

The limits of remembrance during the Spanish Transition: Questioning the “Pact of Oblivion” through the analysis of a censored film and a mass grave exhumation¹

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Abstract

The corpses of those who were defeated in the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) first emerged in the public sphere during the country’s Transition to democracy (1973-1982). For many, the end of the dictatorship was an opportunity to come to terms with memories of the conflict through cultural and social practices. However, the memories of the defeated could not be retrieved. This state of amnesia became known as the “Pact of Oblivion”, a supposed tacit agreement that eventually became an assumed “historical truth”. In our view, no such pact of oblivion ever actually existed. We suggest that, although there were indeed initiatives of remembrance, these were contained. In this way, the so-called “Pact of Oblivion” was more of an imposition than a “social contract”. To show this, we undertake a comparative analysis of two cases from very different fields: the documentary *Rocío* (1980) and a mass grave exhumation in the small village of Casas de Don Pedro (1978). Both share clear similarities regarding the limits of remembrance during the Spanish Transition. They also indicate how subtle power relations and structural power mechanisms prevented memory from entering into regime of visibility.

Keywords

Spanish Transition, Pact of Oblivion, Spanish Civil War, documentary, mass graves, containment of memory, remembrance

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Introduction

The corpses of those who were defeated in the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) first emerged in the Spanish public sphere during the Transition (1973-1982).² While most of the victims on the Francoist side of the conflict were honoured and, in many cases, elevated to martyr-like status by the National-Catholic regime, thousands of bodies belonging to victims of Francoist repression remained buried in unmarked mass graves across the country. In this context, their memory was still taboo. The end of the dictatorship and the beginning of democracy could have served as an opportunity to come to terms with this troubled history through cultural and social practices of public remembrance. This, however, never occurred. The memory of those defeated in the war was not recovered. This, in turn, ushered in a collective state of amnesia known as the “Pact of Oblivion”.³ This title is the metaphor used to describe the tacit agreement made among members of Spanish society in their endeavour to become a democracy. It was a supposed “pact” that has now become an assumed “historical truth”.

In our view, no such “Pact of Oblivion” existed. Instead, we read this agreement as one of the myths produced during the Transition. Equally myth-like, we suggest, is the idea that the move to democracy was a peaceful and exemplary process based on consensus. In this paper, we argue that there were indeed memory initiatives during this time period. However, they were highly contained. In this way, we suggest that the “Pact of Oblivion” was the result of imposition rather than agreement.

We analyse how oblivion was imposed on society as the result of tensions and unequal negotiations, by comparing two cases regarding very different objects of study: a censored film and a mass grave exhumation. We begin by examining the historical assumptions about the Transition and how they are now being confronted. While we focus on the “Pact of Oblivion”, we do so by developing the concepts that frame our study, including “regime of truth”, “social contract”, “the disciplinarization of enunciations” and “the containment of memory”. In doing so, we thoroughly unpack the development of these two memory initiatives. Although in very different spheres of society, both the film and the exhumation share clear similarities regarding how and why limits to remembering were imposed during the Spanish Transition to democracy. Moreover, these two examples are both representative of social memory practices during the Transition and are exceptional cases which encapsulate some of the most salient characteristics of the Spanish culture of oblivion.

In our first case study, we examine *Rocío*, a 1980 documentary about a traditional religious open-air pilgrimage, or *romería*, that takes place every year in Almonte, a village in Andalusia. The documentary connects the *romería* to crimes committed in Almonte during the Spanish Civil War. The film was partly censored in 1983. Our second case study is a mass grave exhumation of individuals who were executed by Francoist forces in Casas de Don Pedro (1978), a small village in the province of Badajoz. The event was also tightly constrained due to the threats made to

those who participated in the event. As we will discuss in more detail below, despite censorship having been abolished and the absence of any specific law prohibiting acts of remembrance, subtle power relations and structural power mechanisms prevented memories from emerging into regimes of visibility. This, in turn, prevented them from becoming part of shared forms of historical knowledge.

Questioning historical truths: the “Pact of Oblivion”

Following the Spanish Civil War and the close to four decades of dictatorship that followed it, Francisco Franco died of illness in 1975. After his death, Spain underwent a process of democratization and became a parliamentary monarchy headed by Franco’s designated heir, King Juan Carlos I. Only two years after Franco’s death, Spain held its first democratic elections during which most sides of the emergent political spectrum participated. Several years later, on 23 February 1981, a military coup failed its attempt to overtake the government. With this, the Spanish Transition to democracy became part of the so-called “Third Wave” of democratization processes that were occurring in Latin America and Southern Europe from the 1970s onwards (Huntington, 1991).

Since then, dominant historical narratives within Spanish political discourse have defined the Transition as a peaceful, exemplary and even internationally exportable process (Maravall, 1982; Linz and Stepan, 1996; Paniagua, 2009), which did and could enable a country’s smooth passage from dictatorship to democracy. This widely accepted interpretation, a kind of knowledge that is socially and culturally constructed within a specific period of time, quickly became a historical truth regarding the Transition.⁴ Genealogy helps us trace this interpretation of history: this *Foucauldian* method records the history of interpretations (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983: 108) and its inherent relationship with truth-producing processes.

We seek to problematize the assumption that there was a “Pact of Oblivion”,

particularly regarding the dead of the defeated side of the war. In this case, biopolitics did not just staturalize the biological and take care of the living (Agamben, 162), but also the dead bodies of the war. Thus, more specifically, *necropolitics*⁵ – subjugating life to the power of death (Mbembe, 2003: 39) – caused the corpses to disappear, at least from the public sphere (cinemas, media, justice courts...). The fate of the Civil War dead and their interaction with the social conditions of the Transition determined the creation of historical truths about the period.

The official production of knowledge about the Transition was articulated in places where there was enough authority to define a particular regime of truth,⁶ as part of a process where legitimated devices like mass media or academia constantly circulated this discourse which, in turn, became “true”, thereby supporting or creating a hegemonic imaginary of the past. In this sense, during the 1980s and the 1990s, both public television (TVE) and print media, together with the political and academic elites, were mainly responsible for the official Transition narrative being positioned as an unquestionable “truth” (Ardanaz, 2010; Castro, 2010; del Águila and Montoro, 1984).

The peaceful Transition based on consensus was supposedly achieved through the politics of pacts, within a broader context of the politics of national reconciliation (Colomer, 1998: 177). This behaviour was not only supposed to leave behind the conflict of the Civil War, but also to repudiate the *Leyenda Negra* or *Black Legend*, which suggested that Spaniards were only capable of acting through violence. The

Transition was supposedly an “original process of political engineering between the elites, based on pact and consensus” (Díaz Gijón, 1996: 106). These included signed pacts like the Moncloa Pacts on economic policies signed by the main political parties in 1977; symbolic pacts like the *reforma pactada* and *ruptura pactada*, which were terms used to describe different moments of the Transition; or tacit and metaphorical pacts like the period of silence regarding the memory of those who fell victim to Francoism, commonly labelled the “Pact of Oblivion”.⁷

While signed pacts were entirely decided by the elites, others appeared to involve a tacit agreement, or social contract, amongst all members of the social spectrum. According to Allan Sekula, however, “in a developed society most of the messages in the public domain come from an anonymous voice with an authority that excludes any option but consent. When we talk about the necessary *agreement* among the parties involved in the communicative activity, we should distrust the idea of a social contract we reach freely”⁸ (Sekula, 1975: 52). Consent, in Sekula’s terms, is not so much a choice or free *agreement*, but the imposition of a dominant discourse. In this sense, the supposed consensus of the Transition was assumed, at least in the public sphere, among very different, but also very unequal agents, many of whom saw consent as the only available option.

Yet consensus is part of the hegemonic narrative of the transitional period, in which the Transition is elevated to the status of “myth” (Gallego, 2008), thereby

positioning it as the foundation of contemporary Spanish democracy. In fact, Spain's embrace of democracy has been referred to ironically as the "immaculate transition" (Vidal-Beneyto, 1995) and considered a model for other subsequent transitions (Aguilar, 2008a: 93), especially those that occurred in Latin America and, later, after the fall of the Soviet Union, in Eastern Europe (Demange, 2010).⁹

However, with the passing of time, these assumptions have been challenged and revised in an ongoing process that has updated the regime of truth. In the last two decades, in the context of a political and economic crisis and with the emergence of new forms of social mobilization, a critical re-examination of official "celebratory" readings of the transitional period has emerged. In fact, since the end of the 1990s, the official narrative regarding Spain's troubled past has been increasingly called into question. In academia, many voices have described, often disparagingly, the virtues of the Transition, particularly those related to the country's electoral system as the flaws of democracy (Colomer, 1998: 181). More recently, academic research has also refuted the "myth" of a peaceful transition. Sophie Baby (2012: 5) describes the Transition as a violent period during which people were killed,¹⁰ often as the result of police repression against workers and demonstrators.¹¹ Although the myth of an "immaculate transition" has impregnated academic and political discourse (Baby 2012: 5), Baby speaks of a cycle of violence that is specific to this time period and that has had a profound social

and political impact (Baby, 2015: 76). In this sense, we could argue, the Spanish Transition was not an inherently peaceful process.

Since the economic crisis, criticism of the Transition has spread to civil society and to new political parties and theorists, most of whom demand that more attention be paid to grassroots democratic struggles rather than to dominant, elite-focused narratives. This work has also called into question the excessively prominent role of the political leaders who carried out the political negotiations that would install “democratic” institutions while also raising doubts about the ability of these institutions to completely break with the country’s dictatorial past (Gallego, 2008; Monedero, 2011; Martínez, 2012; Andrade, 2012; Chaput and Pérez, 2015; Wilhelmi, 2016).¹²

When referring to the “Pact of Oblivion”, we would like to stress that in Spain, the Transition has often been described as a period when the violent past of the Civil War and the ensuing repression experienced during Franco’s dictatorship were not present in the political agenda of the time (Molinero, 2010: 42). However, as we will demonstrate, this binary between remembering and forgetting is far more complex. The main institutional reference was the Amnesty Law passed in 1977. While this law released the dictatorship’s political prisoners, it also granted the perpetrators of violence impunity by preventing judicial inquiry into their acts of repression. Although at the time of its passing, debates regarding the law referenced the amnesty of Francoist crimes (Aguilar, 2008b: 297), this issue was mainly overlooked in public discourse,

which focused, instead, on the pardoning of political prisoners who were still in jail after Franco's death. The absence of historical perspective prevented the prosecution of the perpetrators from becoming a political demand. Indeed, even left-wing demonstrations at the time called for "Amnesty and Freedom" without considering perpetrator impunity. Many grassroots activists failed to question the Amnesty Law, and even fought for its ratification (Aguilar, 1997: 99–100).

Framed in a discourse of reconciliation according to which both sides of the war had been equally wrong, the Amnesty Law was used by the political elite to advocate for a collective act of oblivion regarding the country's past. Though many grassroots activists accepted the "Pact of Oblivion", especially those left-wing leaders whose political parties were legalized during the Transition and had accepted the terms of the new democracy, for most people opposition was never really an option.

In fact, if oblivion¹³ had been a choice, as Santos Juliá insists (2003: 16–17), and had been debated at all levels of Spanish society, the decision to embrace oblivion would not necessarily have been an undesirable path to choose. Forgetting is, after all, an intrinsic condition of memory (Assmann, 2008: 113). But, as Paul Ricoeur suggests, amnesty is imposed oblivion (2003: 587): albeit sometimes a useful social therapy, it is ultimately unjust (2003: 591).

However, there were other ways to reclaim memory, like the exhumation of the mass graves produced as a result of Francoist repression, the creation of alternative

narratives, the public claim for reparations to be given to victims and their kin, the removal of street names and monuments to Francoist figures, etc. Although, these attempts to remember also failed through different acts of containment. As Andrea Davis argues, silence “was not at the root of the Transition, but a consequence that resulted from its elite negotiation and enforcement” (2015: 686).

So how did such enforcement occur? In the case of the “Pact of Oblivion”, as Jay Winter argues, the normative enforcement of silence is a subtle and multifaceted domain (2010: 14). It is within this domain that we find the subtle mechanisms by which memory has been contained in Spain. Some of these examples are discussed below. Moreover, in Spain, there was neither a law against memory nor censorship during the Transition. These kinds of prohibitions were deemed unacceptable to the new democracy, which celebrated the freedom of expression as a laudable virtue.

In this sense, and according to Foucault’s analysis of the complex process by which post-capitalist societies abolish censorship, “...we move from the censorship of statements to the disciplinarization of enunciations (...), to a form of control that is now exercised on a disciplinary basis” (Foucault, 2003: 184). According to this idea, censorship could be used to target forbidden content. However, what is actually targeted is the discipline of enunciations, their form or structure. If forms are not disciplined to academic standards for example, they will not be accepted in privileged spaces, such as a university, a commercial cinema or a national newspaper. Until these forms are

formulated in a legitimate place of enunciation, their content will not attain authority, preventing these enunciations from becoming part of a regime of truth, as in the cases shown here. This new kind of disciplinary control is more effective than censorship because rather than focusing on specific issues, it runs through the whole structure of production.

In this sense, many memory initiatives during the Transition were contained, preventing them from spreading across society. As Germán Labrador has argued in his recent book (2017), the transitional period was by no means a cultural wasteland, but a space of experimentation and freedom that took place in what Foucault calls a “historical interstice” (1989: 16). This interstice was the end of a dictatorship and the beginning of something new with inherent expectations attached to it. In this experimental space, the limits of what could be said and seen were negotiated among many agents in tension. The fear inherited from the long dictatorship and the afterlife of sociological Francoism¹⁴ that had penetrated the Spanish social body was threatened at a specific moment in time.¹⁵ Indeed, the hope generated by the forthcoming democracy created the conditions for the emergence of deep changes and radical practices. This experimentation was part of a complex negotiation process that finally established clear limits on remembrance.

We argue that the multiple mechanisms through which power controlled and modulated social and cultural practices, especially those related to the memory of the

Spanish Civil War, produced “oblivion” in Spanish society (Plate, 2015: 6). The mechanisms of containment, included threats, fear, marginalization, rumours and reprisals, which may not explicitly come from the State, but take shape at the grassroots level. Indeed, following Liedeke Plate’s concept of amnesiology, forgetting is part of “a process that stands at the heart of culture” (2015: 7). Self-censorship, born out of fear of the general context in which consensus was the enforced norm, was also exercised.

Attempts to engage in memory initiatives during the Transition had to accept the official narrative and could not contradict the power institutions created or enforced around it, namely the Monarchy, the Church, the parliamentary system, and the “mythical” status of the Transition itself.¹⁶ Remembrance, then, was allowed only within a particular form of “political correctness”¹⁷. Moreover, this cultural proliferation did not lead to a public debate regarding the past because the dominant and institutional discourse did not engage in any such discussion (Vinyes, 2014: 175–176). Most memory initiatives that did not respect the discourse of reconciliation and consensus promoted by the Transition’s elite failed to attain widespread visibility.¹⁸

This paper does not seek to analyse the “Pact of Oblivion” in itself, but it is guided by this perspective regarding the Spanish Transition. It contributes to current debates by seeking to problematize the assumption that oblivion was ever really a pact, even in its most metaphorical sense, as well as the idea that there were no attempts to engage in memory initiatives. To do so, we analyse the thresholds confining these two

projects of remembrance. Our aim is to show how and at what levels memory was contained by fixing its limits.

Preserving impunity: *Rocío* (1980), a censored film in democracy

Our first case study is from the film world. The documentary *Rocío* was made by Fernando Ruiz Vergara and Ana Vila in 1980.¹⁹ It adopts an anthropological approach to a traditional religious open-air pilgrimage, or *romería*, held every year in the village of Almonte in Andalusia, in southern Spain. Using powerful images recorded by the filmmakers and their subsequent editing, it adopts a critical perspective emphasized by interviews with experts on the pilgrimage and the history of the religious brotherhood, or *hermandad*, that organize it. Transversally, *Rocío* recounts events that occurred in Almonte during the Spanish Civil War and makes explicit connections between the Francoist perpetrators and the religious brotherhood. The documentary reveals the names of many of the victims and shows their portraits.²⁰ The main perpetrator of crimes in Almonte²¹ is named by Pedro Gómez Clavijo, a village resident that is interviewed in the film.

It should be remembered that, when the film was made, no investigation had been conducted regarding repression in Spain. As a consequence, the revelation of these details in a film was shocking to its audience (del Río, 2013: 81). *Rocío* is therefore paradigmatic and relevant for Spain's memorialization movement²². Although some

prior documentaries had broached the memory of the Spanish Civil War²³, this was the first film point to a perpetrator by name. The legal and social prosecution of both film and filmmakers also makes this documentary relevant to analyze how impunity works in Spain.

Many documentaries made during the Transition were extremely original in both form and content. They took the opportunity of the Regime's opening up to finally address the many issues that had previously been left out of public debate. These attempts were especially intense after the abolition of the censorship law in November, 1977, two years after Franco's death. Until that moment, censorship had determined everything that could be either said or seen. Certain themes and behaviour were banned from film productions. However, the abolition of the law did not mean the end of censorship. The regime of visibility was simply defined in other ways.

Rocío is paradigmatic in this sense, because it shows the different levels of censorship that persisted into the democratic period. To analyse those levels, we follow the three kinds of censorship outlined by Christian Metz (1970: 18): censorship by law, the most evident and commonly used during dictatorships; economic censorship which focuses on the funds made available for particular kinds of cultural production; and finally, ideological censorship, which defines the boundaries of correctness, such as institutional ways of thinking or moral principles. This last kind of censorship is what often promotes self-censorship.²⁴ The analysis of *Rocío* that follows considers all of

these levels within the politics and microphysics of power, which, to some extent, tacitly instituted oblivion, although not as a choice or pact.

Despite winning an award at the Seville Film Festival, being selected by the Ministry of Culture to participate in the Venetian Film Festival²⁵ and being premiered in 1980, the film was not actually screened in Andalusia until five years after its release. The initial reason for this delay was the pressure exerted by religious institutions and conservative groups who successfully prevented broadcasters throughout Andalusia from screening it (del Río, 2013: 80). This was an action closely connected with the last two kinds of censorship described by Metz, namely ideological and economic forms of censorship. Self-regulation determined what should or should not be presented in public. Every cinema in Andalusia, whether out of fear, shame or other concerns, respected this imposition. Of course, it is also important to consider that any decision to screen the film could also have wrought economic consequences on film houses.

Contempt for the Church was the reason given for the commotion. Although there was no direct official imposition, a limit on what could be said in public was established in a sophisticated and subtle way – limits to which people “freely” consented. The absence of an official statement or law makes such censorship difficult to perceive and analyse, an indication that the limits of remembrance are not linked solely to direct impositions, but also to more subtle limitations. According to Metz, ideological censorship defines what is thinkable. Defining the thinkable reduces

creativity and limits the condition of possibility in a restriction that is arbitrary, constructed, cultural and partial (1970: 20). In the case of *Rocío*, it was unthinkable to question religious institutions or link them to Francoist perpetrators. This statement exceeded the regime of truth enforced during the Transition, and as a consequence, making it public appeared implausible. This commentary and, by extension, the film itself were things that had to be kept secret and hidden from view.

Rocío is also indicative of another limit, particularly the limits established by a court of law. Although six years had passed since Franco's death, dictatorship censorship was still taking place in Spain six years after Franco's death.²⁶ On 23 February 1981 – the same day as Tejero's *coup d'état* and one year after *Rocío*'s premiere – the perpetrator's descendants filed a complaint against filmmaker Fernando Ruiz Vergara, scriptwriter Ana Vila and Pedro Gómez Clavijo, the Almonte resident who made the accusation in his interview. The descendants claimed, among the other accusations they made, that their father, José María Reales Carrasco, had been grossly defamed. They also pointed to the film's public expression of contempt for the Catholic faith, particularly expressed in their approach to the Virgin of Rocío (del Río, 2013: 82). In fact, the film showed a portrait of Reales Carrasco with his eyes hidden by a black band (Figure 1), a decision made when the filmmakers were threatened by his son in an interview for the film. "Be very careful what you say and do. We might cut your balls off", (Ana Vila, personal communication, 2016). The filmmakers, who obviously

anticipated the problematic nature of their subject matter, hid his eyes in an act of self-censorship. Despite this precaution, the complaint led to an immediate ban prohibiting the screening the film, which was confiscated by authorities in Seville, Cádiz and Huelva (in April, 1981). Two months later, the film's circulation was prohibited across the country.

Figure 1. Screenshot of *Rocío*

Nevertheless, the film was scheduled to be shown in Pilas, a small village near Almonte. However, the conflict over the film and its content spilled onto the streets, as more than 300 signatures were collected to protest its screening, thereby claiming that the village would be removed from the *Rocío* pilgrimage trail.²⁷ Again, the warnings aroused concern and a sense of shame. The owner of the Murillo Cinema, who had planned to show the film, also received threats against both the movie house and himself. The distributors had been strictly warned against selling the film in western Andalusia, where Almonte is located. Despite the counter-collection of signatures that favoured the screening, the film was not shown. As it was barred from view, it fell into a marginalized place from which “truth” could not emerge.

The film's erasure from official channels of circulation and distribution is intimately connected with the *Foucauldian* idea regarding the disciplining of

enunciations described in previous paragraphs. In this context, censorship focuses, not on themes or contents, but on form. Interestingly, Article 6 of the decree abolishing censorship in Spain established that films with more than 50% archival images or with the same proportion of interviews, shows, surveys, reports or current events – in other words, documentaries – were not eligible for subsidies.²⁸ *Rocío*, and many similar films, could neither apply for funds nor be shown in cinemas. Such limitations operated at a more subtle level, traversing cinematographic production as a whole.

During the trial, seventeen elderly people from Almonte testified to the veracity of Gómez Clavijo's filmed testimony (del Río, 2013: 83). In addition, other intellectuals and historians, including Ian Gibson, rallied in support of the film and the testimonies it preserved. However, none of these testimonies were taken into account. In her description of the trial, Ana Vila described the presence of three very old, very Francoist judges and a "very right-wing 'whiff'" (personal communication, 2016). Many people connected to the new fascist party *Fuerza Nueva* also attended the trial (Ana Vila, personal communication, 2016). Interestingly, Vila and Vergara had conducted interviews with many of these individuals for various reasons when they had been living in Seville several years prior to the hearing. Forty or fifty people showed up at the trial with Francoist Spanish flags. Bocanegra, Vila and Vergara's lawyer instructed them not to leave the place alone (Ana Vilá, personal communication, 2016). When we

asked Ana Vila about the experience, she spoke directly and without hesitation: ‘I was so very afraid’ (2016, personal communication).

Finally, in September 1982, the Court in Seville ruled against the film: the footage regarding the perpetrator and the crimes that he had committed would have to be removed before the film could be screened again. In this form of censorship, judicial authorities required the elimination of scenes due to their specific content. Concurrently, both the filmmaker and scriptwriter were given a two-month prison sentence. Pedro Gómez Clavijo was also sentenced to four years, the extended length being due to a criminal record he held from the 1920s, and was required to retract the statement he made in the film. At the age of seventy-three, Gómez Clavijo was heard crying in the court’s public restroom, expressing his fear of going to jail. The exemplary nature of Clavijo’s sentence acted as a warning, a way to prevent people from exceeding the limits of correctness regarding specific issues in light of their potential consequences. As his lawyer said in court, “What we are judging here is not Pedro Clavijo, but the oral source of history, although I am afraid that, from now on, the inhabitants of Almonte will tell us less than they know” (quoted in del Río, 2013: 85). Espinosa Maestre was unsurprised by the attack on *Rocío*. In an interview, he stated, “For those who are critical of the Transition, [...] neither the military coup nor the attack against *Rocío* came as a surprise. Francoist power mechanisms remained intact and they weren’t going to change overnight”.

Finally, Vergara sought to take responsibility for the film in an appeal to the Supreme Court, which was rejected by Luis Vivas Marzal, a judge known for his support of Francoism. Indeed, in many ways, Marzal embodied the dictatorship's persistence throughout democracy by continuing to serve as a judge who acted to safeguard the impunity established during the Transition. The wording of his ruling is indicative of the institutional view and of the prevailing legal approach to the memory of the Spanish Civil War, which considered the conflict as non-political event, or 'fratricidal' war, that ought to be forgotten. In this sense, the war became the exclusive domain of those who were an authority on the subject:

'Even if it is true that the apparent objective of *Rocío* is exclusively a documentary (...) about the *Rocío* pilgrimage, it quickly gives way to an inappropriate and unfortunate reminder of the events that took place before and after 18 July 1936, where one of the fighting sides is ridiculed, forgetting that civil wars, as the fratricidal struggles that they are, leave behind them a trail of blood and circumstances – some heroic and others reprehensible – that must be buried and forgotten if we wish the survivors and the generations following the war to live together peacefully, harmoniously and in a conciliatory way. In this case, it is not appropriate to fan the embers of that fight to awaken resentments and hatreds deadened by the passing of time, without hindering rigorously historical and

impartial narratives not meant for ordinary people.’ (quoted in del Río, 2013: 105-106).

The edits made to the documentary, which set down the unthinkable in law by removing the image and name of José María Reales Carrasco, were maintained, guaranteed the perpetrator’s anonymity and enforcing the impunity granted by the Amnesty Law. By way of protest, Vergara used a black banner to indicate (Figure 2) where these cuts had been made. This clever strategy rendered visible what censorship wanted to keep secret, what it sought to confine to private or marginalized places and what it aimed to exclude from ongoing process of establishing a regime of truth. After the trial, Vergara chose to live in exile in Portugal. Both the director and his documentary were forgotten for many years.

Figure 2. Screenshot of *Rocío*

Contained remembrance: the exhumation of a mass grave in Casas de Don Pedro (1978)

Our second case is related to social memory practices, particularly those related to mass grave exhumations. In 1978, in Casas de Don Pedro, a small village of the southwestern province of Badajoz, Felisa Casatejada, together with her husband and other families, decided to exhume the remains of her two brothers. They had been killed, along with others, including members of the Republican Army, by Francoist forces in the concentration camp known as Las Boticarias in 1939.²⁹ They were subsequently buried in an unmarked mass grave in the olive grove that belonged to the estate where the camp was located. The civil governor from the province of Badajoz, as well as the person who owned the land where the grave was located, granted Felisa permission to carry out the exhumation. Both a curious detail and a sign of the times, the village mayor was not a democratically elected official, since the first local elections would not take place until 1979. No further institutional support was offered to carry out the exhumation, and the group were forced to bear the costs of the initiative themselves.

The exhumation in Casas de Don Pedro was not an isolated case. Despite widespread fear, an important number of people opened many of the Civil War's mass graves during the Transition in an attempt to unearth and recuperate the remains of those who had fallen victim to Francoist violence.³⁰ Understudied until recently,³¹ this phenomenon has not been analysed from a perspective that takes into account the

politics of memory during the Transition. Indeed, Transition-period exhumations are one example of how limits were imposed to acts of remembrance during this time. Here we have explored this issue in order to shed new light on the exhumation carried out in Casas de Don Pedro, thereby presenting new observations regarding the phase of exhumations that extended from the 1970s to the 1980s.

For many families, the death of Francisco Franco in 1975 appeared to be the appropriate moment for carrying out the burial rites that their loved ones had been denied since the 1930s. It was also the first time that these memories had broken its shroud of secrecy and irrupted onto public space. However, and despite the scale of the phenomenon, this wave of exhumations was mostly not covered by the Spanish media. Most mainstream newspapers and magazines chose not to report on this topic. An exception was the magazine *Interviú* – a tabloid magazine specialized in scandal, sensationalism and the publication of pictures of naked women – to which we will return in the paragraphs that follow. For now, it is worth noting that *Interviú* did receive threats, and some newsstands selling the magazine were burned in retaliation for its decision to address the phenomenon (Aguilar and Ferrándiz, 2016, p. 5). Regardless, the exhumations remained barely visible to the national sphere of media consumption; their visibility was restricted to local areas. Unlike the most recent wave of exhumations that started in 2000, the exhumations carried out during the 1970s and 1980s received no scientific or technical support. Consequently, there was no individual scientific

identification and, in most cases, the remains unearthed were simply reburied in a collective vault³².

The aim of these exhumations was finally to dignify the dead and to fulfil a process of burial and mourning that had been denied to Spain's war defeated during almost forty years. Those who organized the exhumation and reburial of their relatives faced multiple hardships in carrying out these projects. Some of these included the need to locate mass graves without having any precise information about them. Concurrently, they also had to resolve the dilemmas that arose within their own groups, such as whether to have a religious funeral. As we will see in the example below, compromise was essential to manage the exhumation and burial appropriately. But what mattered the most was to give the victims a decent grave and a place where they could be mourned and remembered.

The case of Casas de Don Pedro is highly representative of different characteristics that run through many of the exhumation initiatives that first emerged in the Transition, especially with regard to its appropriation of a combination of political and religious practices. The actions of the mayor and of the authorities are also indicative of the attitude that institutions assumed regarding memory initiatives at that time, which, we argue illustrates specific mechanisms related to containment. At the same time, this exhumation is exceptional because it encapsulates all these features of interest. In what was one of the first exhumations of the Transition period, Felisa

Casatejada, who played a central role in the collection of information and photographic documentation regarding the event, was integral to voicing what the exhumation meant from within the context of the Transition. It was also covered by the magazine *Interviú* while most cases were ignored by the media.

On 13 May 1978, people from Casas de Don Pedro began unearthing remains (Figure 3), which were then gathered together in three coffins. Felisa had contacted *Interviú*, and as a consequence a journalist travelled to the town to cover the exhumation. Two days later, the coffins were taken to the cemetery in a funeral procession. Felisa had been warned by the civil governor that the display of any explicit political symbol or message would lead to her imprisonment (Felisa Casatejada, 2015, personal communication). According to the report published in *Interviú*, rumours quickly spread. Some suggested that elderly people attending the procession would lose their pensions while others speculated over the arrival of an extreme-right “commando” who would prevent the ceremony from taking place. Nevertheless, the magazine article refers to the presence of 600 participants who participated in the procession to the cemetery (Catalán Deus, 1978). Felisa said she feared for her life and begged those attending not to scream political slogans (2015, personal communication). The Guardia Civil and the mayor were there to keep an eye on them. At the end of the ceremony, the remains were reburied in a collective vault (Figure 4).

Figure 3. Las Boticarias, May 1978. Picture provided by Felisa Casatejada.

Figure 4. Casas de Don Pedro, 1978. Picture provided by Felisa Casatejada.

Despite the threats and fear, political symbols were present and certain limitations were flouted. Indeed, participants, with their fists raised, appeared in pictures (Figure 5), and Socialist and Communist flags were laid on the coffins, which had been partly hidden during the procession by the flowers used to decorate the wooden boxes. (Figure 6). The red, yellow and purple colours of the flowers at the mausoleum were reminiscent of the Republican flag banished by Franco. After the funeral, those who remained at the cemetery sang the Internationale (Felisa Casatejada, 2015, personal communication). The fact that some participants ignored the threat points to the importance of these symbols and the need to remain faithful to their ideas as Felisa and the other relatives dignified the victims. In this sense, the networks of solidarity that existed between victims' families from across different villages were important because they gave these collective groups the necessary strength to carry out their initiatives. Scott even acknowledges these networks as "indispensable to sustain collective action" (1990: 151). Forming a community of victims gave them the confidence to act against a hegemonic discourse.

Figure 5. Las Boticarias, May 1978. Picture provided by Felisa Casatejada.

Figure 6. Casas de Don Pedro, May 1978. Picture provided by Felisa Casatejada.

Conflict was on the verge of breaking out. Graffiti that sought to shame Felisa, who was a butcher, appeared in the village: ‘The butcher’s sells ‘Red’ bones to make stew’ (Chaves, 2004, p. 303). After the exhumation, Felisa argued with the owner of Las Boticarias, where the grave was excavated. Illustrating the enduring nature of threats issued during the Transition, to this day, she does not go anywhere near the site, because the current owner, the wife of the former owner’s nephew, threatened to report her to the police if she did. Even now, despite media visibility, it is not necessarily easier for memory to emerge. The threats received and the fear felt reveal that, during the Transition, the very act of exhuming was an act of dissidence, particularly if it included left-wing symbols.

On the other hand, the procession was impregnated with customary cultural rituals. Both Felisa and other women wore black mourning dress, and the coffins entered the village church, only after the political flags had been removed (Figure 7). Felisa reiterated to those in attendance: ‘Everyone, please! No one must speak in here!

We cannot speak!’ (2015, personal communication). The church was the threshold that political symbols could not cross and where certain things could not be said. They were acts that would have been too conspicuous in a context marked by the hegemony of the discourse of consensus.

Figure 7. Casas de Don Pedro, May 1978. Picture provided by Felisa Casatejada.

The religious funeral was also part of attempts, on the part of victims’ kin, to publicly recognize the death of their relatives. It was also, therefore, part of the customary mourning process. It meant staking a claim to the same right that everyone else had to take mortal remains to the village cemetery where, as Felisa said, “[the killers] should have taken them after killing them [the victims]” (2015, personal communication). This was another important aspect of the dignification process and, above all, a moral imperative, guided by cultural customs.

However, in so doing, participant groups were also complying with the established order, an order that continued to confine them to the margins of public visibility, albeit more indirectly than during the dictatorship. They had to tacitly “agree” to concessions if they were not to surrender the opportunity to dignify their deceased loved ones. The exhumations show that, as seen above, certain limits on political correctness, regarding what could be done and how in the Transition context, were clearly observed.

Although the case of Casas de Don Pedro shows political confrontation, most Transition-period exhumations were an unobtrusive form of political struggle and a memory practice that, we suggest, acted as a subtle form of resistance to the “Pact of Oblivion”. They are, as James Scott puts it, a form of infrapolitics of the subordinate, a resistance that dares not speak in one’s own name (1990: 19). In general, the participants avoided direct clashes, while also trying to be true to the memory of the victims that they sought to honour in their tribute. As a result, they showed both resistance and compliance, with memories emerging, but confined within what were perceived to be the acceptable limits of the “Pact of Oblivion”.

In this case, Metz’s theory of cinema can also be applied to the different types of censorship that operated in this context. First came economic censorship, because the groups involved had to raise their own funds for the exhumations. Although, as in Casas de Don Pedro, councils often gave them a spot in the cemetery for the pantheon, they still had to rent a mechanical shovel and pay for the building, while the monument was and continues to be maintained by family members. In this sense, the practice of memory remains private, with no responsibility assumed by the State. It is worth recalling that, by contrast, after the Civil War, numerous Francoist victims were exhumed and reburied in dignified graves at the dictatorship’s expense, and within an official National-Catholic discourse of martyrdom (Box, 2010; Ferrándiz, 2014).

The second type of censorship is ideological: imposing the boundaries of the thinkable, which would have been overstepped by screaming “Long live the Republic!” during the procession in Casas de Don Pedro, for instance. Nor could left-wing flags be brought into the church. The mayor had also controlled what would be written on the vault’s commemorative plaque, by refusing to allow the inscription “Killed for being Reds”. He was, however, more understanding when he allowed Felisa to choose the site where the collective vault would stand: right in the axis of the entrance to the cemetery. In this sense, without direct repression or legal censorship, memory was more subtly contained.

These are examples of what could not cross the threshold of the thinkable during the Transition. Explicit symbols were not exposed and the authorities were there to make sure that these initiatives would not be too visible, that they would not spread too far³³ or, as they saw it, become a threat to the politics of reconciliation and the stability of the Transition.

For the main newspapers, publishing reports on exhumations was not appropriate within the hegemonic narrative of consensus. The fact that exhumations were actually relegated to what were considered less serious publications like *Interviú*, or publications, like local newspapers, that could reach much smaller audiences, reveals how discipline – in *Foucauldian* terms – was not necessarily imposed on content but, as we have seen, on form (Foucault, 2003: 184). *Interviú* was not part of the media that

created the regime of truth. Since these initiatives were only mediated in this form, the memory emerging from the exhumations was excluded from the hegemonic regime of truth.

Although such practices took place and counter-discourses to the “Pact of Oblivion” existed, the exhumation of unmarked mass graves could not emerge on a large scale because of the discretion, enforced directly and explicitly by the authorities, but also on a more private level, ensuring that common norms were fulfilled and that the standards of the Transition would not degenerate. Even if limitations were sometimes flouted, the mechanisms of containment nevertheless succeeded in confining this type of memory,³⁴ thereby preventing exhumations from becoming a broad, coordinated and visible movement until the year 2000.

Conclusion

Remembrance certainly emerged during the Spanish Transition. Both the documentary and the exhumation analyzed here show a shared need to face up to the legacy of a violent past and to create new narratives regarding that history. These initiatives gave the crimes of the Spanish Civil War an initial opportunity to be finally included in the Spanish regime of truth. However, as we have seen, these attempts were contained by mechanisms that operated at very different levels.

These mechanisms acted first at the macro level through the legal instruments that censored the documentary. The lack of public funding also hampered both exhumation and film production. Both strategies were an obstacle to the visibility of these memories. Their social impact was also mitigated by a disciplinarization of enunciations, which set them aside from “serious” mass media, as they were only featured in magazines with no authority regarding the hegemonic discourse.

The mechanisms also operated at the micro level. The threats against the owner of the cinema in Pilas; the inability to distribute the documentary in Andalusia; the fear felt by Ana Vila during the trial; the tears of Gómez Clavijo, the threats against Felisa; the rumours that were spread, the feeling of surveillance during the burial, among other instances, were indicative of the dangers involved in coming to terms with memory in Transition Spain.

In this context, remembrance was allowed as long as it did not disrupt the consensus established in the Transition. These two case studies allow us to deduce the limits imposed. In the documentary, it was unthinkable that the Catholic Church could be connected with war crimes or that the perpetrators could be publicly accused or brought to trial. And yet, neither the portraits of many victims, nor their names were removed from the footage. In the case of the exhumation, corpses were allowed to emerge, provided that left-wing political symbols were made less visible and political slogans were prohibited. The memory of the victims was permitted as long as it did not question the legal and moral authority of institutions like the Catholic Church or the impunity of the perpetrators who committed the crimes. Actions were permitted as long as they did not politicize memory, which might have contradicted a reconciliation discourse rooted in the equal distribution of political guilt in the war, and as long as they did not revive undesirable ideologies.

Following Sekula, we would argue that this negotiation was a relation of power within a questionable social contract. No such contract, or pact, existed, because the memory initiatives emerging at the grassroots level did not benefit from the devices and authority of the State, which created the mere illusion of negotiation, but with evident asymmetries in power.

We will conclude with two other developments related to our analysis. Firstly, in 2000, the first exhumation carried out with scientific means that also gained widespread

media visibility took place in Priaranza del Bierzo, triggering a new wave of exhumations across the country. Secondly, in 2014, a new documentary sought to resurrect the rejected *Rocío* and explain the controversy surrounding it was released. It was published with a book and the non-censored version of the original film. This recent emergence of memory is rooted in earlier memory initiatives marked by their scant visibility, including those carried out during the Transition.³⁵ The circumstances and reasons behind the emergence of these initiatives in the 21st century warrant thorough research. Even during the Transition, political power was unable to limit all of the initiatives that sought to address Spain's violent past. In other words, oblivion was never complete.

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NOTES

1 A first version of this paper was presented at the Fifth Annual Conference of the Dialogues on Historical Justice and Memory Network “The Politics of Memory: Victimization, Violence and Contested Narratives of the Past” with the title “Against the Politics of forgetting: the Invisibilization of the Spanish Civil War Crimes during the Transition and the Recent Emergence of Memory”. The conference was organized

by the Institute for the Studies of Human Rights and was held at Columbia University (New York City, United States) on 3-5 December 2015.

² The exact dates of the beginning and ending of the Transition are debatable, but it is generally agreed to have started with the death of Franco in 1975, or even earlier, and to have lasted until at least 1982 with the Socialist victory in the national general election.

³ Although also called “Pact of Silence”, we prefer the broader denomination “Pact of Oblivion”, as our analysis focuses especially on the rule of the visible regime.

⁴ See Foucault’s indications on how truth is not a universal statement but is rather situated in and related to culture, society and history within the specific interests of each epoch: “The truth is of this world; it is produced here thanks to multiple impositions. It has regulated effects of power here. Each society has its own regime of truth.” (Foucault, 1989: 187).

⁵ The corpses of the Civil War went through different necropolitical phases in what Francisco Ferrándiz coins their “afterlives” (2017). The dead bodies can be traced in a sort of “social autopsy”, revealing a process of “reciprocal impregnation” between the exhumed corpses and the social environment into which they return (Ferrándiz, 2011: 534).

⁶ See Foucault’s indications on how and where truth is created: “In societies like ours [...] the “truth” focuses on the form of scientific discourse and on the institutions that

produce it; it is produced and transmitted under the non-exclusive, but still dominant control of a few great political and economical devices (university, army, writing, media); in short, it is the heart of the question of an entire political debate and social confrontation ("ideological" battles)" (Foucault, 1989: 188).

⁷ The existence of such a pact has been debated. Santos Juliá talks of a “phantasmagoric pact of silence which it is now in good taste to blame for the faults of the Spanish democracy”(2007). Santos Juliá criticized Paloma Aguilar for using the “Pact of Oblivion” as an unquestioned notion explaining everything, and for her interpretation of the Amnesty Law, among other things (Juliá, 2007). Aguilar replied that her argument was in fact much more nuanced, and acknowledged that silence about the past was not complete (Aguilar, 2008c).

⁸ All translations of Spanish quotations are the authors’ own.

⁹ Comparing the Spanish case to others goes beyond the scope of this article. Nevertheless, the mass grave exhumations of the Transition have been studied in comparative perspective (de Kerangat, 2017).

¹⁰ 3,500 “violent facts” were committed and 715 individuals killed between Franco’s death in November 1975 and the election of the first Socialist government after the dictatorship in October 1982 (Baby, 2015: 77).

¹¹ An example is the massive assembly inside a church in Vitoria (Basque Country) in March 1976 that was brutally repressed by the police who shot participants and wounded almost a hundred people, ultimately killing five workers. An analysis of the afterlife of the images recorded during this repressive episode shows how the inherent violence of the Transition was intended to be remembered during democracy (Mateo Leivas, 2017).

¹² For the last five years, criticism has been aimed at the concept of CT (Cultura de la Transición), which describes a culture imposed from above that defined limits on the freedom of expression that have endured since the 1970s. During the Transition, critics claim, culture was deactivated for the sake of stability. It was no longer the battlefield of critical analysis it should have been (Martínez, 2012: 14–15).

¹³ We look at oblivion and its relationship to memory processes, as one of the facets linked to silenced episodes of the past. As Kansteiner puts it (2002: 195), historical representations are always negotiated and selective. A narrative of the past is the result of a deliberate selection between what is to be remembered and what is not. In this sense, forgetting and oblivion can be imposed (Connerton, 1989:12).

¹⁴ This idea of “sociological Francoism”, understood as the social support of the dictatorship, is explored in “El franquismo a ras de suelo” (2013).

¹⁵ “Sociological Francoism” could be linked to another recurrent expression during the Transition: “the silence of the majority”. It refers to those who supported Francoism because they were directly involved with the winners of the war, had benefitted from it, or simply agreed with Francoist values. Leaders of the dictatorship used the expression to praise the uncomplaining part of society that ultimately allowed the memory of the losers to be contained during the Transition. Nor should we forget the many Francoist leaders who remained in politics during the democratic period.

¹⁶ Initially, the memory of the Civil War was very visible and was used as a deterrent and a situation to be avoided at all costs (Aguilar, 2008b: 252; Molinero, 2010: 45).

¹⁷ The cultural sphere was very productive in addressing issues related to the Civil War and the dictatorship (Juliá, 2003). Examples include six volumes about postwar Spanish exile published by Taurus (Abellán, 1976), and *El cuarto de atrás*, published by Carmen Martín Gaité in 1978. An exhibition on the Civil War was organized by the Ministry of Culture and curated by historian Ángel Vías and Francoist historian Ramón Salas in 1980 (Espinosa Maestre, 2007), but its narrative failed to mention the victims.

¹⁸ See the case of Concha Jerez, an artist who produced a piece called “*Sumario de un proceso político*” in 1974, followed by “*Desarticulación de un partido político clandestino*”. She ended this series with “*Autocensura*” (1976). Its title expressed the

paradoxical sensation of being unable to produce critical, reflexive art in the political environment of the Transition (Desacuerdos 3, 2005: 139-140). Other artists, like Francesc Torres, Antoni Muntadas, Eulàlia Grau or the Zaj group were forced to live outside Spain to maintain a critical stance towards their artistic production. Others, like Francesc Abad, who had made pieces about torture (1976), were neglected for many years in the artistic world.

¹⁹ Francisco Espinosa, José Luis Tirado and Ángel del Río researched the film thoroughly in a book published together with the uncensored version of *Rocío* in 2013. Tirado also made a documentary called *El caso Rocío*. Much of the information used in this section refers to that work. We also interviewed *Rocío*'s scriptwriter, Ana Vila, who helped us understand the feelings and fears of the time. She provided us with more information about the trial linked to the film and previous work made by Vergara and Vila. We were unable to interview Fernando Ruiz Vergara who passed away in 2011.

²⁰ There were at least 100 people killed in Almonte at the beginning of the war. The documentary names many of them and even uses their nicknames.

²¹ José María Reales Carrasco was a landowner and the mayor during Primo de Rivera's dictatorship. According to the documentary, he was the main culprit of the Almonte slaughter at the beginning of the war (1936). His portrait appears twice in the film. On

the second occasion, when the image is used to accuse him, his eyes are covered with a black band.

²² *Rocío* has recently been screened at many memory events. In one of them, Emilio Silva met Vergara. Silva told us that, instead of drinking like the others, Vergara was eating a yogurt. For Silva, “this was a sign of his precarious life in the Portuguese village where he went to live after all the suffering and pain that the prosecution of the film caused him” (2017, personal communication).

²³ During late Francoism and throughout the Transition, a new wave of documentaries appeared in a process intimately connected with the increasing politicization of society and the emergence of social movements. Those documentaries focused on social and political struggles while questioning the Transition process itself and its evolution. Films like *El desencanto* (Jaime Chávarri, 1976), *Votad, votad malditos* (Llorenç Soler, 1977), *La vieja memoria* (Jaime Camino, 1979), *Después de...* (Bartolomé, 1981) are good examples. Laura López Vaquero’s “Las voces del cambio. La palabra en el documental durante la Transición en España” (2012) is also a good source for further examples of political documentary films made in Spain during that time.

²⁴ Metz argues that, while conventional censorship reduces dissemination and while commercial censorship affects production, ideological censorship particularly jeopardizes creativity and innovation (Metz, 1970: 18).

²⁵ The film was selected by the Ministry of Culture to participate in the Venetian Film Festival together with *Ópera Prima* (Fernando Trueba). It also participated in and won the Seville Film Festival (Del Río, 2013: 80).

²⁶ *Rocío* was not the only film with legal problems. Joaquín Jordá's *Numax presenta* (1979) was confiscated by the Ministry of Culture after the attempted *coup d'état* of 1981. It was controversial, as it recorded some sectors of society and their high levels of dissatisfaction with the government (Cerdán, 2008). Another case is the documentary "Después de" (1981) by Cecilia Bartolomé and José Juan Bartolomé. The criticism voiced by those interviewed and the tension shown in the film led authorities to confiscate it and to postpone its premiere until November 1983.

²⁷ The Almonte Brotherhood told the Pilas council that if they went ahead with the screening, the Virgin would "turn her back" on the village when the parade came through (del Río, 2013: 82).

²⁸ The law also established that screenings would be divided into two categories: special and commercial. Films designed to be shown at special screenings could not receive any subsidies or protection from the State. (Alvarado, 2013: 71-74)

²⁹ For more information on the history of repression in Las Boticarias, see the work of Fernando Barrero Arzac: <https://fbarreroarzac.wordpress.com/2016/09/14/represalia->

[ejemplar-de-los-prisioneros-de-la-109a-brigada-mixta-en-el-olivar-del-cortijo-casa-de-la-boticaria-badajoz/](#)

³⁰ One of the authors is currently working on a research project studying those exhumations. As far as we know, there were more than a hundred of them.

³¹ Nevertheless, there are several works published about these exhumations. Although they are not the main focus of his book, Francisco Ferrándiz published a chapter (pp.143-203) on the pre-2000 exhumations in *El pasado bajo tierra*. Emilio Silva also mentions a few in *Las fosas de Franco*. Paloma Aguilar and Leigh Payne (2016) refer to the topic in *Revealing new truths about Spain's violent past*. Aguilar and Ferrándiz have published an article about *Interviú's* coverage of the exhumations. The book edited by Julián Chaves includes Felisa Casatejada's testimony regarding the events in Casa de Don Pedro. Laura Muñoz's PhD thesis provides a lot of information about exhumations carried out before 2000 in Extremadura, although her focus is on contemporary ones, including the exhumation of Casas de Don Pedro presented here. In short, the Transition phase of exhumations is now being explored, although further research is still necessary.

³² This aspect points to the importance of community for both victims and relatives of the dead: those who died together had to remain together, and the relatives of the victims stood united throughout this collective initiative.

³³ The exhumation in Las Boticarias was followed by others in the province of Badajoz, but the media and political impact they had at the state level was very limited. More information on these exhumations in Badajoz is available in Laura Muñoz's thesis: "De la exhumación de cuerpos al conocimiento histórico. Análisis de la represión irregular franquista a partir de la excavación de fosas comunes en Extremadura (1936-1948)", pp.44-52.

³⁴ Authors like Marije Hristova (2007: 44–45) or Emilio Silva (2017, personal communication) have argued that the attempted coup on 23 February 1981 had a considerable impact on mass grave exhumations and that the number of exhumations plummeted afterwards due to the psychological and social effects of a revived fear. However, according to Francisco Ferrándiz (2014: 165) and ongoing research, it is not completely clear whether this event really stopped the wave of exhumations. Regardless, its impact is undeniable.

³⁵ We are currently working on a paper which analyses the social, political and cultural conditions of the recent emergence of memory involving these cases.

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