaths were still laid at the cross and the memory of the war was exalted. Given all of this, and in the heat of the debates over the law of 2007, the Cáceres Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory requested the removal of the monument. The town council refused this demand on several occasions, arguing that the cross was not a Francoist symbol.³¹ Indeed, this controversy has continued until this day and become widely-known. The *Asociación Memorial en el Cementerio de Cáceres* (AMECECA: Memorial Association in the Cáceres Cemetery), which was created to restore the memory and dignity of Republican victims, has made numerous attempts to bring about the removal of the cross. In 2015, it was unsuccessful in its request that the town council remove the monument, on the basis that it exalted the Franco dictatorship. In January 2021, the association shifted

³⁰ *Valle de Buelna FM*, 9 July 2014, <http://www.valledebuelnafm.com/index.php/noticias/item/9247-laoposici%C3%B3n-de-los-corrales-critica-el-uso-de-recursos-p%C3%BAblicos-en-lugares-privados>

³¹ Sergio Lorenzo, ‘Las inscripciones franquistas de la Cruz de los Caídos se retiraron hace 36 años’, *Hoy*, 15 March 2020, <https://www.hoy.es/caceres/inscripciones-franquistas-cruz-20200315004145-ntvo.html>, last accessed 13 November 2020.

its attention to petitioning the regional government of Extremadura, in compliance with the Law of Historical Memory that the regional parliament had passed in 2019.³²

Meanwhile, those who favour keeping the monument in its current site have also been very active. Some of them, for example, have created a Facebook group ('Salvemos la Cruz de los Caídos': 'Save the Cross of the Fallen'), which boasts more than 8000 members. In the view of the group's creators, the changing of the plaque on the monument in 1984 was significant, because it explicitly recognised 'the dead of both sides'. Skirting over the political meaning that the Franco regime had bestowed upon the cross, they believe that it should be left as one of the 'symbols of our life', which commemorates 'the horror of the war and of the sons of the city who died to defend their fatherland, whether on one side or the other'. This reading of history, and of the monument, has made it into the sessions of the town council. In early 2021, for example, some of the councillors echoed the sentiments of 'Salvemos la Cruz de los Caídos'. They brought a motion to a council meeting which requested the town hall use public funds to maintain the cross 'in its present and original site'. By doing this, they assured their fellow councillors, they could avoid 'confrontation and radicalisation, reviving hatreds and resentments, which are fortunately already buried and forgotten'. Ultimately, this motion was rejected, but only after a very tight vote in which the mayor had to use their casting vote.³³ Notwithstanding the approval of a new Law of Democratic Memory in Spain on 14 July 2022 – which mandates the removal of Francoist symbols from public spaces – the

³² For the documents, see AMECECA, 'Campana para la retirada de la Cruz de los Caídos', <http://amececa.es/index.php/component/tags/tag/campana-para-retirada-cruz-de-los-caidos>, last accessed 20 August 2020.

³³ Facebook, 'Salvemos la Cruz de los Caídos', <https://www.facebook.com/groups/739655176757623>; Ayuntamiento de Cáceres, Actas del Pleno de 21 January 2021, p. 65, <https://www.ayto-caceres.es/plenosmunicipales/convocatoria-pleno-mensual-ordinario-21-de-enero-de-2021/>, last accessed 20 August 2021.

authorities in Cáceres have still done nothing in respect to the monument, and nor do they appear minded to do so.

The experience of Cáceres demonstrates the difficulty in detaching the surviving monuments from the meanings which the Franco regime bestowed upon them. The symbol of the cross, which was used on Francoist monuments precisely because it was charged with political meaning in the context of the civil war, is now seen by many to have only a religious connotation. Indeed, for some, and in particular after alterations made to monuments during the early years of the new democracy, the cross has a ‘reconciliatory’ potential. The monument at Cáceres highlights how the cross remains for many a symbol of a memory offensive to the fallen Republicans. Meanwhile, some resist moves to alter or move the monument in order to keep alive the memory of the fallen on the rebel side, and still others are content to keep the monument as it is simply because they see it as a catholic symbol, like so many others, occupying public space. There is little space for an alternative, civic and inclusive memory of the civil war and the Franco regime while such conflicts continue to rage along these lines.³⁴

Monuments to the fallen thus continue to display the multiplicity of memories of the Spanish Civil War, but also the apparent inability of Spanish democracy to create an inclusive memory of the recent past. Even as this book was nearing completion, memory associations were asking town councils time and again to remove monuments to the fallen. In spite of both regional and national legislation to support any efforts to remove these symbols, many requests to do so are simply ignored. In the city of Córdoba, for example, the monument to the fallen remains in a park in the centre of the city. Neither

³⁴ Jorge Marco, ‘Por una memoria cívica’, 22 November 2020.
<https://ctxt.es/es/20201101/Firmas/34167/Jorge-Marco-memoria-guerra-civil-dictadura-franquismo-Transicion.htm>

leftist town councils (Izquierda Unida and PSOE) or PP councils (the latter in coalition with Ciudadanos) have taken any measures in relation to the monument. Built in 1975, the cross on the monument includes an inscription with the date of the civil war in Roman numerals (MCMXXXVI-MCMMXXIX), along with the Falangist and Carlist crests. Despite requests from numerous memory associations and even complaints from the *Defensor del Pueblo Andaluz* (Defender of Andalucians), the cross remains in place.³⁵ It is all the more strange if we consider that Francoist repression in the province was notoriously fierce.³⁶ The fate of the cross to the fallen in the city of Vigo was also widely reported. In 1981, the socialist council had decided to remove all Francoist symbols from the monument, but to leave the rest of the structure as it was. Following the approval of the 2007 law, various groups, in particular Galician nationalist groups or those on the political left, repeatedly demanded that the monument be removed. The socialist mayor of the city, Abel Caballero, tried to buy time by arguing that it was necessary to reach a consensus on the future of the monument. The courts were also brought into this dispute. Meanwhile, the space was a target for graffiti. Petitions were organised to try to oblige the city to comply with the Law of Historical Memory, which was, of course, run by the PSOE, the party which formed the national government which had passed the law. Regardless of how the mayor and his councillors understood the legacy of the civil war, memory had transformed the site of the monument into a site of battle. For the politicians, this had to be weighed up against the potential electoral consequences of removing Francoist symbols, not least because the city had been governed by the PP until shortly before the passage of the 2007 memory law.³⁷

³⁵ The 'defensor' is a state post in each autonomous community in Spain, charged with guaranteeing the rights of citizens against potential political abuse.

³⁶ *Público*, 24 November 2019, 'El defensor del Pueblo insta al Ayuntamiento del PP en Córdoba a que retire la Gran Cruz de los Caídos', <https://www.publico.es/politica/defensorpueblo-insta-ayuntamiento-pp-cordobaretire-gran-cruz-caidos.html>.

³⁷ For some reports on this process, see: *El Faro de Vigo*, 12 November 2007, 'Caballero plantea que una comisión decida sobre los vestigios franquistas',

Battles between Church and state in Spain over the fate of the monuments to the fallen are now notorious. As is well-known, the ecclesiastical hierarchy had offered vital support to the military rebels during the civil war, and the dictatorship after it. Since the return of democracy to Spain, various institutions of the democratic state have required parishes or bishops to remove Francoist symbols from their churches. However, the Church is not obliged to remove Francoist symbols from its places of worship since they are private property, a protection ironically guaranteed by the Law of Historical Memory. As we have seen throughout, both the interior of churches and their exterior walls became common sites for Francoist symbolism. In the city of Cuenca, a group calling themselves ‘Ciudadanos por la República’ (Citizens for the Republic) asked the bishop on many occasions to remove the cross to the fallen installed on the side of the city’s cathedral. A council motion was also put forward to this end, but the local PP councillors abstained in the vote on the matter, accusing the parties of the left of seeking ‘to open old wounds’. Certainly, the social divisions in the city over the fate of the symbols was becoming clear throughout this debate. The monument had been covered in graffiti and red paint on numerous occasions. As it happened, the citizens group was only requesting that the name of José Antonio and the remaining Francoist symbols be removed, leaving the cross in place on the cathedral wall. Ultimately, the group took the matter to the courts. In 2017, a judgement declared that it did indeed constitute a Francoist symbol and ordered the name of José Antonio and the yoke and arrows of the Falange to be erased.³⁸

<https://www.farodevigo.es/gran-vigo/2007/11/12/caballero-plantea-comision-decida-vestigios-18086488.html>; *El Mundo*, 15 September 2011, ‘La “Cruz de la discordia” cumple 50 años en el caso de Vigo’, <https://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2011/09/15/galicia/1316074796.html>

³⁸ Herminio Lebrero Izquierdo, *Lugares de Memoria Institucionalizada en Cuenca (1877-2017)*. *La Historia que perdura* (Cuenca: Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, 2018), p. 156; *ElDiario.es*, 15 March 2018, ‘La cruz de la Catedral de Cuenca ya luce sin los símbolos franquistas’, https://www.eldiario.es/castilla-la-mancha/lateral-catedral-cuenca-simbolos-franquistas_1_2223752.html, last accessed 13 November 2020; Helena Villasante Claramonte, ‘Traumas y memorias de la violencia en la guerra civil española y la dictadura franquista’, *La Linde*, 4 (2015), p. 207.

In fact, Spanish courts have often been brought into these conflicts over the retention or removal of crosses to the fallen.³⁹ The town of Mota de Cuervo (Cuenca) offers an illustrative example. The town had been in Republican hands for the duration of the civil war. In the summer of 1936, there had been a great deal of violence directed at those who were considered to be enemies of the Republic, and in total nine residents had been killed during the conflict.⁴⁰ After the war, a monument was erected to the fallen next to the parish church of San Miguel Arcángel. The cross was only 35 centimetres on the wall of the church and contained a list of five fallen. After the approval of the Law of Historical Memory, the town council, which was controlled by a coalition of PSOE and Izquierda Unida, agreed to remove this cross in compliance with the new legislation. This led to a backlash from some of the town's residents. The local PP organised a silent gathering to block the removal of the cross. For these residents, the Francoist symbolism on the monument could be removed, but both the cross and the list of the fallen ought to remain.⁴¹ In the end, the cross was indeed removed by the council. This led to the house of the IU mayor being attacked with red paint, while unidentified perpetrators broke windows and emblems at the party headquarters, even going as far as to rub human excrement on the front of the building.⁴² Representatives of the Church did not take long

³⁹ The case of Aguilar de la Frontera (Córdoba) is particularly significant. See Francisco Navarro López, *El proceso de democratización del espacio público en Aguilar de la Frontera la Cruz de los Caídos, 1938-2021* (Unpublished MA thesis: Universidad Pablo de Olavide, 2021).

⁴⁰ Sergio Nieves Chaves, 'Violencia revolucionaria en la Mancha conquense durante la guerra civil: lógicas, actores, víctimas y fines', *VII Encuentro de Jóvenes Investigadores en Historia Contemporánea* (Granada: Comares, 2021).

⁴¹ *Europa Press*, 7 March 2009, 'Unas 200 personas se concentran en Mota del Cuervo (Cuenca) contra la retirada de la cruz de los caídos', <https://www.europapress.es/castilla-lamancha/noticia-200-personasconcentran-mota-cuervo-cuenca-contra-retirada-cruz-caidos-20090307204201.html>, last accessed 13 November 2020.

⁴² *20 minutos*, 'Atacan la casa del alcalde de Mota del Cuervo tras retirar la cruz franquista', <https://www.20minutos.es/noticia/455027/0/retirada/cruz/franquista/>; *ABC*, 4 May 2010, 'Nuevos ataques a la sede de IU de Mota del Cuervo', <https://www.abc.es/espana/castilla-la->

to respond to the removal. The bishop lodged a complaint to the Civil Guard for not having been able to put forward arguments or explain the Church's disagreement over the meaning of the monument. For the diocese, he argued, the cross should not 'be considered in the slightest as an exaltation, either personal or collective, of the military rebellion, the Civil War, and the repression of the dictatorship'. He added that the list of names in whose memory the cross had been erected 'is that of an honest group of people, esteemed for the upstanding conduct, friends of the poor, good Catholics, unlike those who killed them, without even the slightest legal procedures, for nothing more than holding their religious beliefs'. At the same time, the bishop affirmed that 'people such as this are worth of being rehabilitated and offered commemoration'. This conflict over the fate of the cross eventually came to the courts. In the end, a judge ordered the restoration of the cross together with the list of the fallen. In his judgement, the cross was 'an exclusively religious symbol', and the fallen were listed there for 'their religious beliefs'. As such, their memory should be preserved and protected. At the same time, the judge ordered that during the restoration, 'all symbols and expressions customary of, and alluding to, the Franco regime' be removed, since they implied 'exaltation of said regime'.⁴³ In the judge's reading of the matter, only the symbols on the monument identified it with Francoism. The history of the monument, the political meanings that had derived from the cross at the time of its construction, the significance of its siting in public space, and of course the people who had died in the town as a result of Francoist repression, were all

[mancha/toledo/abci-nuevosataques-sede-mota-cuervo-201005040300-140123799934_noticia.html](https://www.abc.es/espana/abci-nuevosataques-sede-mota-cuervo-201005040300-140123799934_noticia.html), last accessed 13 November 2020.

⁴³ *Público*, 5 March 2009, 'Los obispos denuncian la retirada de una cruz con el nombre de cinco caídos', <https://www.publico.es/actualidad/obispos-denuncian-retirada-cruz-nombre.html>, last accessed 13 November 2020; *ABC*, 6 March 2009, 'Fuera la cruz... por memoria histórica', https://www.abc.es/espana/abci-fuera-cruzmemoria-historica-200903060300-913578315533_noticia.html, last accessed 13 November 2020. See also María Teresa de Lemus Diego, *Libertad religiosa, simbología y derecho comparado* (Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca, 2005), pp. 305-306. The mayor's office launched an appeal against the judicial sentence, but when the PP took over the council, it was retracted.

missing from the consideration of the judge. Some things might change in this new era, but some silences would continue.

The ‘memory wars’ continued to dominate social life in some towns, often without any need for the involvement of the political parties. A visit to any one of the myriad virtual forums on the internet is enough to illustrate this point. In the park of the town of Consuegra (Toledo), for example, the cross to those fallen ‘for God and for Spain’ is still standing. During the civil war, the town had been in Republican control and had witnessed horrible violence, with 149 people being killed.⁴⁴ For this town, the past was a serious matter. In 2007, a resident posted a question on a forum, asking ‘How long will we have to tolerate the cross in the park?’ The question prompted a flood of responses, which revealed the breadth of opinions about what the Second Republic, the Spanish Civil War and the Franco regime really were. Naturally, some residents wanted to speak about violence. Some wished to speak of Francoist violence and how it had affected their families, while others spoke of Republican violence and the death of their relatives. The first group wanted to dismantle the cross, seeing in it a legacy and an exaltation of the dictatorship. The second group wanted to keep the cross, as a way of continuing to honour their ancestors, and arguing that to do otherwise was tantamount to ‘reopening old wounds’. This sentiment was summarised by one resident who declared ‘I believe that the present is more important [than the past]’, seemingly unaware that memory (as

⁴⁴ My thanks to José Luis Ledesma for providing the figure. For the duration of the dictatorship they were recorded as ‘martyrs of Consuegra’, giving them a dignified burial in the municipal cemetery and holding events in their memory. During the transition, a volume was published which narrated these deeds, with the support of the Archbishop of Toledo. The book emphasised the need to tell the story of ‘the heroism of the SPANISH MARTYRS OF OUR TIME’. See Domingo Esteve Sánchez, *Mártires de Consuegra* (Madrid: Arca Alianza Cultural, 1986), pp. 12, 38-45.

opposed to history) of the past is nearly always created, disseminated, and used to influence the present.⁴⁵

Even in the twenty-first century, therefore, decades after the end of the dictatorship, it is strikingly clear that attempts to alter or dismantle monuments to the fallen have often generated social resistance. To take another example, in Órgiva (Granada) in 2017, a town council led by the PSOE and *Ganemos* approved the removal of the cross to the fallen ‘as a symbol of Francoist repression and in order to comply with the Law of Historical Memory’. The cross had once contained a plaque which listed ‘those fallen for God and for Spain’, which had been removed in the 1980s, but this was a step further. The councillors of PP and Ciudadanos voted against the proposal and rallied support in the community, organising a petition aimed at keeping the monument, and organising rallies in front of it. In one such event, those present (who declared the rally had no ‘political significance’) decorated the cross with coloured balloons and garlands to show people where to gather, declaring also that ‘this cross does not have any political connotation and to prove it we have decorated it as if we were holding a festival’. Yet again, a memory of the monument could be constructed to serve particular needs in the present. Such memories could be diverse and even contradictory.⁴⁶

It would be misleading to suggest that this period of conflict over memories of the civil war and the dictatorship only involved associations, institutions and town councils which were seeking to transform, demolish or move monuments to the fallen. On the contrary,

⁴⁵ The forum is worth looking at. See *Foro-Ciudad.com*, 10 September 2007, <https://www.forociudad.com/toledo/consuegra/mensaje-498221.html>

⁴⁶ *El Independiente de Granada*, 29 April 2017, ‘Órgiva aprueba iniciar los trámites de la retirada de la Cruz de los Caídos de la Plaza Alpujarra’, <http://www.elindependientedegranada.es/cultura/orgivaaprueba-iniciar-tramites-retirada-cruz-caidos-plazaalpujarra>; *Ideal*, 6 May 2017, ‘Vecinos de Órgiva se concentran a la Cruz de los Caídos para pedir que no desaparezca’, <https://www.ideal.es/granada/provincia-granada/201705/06/vecinos-orgivaconcentran-junto-20170506172347.html>

many institutions sought to maintain and preserve the monuments in this period. The regional government of León, for example, spent 6000 euros from public funds to restore the Francoist monument in the town of Valdelugeros. The president at that time was Emilio Orejas, mayor of that town, whose father had also been mayor under the Franco regime in 1972.⁴⁷ In Porcuna (Jaén), not only was the monument to the fallen not removed, it was in fact renovated in 2012. This restoration clearly did not please all the locals, since shortly afterwards the monument was attacked with red paint.⁴⁸ But this tendency to protect and pay for monument was relatively common. In the small town of Pozcuna (Ciudad Real), for example, as we saw in the previous chapter, the cross to the fallen had been moved to a less prominent place and turned around so that the Francoist symbols could not be seen by the public. In 2017, the town council, which was now led by the PP, took the decision to turn the cross back around, thus making the emblems of the dictatorship, as well as the names of the fallen, clearly visible once again. No suggestion was made to remedy the exclusion of Republican victims from the town's memory space. The former socialist mayor denounced the decision, claiming that he had 'nothing against the families honoured on the monument. For me they are the victims of horror and barbarism, but I cannot understand how certain decisions can be taken which once again allow other victims to be forgotten, those who lie in ditches, the victims of the repression'.⁴⁹ Spain had been a democracy for decades by this point, and yet still there

⁴⁷ *Leonoticias*, 3 November 2014, 'Los diputados del PP eligen a Emilio Orejas como candidato a presidente', <https://www.leonoticias.com/frontend/leonoticias/Los-Diputados-Del-PP-Eligen-A-Emilio-Orejas-Como-Candidato-A-vn158650-vst492>; *Ileon*, 3 November 2014, 'Emilio Orejas, un heredero político para resucitar la imagen de la Diputación', <https://www.ileon.com/politica/045328/emilio-orejas-un-heredero-politico-pararesucitar-la-imagen-de-la-diputacion>

⁴⁸ *Todos los nombres de Porcuna*, <http://todoslosnombresdeporcuna.blogspot.com/2012/11/elmonumento-los-caidos-de-porcuna.html>, last accessed 13 November 2020.

⁴⁹ *ElDiario.es*, 18 August 2017, 'Un ayuntamiento del PP recupera y adorna una cruz de simbología fascista', https://www.eldiario.es/castilla-lamancha/ayuntamiento-pp-recuperasimbologia-fascista_1_3236002.html

was a tendency to attempt to impose a single and implicitly exclusionary memory of the past.

Perhaps understandably, the single most obvious source of conflict over monuments to the fallen in Spain, and that which has received most public and press attention both domestically and internationally, is *El Valle de los Caídos*. Decades after the death of Franco and the return of democracy, almost nothing had changed in this ‘national’ monument as Spain entered the twenty-first century. As late as 2006, the British journalist and historian Giles Tremlett was perplexed when attending a commemoration at Cuelgamuros on 20 November. He witnessed a Mass held for more than 1000 people, a cover for a political and religious ritual which praised the Caudillo and where those present shouted ‘vivas’ for Franco and for ‘Spain united, great and free’.⁵⁰ In the heart of a democratic Spain, this site of memory survived practically intact, in full public view, financed by the state, and where tributes were still paid to a dictator.

In recent years, the monument has undergone a radical change, however, and the processes surrounding this change once again highlight how memories of the civil war and the dictatorship can lead to social and political division. On 24 October 2019, Franco was exhumed from his grave at *El Valle de los Caídos* and taken to the cemetery of Mingorrubio, in the Madrid district of El Pardo. This marked the end of a tortuous process which was initiated by the PSOE-led government, and which ultimately required not only a lengthy judicial battle, but also the authorisation of the Vatican. Nonetheless, the exhumation of the dictator carried a potent symbolic weight. As in other European countries that had endured dictatorships, the removal of Franco’s remains from a place he had been exalted to somewhere more modest brought up a series of questions relating

⁵⁰ Giles Tremlett, *Ghosts of Spain: Travels through a Country’s Hidden Past* (London: Faber & Faber, 2006), pp. 34-37.

to justice, retribution, reparation, and national reconstruction within a democratic state.⁵¹ The family of the dictator (and many of his remaining supporters) stood firmly against the exhumation. They attempted to revive a positive memory of the civil war and of the Franco regime, in which the Caudillo had saved Spain in its most tragic hours and ensured lasting peace in the country, indeed even paving the way for the return of democracy. If he had to be removed, the family suggested that Franco be buried instead at the Cathedral of the Almudena, in the centre of the Spanish capital. The government was opposed to this idea, not least because such a central and popular location would mean that Franco would still receive homages in the cathedral and be visited by his devotees. With the law on their side and in a sober ceremony, the government pressed ahead with the exhumation. To this day, the Valley remains a place steeped in Francoism, and there is still much to be done to re-signify the monument. Nonetheless, the removal of Franco's remains has freed the monument from some of its former symbolic potency as a place of exaltation of the dictatorship and the dictator.

As with the fate of so many of the monuments discussed in this chapter, the controversy over the exhumation of the dictator highlights how memories of the civil war and Francoism can be reinterpreted to be used as a political weapon in the present. The PP and Ciudadanos, for example, did not declare themselves opposed to Franco's removal from the Valley, but positioned themselves as honest brokers who could claim that 'it is a debate that contributes nothing [to society]' and that this ran the risk of 'dividing' Spaniards. The more extreme-right party Vox was bitterly opposed to the exhumation. At regional and local levels, it demanded that relevant institutions impede the removal and refuse to grant the necessary permissions. When it was clear that the process could not be stopped, they turned their fire on the government. The most explicit attacks came from

⁵¹ Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), pp. 13-20.

the party leader, Santiago Abascal, who had once been a member of the PP, who claimed ‘the objective is not to disinter Franco [...] The objective is to delegitimise the transition, oust Felipe VI and tear down the cross of the fallen’. Abascal posted on his Twitter account a message that accused the Prime Minister, Pedro Sánchez (‘the scavenger of Moncloa’) of having started a ‘campaign of hate’ and advising him that ‘he ought to reshoot the same photo that was taken by his beloved militias’. The tweet was accompanied by two photographs of Republican militiamen standing next to skeletons during the Spanish Civil War, in one of the more infamous acts of anticlerical violence from the conflict. Vox was careful, however, not to associate itself with those supporters of the dictator who gathered on the day of Franco’s removal at the cemetery of Mingorrubio, and the crowd did not display the banner of any political party, even though the memory of this traumatic past was clearly being used as a weapon for present-day political ends.⁵²

In most of these battles in the ‘memory wars’ that we have summarised above, the democratic state all too often appears to be absent. These conflicts erupting throughout Spain were a symptom of a past that society had yet to overcome. Even so, successive Spanish governments have been reluctant to attempt the construction of a plural and inclusive memory of this past. Belatedly, as we have seen, after so many years of inaction, in 2007 the PSOE government tried to begin this process. But the result was a law that arrived too late, was too short, did not give the national government an active role, and did nothing to include the memory of the dead from the rebel side during the civil war. The PP government of Mariano Rajoy (2011-2018) which succeeded this administration did not repeal the Law of Historical Memory, but it did reduce public funding for its

⁵² *El País*, 24 September 2019, ‘El PP se pone de perfil ante la exhumación de Franco y Cs le resta importancia’, https://elpais.com/politica/2019/09/23/actualidad/1569238701_053316.html; *El País*, 24 October 2019, ‘Vox estalla contra la exhumación de Franco y acusa a Sánchez de carroñero’, https://elpais.com/politica/2019/10/24/actualidad/1571917516_344634.html.

provisions to zero, and seemingly had little problem with the fact that Spain was still filled with mass graves.⁵³ Its desire to leave things as they were and not confront a traumatic past would ultimately aggravate a problem, which returned very publicly once the PP left power.

The arrival of a leftist government since 2018 seems to have marked a shift in this tendency. The first administration of PSOE leader Pedro Sánchez (June 2018-January 2020) took on the difficult task of exhuming Franco from the Valley of the Fallen, as we have seen. In July 2020, now in coalition with Unidas Podemos, the Sánchez government approved a new ‘Law of Democratic Memory’, which gave the state a more active role in constructing a memory of the civil war and the Franco regime. The stated aim of the legislation sent to the Spanish parliament is ‘the recovery, safeguarding and diffusion of a democratic memory’, in order to ‘foster cohesion and solidarity between different generations around principles, values and constitutional liberties’. The law outlines how state and regional governments will cooperate in its enactment, protecting and promoting documentary archives. It envisages a new curriculum for schools that will seek to instil democratic values. Among many other measures, it also establishes a mechanism for reparation and dignification of the victims from the civil war, and proposes the recovery of bodies which still remain in ditches and mass graves. The law is also aware of the importance of symbolism. It prohibits the defence of Francoism and threatens to dissolve any foundation or association which praises the coup of 1936 or the dictatorship. Symbols which are considered ‘contrary to democratic memory’, which includes the crosses to the fallen, are to be removed from public and private spaces (article 35).⁵⁴ There is little prospect that the law will put an end to the fierce battles that continue to rage over

⁵³ This was made clear in an interview in 2015. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tW1ddGFlcCs>

⁵⁴ Plan for a Law of Democratic Memory, *Boletín Oficial de las Cortes Generales*, 64-1, 30 August 2021.

competing memories of the civil war and Franco regime. But it is certainly clear that after several decades of democracy, the national Spanish government is now actively participating in shaping a policy of memory relating to this traumatic past.

Conflicts over the national memory: the case of peripheral nationalisms

As we have seen, as Spain moved into the twenty-first century, the memory of the civil war and the victims of violence was still frequently being used for political purposes. When this happens, History is given a back seat, and instead the political agendas of the present and the prospect of a different future assume priority. In other words, the past is used cynically for particular ends, often requiring representations of the past that bear little or no relation to the complexities of those dramatic years of the civil war and Franco regime.

When the idea of the nation-state is broken and the historical national community is weakened, memory becomes an essential resource.⁵⁵ The civil war provides an excellent example of this. Francoism not only constructed but also imposed a particular official memory of the past. But this also took place after the death of Franco, when other national projects were gaining ground. In both cases, memory was transformed into an instrument for outlining and solidifying a national community which appealed to a common past, and which promised a perfect future. Given this background, it is hardly surprising that the monuments to the fallen built by the Franco regime to consolidate an understanding of the nation which revolved around a Catholic and united Spain, would be transformed in the democracy into instruments for expressing alternative identities and national

⁵⁵ Gilda Waldman, 'La cultura de la memoria: problemas y reflexiones', *Política y Cultura*, 26 (2006), p. 15.

projects. For Catalan and Basque nationalist political groups, for example, the civil war is understood as a war of occupation of the fatherland. According to this interpretation, after the civil war, the degree of national liberty achieved under the Second Republic, as well as the free expression of their identity and language, was prohibited. Meanwhile, in another simplified narrative of history, Spain is conceived as archaic, traditional, and inherently Francoist. Details and nuances in the historical record are blurred. The logical fact that many Catalans and Basques also supported the military rebels after July 1936, and indeed that many died in the war or later performed key roles in the dictatorship, is usually ignored.

Historians have sometimes supported these mythical interpretations of the civil war and Franco regime and achieved excellent sales in doing so (even making it into school curricula). These narratives have also been disseminated through memoirs and other media supported by the regional governments. In the case of Catalonia, the central theme of these narratives is that since Catalonia lost the war, all Catalans also lost. According to this interpretation, all Catalans were anti-Francoist, and so to be Catalan is synonymous with resistance to the regime. By contrast, it is maintained that Spaniards were Francoists. As such, the supporters of the Franco regime in Catalonia were nothing more than Spanish-sympathisers, alien to freedom loving Catalans (immigrants included). Catalonia and the Catalans had been defeated and would be subjected to a ‘cultural genocide’.⁵⁶ In

⁵⁶ This interpretation was supported in particular by Josep Benet. The concept of ‘cultural genocide’ is also his. See Josep Benet, *L'intent franquista de genocidi cultural contra Catalunya* (Barcelona: Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat, 1995); ‘Tots els catalans vençuts’, in Josep Benet, *Catalunya sota el règim franquista* (Barcelona: Blume, 1978). These viewpoints are also seen in the field of literary studies. Enric Vila & Casablanca, on being asked why a Catalan literature does not exist, stuck to this myth, justifying it in two ways: ‘First, the Catalans did not fight the war, and for that reason there could not really be a literature of war, so that there was not someone who could speak of the complex collective experience; second, the civil war is not a war, but a simulacrum, a tribal massacre, a rabbit hunt’. See ‘Josep Pla, no disputar la guerra (Abel Cutillas)’, Patreo, 5 November 2020, https://www.patreon.com/posts/josep-pla-no-la-43557513?utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter&utm_campaign=postshare

these narratives, when Catalonia or the Catalans are referred to, the ‘trauma of defeat’ must always be added to, and considered more significant than, the ‘trauma of the civil war’. This of course ignores the fact that many Catalans who were Catholics, Carlists or Falangists would collaborate with the Franco regime and would do rather well out of the dictatorship.⁵⁷ In part, these narratives stem from Catholic Catalanism, which ironically had accommodated itself into the dictatorship’s social base without too much difficulty after 1939.⁵⁸ This represents a ‘theft of memory’. The fate of the defeated Republicans, in all their diversity, is ascribed to just one element on the losing side, the Catalan right. This narrative offers nothing less than the total exculpation of the victorious Catalans who had supported Franco, contributing to the creation of a collective Catalan and independentist identity, which depends upon a highly idiosyncratic understanding of the civil war, Francoism, Catalonia and Spain.⁵⁹ Such narratives gained new strength after the economic crisis of 2008, which saw a renewed intensity to nationalist policies from the Catalan Generalitat aimed at independence, and within which this official (Catalan) narrative of the civil war sat comfortably. After 2012, a political programme aiming at full independence for Catalonia emphasised these narratives even more, and increasingly spoke to the politics of the present. Independentist press outlets began to use historical concepts and language associated with the Franco regime to describe Spain and its supposedly dictatorial vices.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ The defeat is seen as the key moment in the nation’s development. It is asserted that the civil war did not split Catalan society in two, which means that the essential contribution of some Catalans to the Franco regime goes unmentioned. See Pelai Pagés, *War and Revolution in Catalonia, 1936-1939* (Brill: Leiden, 2013), pp. 169-174.

⁵⁸ A devastating study is Antonio Canales Serrano, *Las otras derechas: derechas y poder local en el País Vasco y Cataluña en el siglo XX* (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2006).

⁵⁹ Antonio Canales Serrano, ‘El robo de la memoria. Sobre el lugar del franquismo en la historiografía católico-catalanista’, *Ayer*, 59:3 (2005). See in particular, pp. 262-263, 279-280.

⁶⁰ Alejandro Quiroga & Fernando Molina, ‘National Deadlock: Hot Nationalism, Dual Identities and Catalan Independence (2008-2019)’, *Genealogy*, 4 (1):15 (2020).

Naturally, this struggle to co-opt the past in the region was evident in the fate of the remaining monuments to the fallen. In the case of Terrassa (Barcelona), for example, the monument to the fallen had been moved to the cemetery after the death of Franco. Stripped of its cross and its Francoist emblems, the monument now comprised two sculptures, the first a soldier who appeared to be Francoist, and the second a medieval knight. A plaque had also been affixed to the structure in the hope of promoting reconciliation, which read ‘The city of Terrassa in memory of the victims of the war’. The plaque also included the Catalan name for the town in recognition of the two languages spoken there. In 2016, however, this more recent projection of memory was contested. Against a backdrop of vocal demands for Catalan independence, youngsters belonging to the independentist party *Candidatura Unidad Popular* (CUP) poured black and red paint over the sculptures, adding the inscription ‘No fascist monuments in Terrassa’. The group boasted of their actions on social media.⁶¹ A fragile symbolic compromise over the memory of the victims of the war, which had been forged years before, was thus contested in the context of a new political reality. Once again, commemoration of the past was a site of conflict. According to this new narrative, Francoism, or ‘fascism’, and war were something alien to the Catalan people. Following the approval of the Law of Historical Memory in 2007, those monuments which had survived its provisions were often targets for graffiti and paint. In 2018, for example, the monument at Arbeka (Lérida), situated at the outskirts of the town, was covered in yellow paint. In the context of the dispute over Catalan sovereignty, the choice of colour was deliberate, and signified the reclamation of independence from Spain.⁶² Although the

⁶¹ *La Vanguardia*, 29 December 2016, ‘Las juventudes de la CUP de Terrassa atacan esculturas franquistas del cementerio’, <https://www.lavanguardia.com/local/terrassa/20161229/412972414322/las-juventudes-de-la-cup-de-terrassa-atacan-esculturas-franquistas-del-cementerio.html>, last accessed 5 November 2020.

⁶² Yellow, one of the colours of the Catalan flag, has become an important symbolic marker in the Catalan independence movement, particularly since the acceleration of demands for Catalan sovereignty since 2012. Following the arrest of several pro-independence Catalan politicians in

monument at Arbeca was not expressly dedicated to the fallen, it did have an inscription in the stone which called for ‘a prayer for those who were sacrificed here for God and for Spain’. In August 1936, numerous residents had been killed there by anarchist militiamen, among them Mariano Mullerat, a Carlist who was the mayor, as well as being a doctor and editor of a periodical published in Catalan (*L’Escut*). The choice of yellow paint aimed to obscure the complexity of local history, implying that those killed by Republicans had in fact been killed by Francoists, and that only Spaniards could have been Francoists.⁶³

Despite an increasingly potent official narrative in the region of ‘Catalonia defeated’, there was nonetheless resistance to the removal of Francoist monuments to the fallen in Catalonia. Perhaps the most illustrative example of this tendency is the monument commemorating the Battle of the Ebro, which was placed in the middle of the River Ebro as it passes Tortosa (Tarragona). The monument was not intended solely to commemorate the fallen. It had been built in 1964 to mark ‘25 Years of Peace’ and thus symbolised an exaltation of Franco, of the regime, and, as the inscription made clear, ‘the warriors who found glory in the Battle of the Ebro’. After the return of democracy to Spain, the monument had been stripped of some of its Francoist symbolism, *inter alia*, the dedication to Franco and the rebel victory in the civil war. More recently, the monument’s continued existence prompted a story that was similar to so many taking place throughout Spain in these years. A conflict erupted between political groups on the town council over the fate of the monument. The leftist councillors sought to remove the monument. Meanwhile, the rightist councillors, including not only the PP, but also the Catalanist *Convergència i*

November 2017, following a disputed referendum in the region, the wearing of yellow ribbons has been used as a sign of support for their release.

⁶³ *Segre*, 3 July 2018, ‘Denuncian pintadas de amarillo en una cruz funeraria en Arbeca’, https://www.segre.com/es/noticias/comarcas/2018/07/03/denuncian_pintadas_amarillo_una_cruz_funeraria_arbeca_50451_1091.html.

Unió (CiU), sought to keep the monument. In 2016, the Catalan parliament involved itself in the fate of the monument, putting pressure on the town council to dismantle it. Again there was no unanimous support among Catalan political parties for this position, and even splits in voting within particular Catalan parties on the issue. The town council, controlled at this point by the CiU, responded by calling a local referendum on the matter, which produced a remarkable result. First, more than 70 per cent of the eligible voters abstained. Of those who took part, 68.36 per cent supported retaining the monument and re-signifying it, against 31.25 per cent who wanted to remove it and put it in a museum. At the time of writing, the matter is in the hands of the courts. Nevertheless, this municipal referendum shows clearly that societal memory is much more diverse and complex than some unifying discourses would like it to be. Clearly some monuments have lost their original meaning for the population, perhaps as a consequence of alterations made to them after the return of democracy to Spain. They have come to form part of an emotional landscape for many people.⁶⁴

One further, high-profile example from Catalonia demonstrates how the complexities of history are sometimes difficult for some people to acknowledge and accept. In October 2016, the exposition ‘Franco, Victory, Republic. Impunity in Urban Space’ was opened in the ‘Born Centre for Culture and Memory’ in Barcelona, with the backing of the city council. The exhibition was commissioned by the historian Manel Risques, and revolved around the life and eventual destruction of three statues in Barcelona. The first was an allegory of the Republic. The second a representation of the Francoist victory. And the third was an equestrian statue of Franco. The exhibition confronted Catalans with

⁶⁴ For an account of what happened, see *Diari Ara*, 3 March 2016, ‘El monument franquista de Tortosa: 50 anys d’història i els intents frustrats de retirarlo’, https://www.ara.cat/cultura/Parlament-lAjuntament-Tortosa-monumentfranquista_0_1533446786.html; *El País*, 28 May 2016, ‘Tortosa vota conservar el mayor monumento franquista’, https://elpais.com/ccaa/2016/05/28/catalunya/1464470616_868416.html.

uncomfortable aspects of their past. Two questions were posited using documentary and photographic records. First, by recording the life of the monuments and their creators (both Catalans), it showed how they worked for the Republic, but also for the Franco regime, which they had praised. When democracy returned to Spain, both men settled into the system without any difficulty, and both remained famous and prospered. Second, the exhibition highlighted how the Catalan authorities had shown themselves indifferent to the calls to remove Francoist monuments from public space for more than thirty-five years after Franco's death. As the exhibition's pamphlet wryly observed, while the Franco regime had been very quick to invade public space with its monuments, democracy would move 'at its own pace' ('altre ritme'). In the 1980s, Catalan municipal authorities had not set out a settled policy of memory, and instead tended to favour equidistant solutions which were based upon notions of reconciliation, but which nonetheless maintained silences. By and large, Francoist symbols did not begin to disappear *en masse* in the region until 2008, that is to say after the passage of the Law of Historical Memory.⁶⁵

The exhibition caused a great deal of controversy, not least because it critiqued the official narrative of the civil war and the Franco regime that underpinned the Catalan independence process which had been growing for many years, and which was now almost hegemonic.⁶⁶ Needless to say, the political parties backing the independence process for Catalonia did not take kindly to the exhibition either. The CUP, for example, criticised the fact that it was installed in the Born district owing to the 'historical connotation that this space has for Barcelona'. The exhibition centre houses the remains

⁶⁵ Comisionado de memoria histórica, *Franco, victoria, republica. Impunitat i espai urba* (Barcelona: Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2017), pp. 2, 22. On the politics of memory in Barcelona in the 1980s and before the Olympics, see Ricard Conesa Sánchez, 'David contra Goliath. Memoria, reconciliación y espacio público en la Barcelona de los ochenta', *Historia, Trabajo y Sociedad*, 9 (2018), pp. 103-105, 119.

⁶⁶ Josep Burgaya, 'Independentismo y narrativa populista en Cataluña. ¿El asalto al poder de las clases medias?', *Pasos a la Izquierda*, 20 (octubre, 2020).

of the medieval district of Barcelona destroyed when the city was taken in 1714 at the end of the Wars of Succession, a fundamental myth in the Catalan nationalist narrative.⁶⁷ The historians who had prepared the exposition, all of whom were well-known specialists in contemporary history, the civil war and the Franco regime, were also attacked by the politicians. Even more interesting, however, was the reaction of the public (or at least some of them) to the exhibition. As part of the display, three statues had been installed outside the cultural centre, two of which depicted women (the Republic and the Victory), and the third an equestrian statue of Franco (without a head).⁶⁸ In the midst of the Catalan independence process, three monuments had been brought back to occupy public space in the city, each of which showed the past as complex and never uniform. The backlash did not take long. The statue of Franco was vandalised with paint, as well as LGBTI and Catalan independentist flags, and even an inflatable doll on the back of the dictator's horse. Eventually, the equestrian statue was toppled. There can be few better examples of how memory is constructed from the present. Nor better examples of how history can be simplified, altered and erased if it becomes uncomfortable, with the aim of creating a homogenous and easy version of the past which serves present-day ends, and which claims to point to a better future.

There are certainly parallels of this experience in the Basque Country. Here also, it is possible to observe a reading of the Spanish Civil War as a national war, a product of a Spanish invasion, a phenomenon external to the history, struggles and essences of the

⁶⁷ *Europa Press*, 17 October 2016, 'La exposición "Franco, Victòria i República. Impunitat i espai urba" abre sus puertas con polémica', <https://www.europapress.es/catalunya/noticia-exposicion-franco-victoria-republicaimpunitat-espai-urba-abre-puertaspolemica-20161017211112.html>

⁶⁸ The equestrian statue of the dictator had been housed up to that point in the warehouses of the Barcelona city council. In 2013, it was discovered that it had been decapitated with an angle grinder or blowtorch. The police investigation could not solve who was responsible for the act nor where it took place. See *El Periódico*, 17 October 2016, 'El dictador que perdió la cabeza', <https://www.elperiodico.com/es/barcelona/20161017/estatua-franco-perdio-cabeza-5551826>

‘Basque people’.⁶⁹ In this narrative tendency, history is understood as a series of conflicts between Euskadi (us) and Spain (them).⁷⁰ This reading of history had already emerged in ETA circles – as had a very similar interpretation within the PNV – during the Franco regime and the transition. It saw the civil war as an aggression against Euskadi, and the Franco regime as an oppressive dictatorship which unleashed a brutal and uncompromising repression. In a clear parallel with Catalonia, the connivance and collaboration of many Basques with the regime, including some who had been prominent in PNV or Catholic circles, was completely ignored.⁷¹ Similarly selective interpretations were offered in regard to the violence and repression that the Franco regime unleashed on the Basque Country, which was, in fact, of lower intensity and with relatively fewer victims than in other parts of Spain.⁷² This memory of Francoist violence in the Basque Country nonetheless became a justification for ETA, which also linked its struggle to those Basque fighters from the civil war period, and projected its militants as the ‘new Basque soldiers’ fighting against the dictatorship. Since the transition, this memory has occupied public space in the region, ‘vampirising’ and overriding other memories of the war and the violence in the Basque Country, not least of all those of the region’s socialists, anarchists or communists. The growing momentum of the movement for the recovery of

⁶⁹ Iñaki Egaña (ed.), *1936. Guerra civil en Euskal Herria* (Andoain: Aralar, 1998), 8 vols. These narratives are also common in the interpretations in Basque historiography of the bombing of Guernica. See José María Ruiz Soroa, ‘Gernika y la historia vasca del mundo’, *Revista de Libros*, 27 September 2017, <https://www.revistadelibros.com/articulos/gernika-y-la-historia-vasca-del-mundo>. These ideas are also found in the foundation *Euskal Memoria*. See http://www.euskalmemoria.eus/es/Quienes_somos

⁷⁰ Antonio Rivera, ‘Pensamiento ilusorio. La construcción histórica del Nosotros vasco’, in Antonio Rivera (ed.), *Nunca hubo dos bandos. Violencia política en el País Vasco, 1975-2011* (Granada: Comares, 2019), pp. 12-24.

⁷¹ For example, Antonio Canales Serrano, *Las otras derechas: derechas y poder local en el País Vasco y Cataluña en el siglo XX* (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2006); Antonio Pérez Embeitia, *Las buenas familias de Bilbao y el poder local en el primer franquismo, 1937-1959* (Madrid: Silex, 2020).

⁷² Moreover, the physical violence was principally directed at the workers’ movement, while the socio-economic repression affected nationalists more. See Francisco Espinosa Maestre, ‘Sobre la represión franquista en el País Vasco’, *Historia Social*, 63 (2009), pp. 58-76; Javier Gómez Calvo, *Matar, Purgar, Sanar: la represión franquista en Álava* (Madrid: Tecnos, 2014); Erik Zubiaga Arana, *La huella del terror franquista en Bizkaia: jurisdicción militar, políticas de captación y actitudes sociales, 1937-1945* (Bilbao: Universidad del País Vasco, 2017).

historical memory has strengthened this process. From within the *abertzale* (nationalist) movement a more complex memory of the past had slowly gained ground, although it must be said, without refuting or contradicting the earlier narrative.⁷³

As well as creating their own narratives, organisations within the Basque nationalist movement, in particular on the left, have also acted to eliminate remaining symbols of Francoism in the region. In 2019, for example, unidentified individuals tore down the cross of the fallen at Ondarroa (Vizcaya) using an angle grinder and drills. The monument had comprised a column crowned with a cross. It had been built in 1958, and was situated on a mountain next to the sea to commemorate the sailors from the town who had died ‘for God and for Spain’ in the sinking of the cruiser *Baleares* in 1938. Many of the dead were Catholic Carlist Requetés native to the town. The act of demolition was captured for posterity and released on the internet. The organisation *Ernai* claimed responsibility, a youth arm of *Sortu* (political heirs to *Herri Batasuna* and now integrated into the coalition *Euskal Herria Bildu*). The group’s justification for the action revealed much more about them and their memory of the war than it did about the complexity of the history of the war. They claimed ‘the younger generation do not want to see Francoist symbols anymore. We will fight fascism everywhere, just as we did in 1936. They shall not pass in *Euskal Herria*!’. The town council in Ondarroa was in the hands of Bildu and took

⁷³ Antonio Rivera Blanco & Javier Gómez Calvo, ‘Siempre se recuerda lo que nunca ocurrió: represión franquista y memoria colectiva en el País Vasco’, in Ana Sofía Ferreira, João Madeira & Pau Casanellas (eds.), *Violência política no século XX. Um balanço* (Lisbon: Instituto de História Contemporânea, 2017), pp. 725-726; Erik Zubiaga Arana, ‘Discourses and Public Policies on Memory: the Narrative Construction of the Violent Past in the Basque Country (1936-2020)’, in Antonio Miguez (ed.), *Sites of Violence and Memory in Modern Spain: From the Spanish Civil War to the Present Day* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021). The conflict between memory and history in the Basque Country is apparent in how the memory of ETA violence is broached (or sidestepped) in numerous public memory institutions that have been created. See Antonio Rivera, ‘Dos focos para una memoria de la violencia vasca: Centro Memorial e Instituto Gogora’, in Miguel Ángel Ruiz Carnicer & Julio Ponce Alberca (eds.), *El pasado siempre vuelve. Historia y políticas de memoria pública* (Zaragoza: Prensas Universitarias de Zaragoza, 2021), pp. 247-271.

some time to develop proposals to remove the monument. After the attack, it announced that the site would be turned into a ‘space of memory’ to honour the sailors from the town who had been lost at sea. At a stroke, the uncomfortable past of the civil war period was erased, almost as if it had never existed, to ensure that nobody could question the present.⁷⁴

Just as in Catalonia, so in the Basque Country we see cases where the consensus reached over monuments during the transition to democracy was later repudiated. For many years, for example, there appeared to be no particular controversy over the cross to the fallen at Olárizu, which was placed on a peak outside the city of Vitoria. Catholic missions had been founded on the site in 1951 and the monument had been erected there in the following year. On it, the Civil Governor had ordered that the names of the priests who had fallen on the Francoist side in the civil war should be recorded.⁷⁵ Even in the twenty-first century, political parties including the PP, PNV and PSOE were happy to leave the monument in place, believing it to be a Catholic symbol. Nonetheless, some groups on the political left, and in particular separatist groups, wanted the monument to be torn down. The case highlights the peculiar position of two memories in conflict, despite originating from the same Basque nationalist perspective. The conservative and catholic memory of the PNV allowed for an interpretation of the monument which did not deem it a Francoist symbol. Indeed, the monument had originally been prompted by family members of those who now found themselves in the PNV. By contrast, the second

⁷⁴ *ElDiario.es*, 14 January 2019, ‘Varios desconocidos derriban una cruz franquista en Ondarroa’, https://www.eldiario.es/euskadi/euskadi/varios-desconocidos-derriban-franquistaondarroa_1_2739212.html; *El Periódico*, 14 January 2019, ‘Un grupo de personas derriba en Ondarroa un monumento franquista’, <https://www.elperiodico.com/es/politica/20190114/derribado-monumento-franquistaondarroa-7245582>

⁷⁵ Virginia López de Maturana, *Informe técnico sobre los vestigios de la Guerra Civil y la Dictadura Franquista en Vitoria-Gasteiz*, 23 October 2017, pp. 11-13, <https://www.euskalmemoriadigitala.eus/handle/10357/48192>.

memory, belonging to the Basque nationalist left, branded the monument ‘fascist’. As with so many monuments throughout the country, the diversity of memories and battles over them was expressed through frequent graffiti on the monument, as well as in the attempts of the town council to repair the damage using white paint. In December 2018, new slogans were graffitied onto the monument, including ‘This did not happen with ETA’, ‘Akatu dezagun faxismoa (we will put an end to fascism)’ and ‘Get rosaries out of our ovaries’. These phrases said nothing about history, but they did say much about memory and about the present. The terrorist group was portrayed as a just cause in the fight against Francoism. In the most simplistic terms, the cross and the dictatorship were identified with fascism. And finally, there was a meditation on the responsibility of Catholicism in the oppression of women.⁷⁶

Some of the acts taking place around monuments to the fallen reveal symbolic attempts to construct new collective memories. The use of the official flag of the Basque Country (ikurriña) is very common, for example, and is presented as the only acceptable banner for the Basque people. A notorious example is the demolition of the cross of the fallen at Gaztelumendi (Larrabetzu, Vizcaya) in July 2017, which became a particularly highly-charged event because four people were wounded in the process, including a female PNV councillor who fractured both her tibia and fibula. The event involved numerous supporters of the PNV and Bildu. Moments before the monument was torn down, the Basque flag was raised, and perhaps surprisingly, so was the *estelada* (the independentist Catalan flag). Adding a further ingredient to this symbolic milieu, the crowd also sang *The Internationale* in Basque. The stated intentions of the Bildu mayor of the town definitively proved that the past was being invented from the present on this occasion. The town would build a monument in honour of those who had fought ‘against Francoist

⁷⁶ *Gasteiz Hoy*, 11 December 2018, ‘El Ayuntamiento borra pintadas “terroristas y radicales” de la cruz de Olarizu’, <https://www.gasteizhoy.com/pintadascruz-olarizu/>.

forces and for the liberty of Euskal Herria' in its place. In other words, with the new monument as much as the old, this site of memory would continue to project a memory that was completely at odds with historical reality. It would alter and silence the historical complexity of the civil war in both the Basque Country and Spain, as well the national identities, the political or social motivations of either rebel or Republican soldiers from the civil war. Instead, the warring parties were placed into two simplistic and catch-all categories, fascists and Basque warriors.⁷⁷ The stones of Francoist monuments to the fallen might have represented the nadir of memory in Spain, but now, in the place of this one, another simplified, biased and opportunistic memory of the civil war and its victims would be constructed.

⁷⁷ *El Correo*, 11 July 2017, 'La concejal herida en el derribo de la cruz franquista de Larrabetzu es operada de ambas piernas', <https://www.elcorreo.com/sociedad/sucesos/fallo-derribo-cruz-20170711093620-nt.html>; Erik Zubiaga Arana & Javier Calvo Gómez, 'La leyenda prevalece. La guerra civil y la represión franquista en el País Vasco', *Cuadernos de Alzate*, 50-51 (2018), pp. 73-74.