

Revis(it)ing the Past: Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation in Post-Franco Spain, a Review-Article (Second Part)

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REVIS(IT)ING THE PAST: TRUTH, JUSTICE, AND RECONCILIATION IN POST-FRANCO SPAIN, A REVIEW-ARTICLE (SECOND PART)

- JAVIER CERCAS. *Soldados de Salamina*. Madrid: Tusquets, 2001. 209 pp.
- DULCE CHACÓN. *La voz dormida*. Madrid: Alfaguara, 2002. 387 pp.
- TOMASA CUEVAS. *Testimonios de mujeres en las cárceles franquistas*. Ed. Jorge J. Montes Salguero. Huesca: Instituto de Estudios Altoaragoneses, 2004. 913 pp.
- CARME MOLINERO, MARGARIDA SALA, and JAUME SOBREQUÉS, eds. *Una inmensa prisión. Los campos de concentración y las prisiones durante la guerra civil y el franquismo*. Barcelona: Crítica, 2003. xxiv + 358 pp.
- JAVIER RODRIGO. *Los campos de concentración franquistas*. Madrid: Siete Mares, 2003. 251 pp.
- JORDI SIERRA I FABRA. *El tiempo del exilio I. Los años oscuros*. Barcelona: Planeta, 2002. 436 pp.
- JORDI SIERRA I FABRA. *El tiempo del exilio II. Los años de la espera*. Barcelona: Planeta, 2003. 352 pp.
- JORDI SIERRA I FABRA. *El tiempo del exilio III. Los años rojos*. Barcelona: Planeta, 2003. 333 pp.
- EMILIO SILVA, ASUNCIÓN ESTEBAN, JAVIER CASTÁN, and PANTO SALVADOR, eds. *La memoria de los olvidados. Un debate sobre el silencio de la represión franquista*. Valladolid: Ámbito, 2004. 219 pp.
- ANDRÉS TRAPIELLO. *Días y noches*. Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 2000. 285 pp.
- Exilio*. Dir. PEDRO CARVAJAL and JULIO MARTÍN CASAS. Planeta D, 2002. 114 min.
- Les fosses del silenci*. Dir. MONTSE ARMENGOU and RICARD BELIS. 30 Minuts/Televisió de Catalunya, 2003. 62 min.
- La guerrilla de la memoria*. Dir. JAVIER CORCUERA. Planeta D, 2002. 71 min.
- Els nens perduts del franquisme*. Dir. MONTSE ARMENGOU and RICARD BELIS. 30 Minuts/Televisió de Catalunya, 2002. 94 min.

OVER the past half decade, Spain's way of viewing its history since 1936 has been changing considerably. With increasing success and resonance, younger generations of scholars, intellectuals, and citizens have been denouncing the "pact of silence" that they believe marked the first twenty-five years of post-Francoist democracy, and that, they claim, made it difficult if not impossible to address the true nature of Francoist repression during and after the Civil War. An important role in this changing view of the past has been played by a large number of new books, films, and documentaries about the Civil War and its aftermath – exile, executions, prisons, and concentration camps – addressing topics and issues that until recently were not or barely discussed in public. In an earlier essay I reviewed some of these recent books and films, focusing on

the role of peace and memory in transitions to democracy.¹ Here I will continue these reflections, concentrating on the notions of truth, justice, and reconciliation.

TRUTH

Many of the books and films mentioned above derive their rhetorical power from the notion that they present important truths that have long been hidden or ignored. They claim to tell the reading and viewing public something important it did not know: newly discovered proofs; facts that might have been common knowledge among specialists but not among others; puzzle pieces that had not been put together; and testimonies that no one ever heard before. Among the nonfiction pieces about the Francoist repression – whether documentaries, collections of testimonies, or scholarly studies – three things stand out right away. First, the sheer shock value of the facts presented, both in terms of numbers and the level of cruelty inflicted on the victims. Thus Javier Rodrigo proves that there were more than 100 stable (as opposed to provisional) concentration camps, which together held between 367,000 and 500,000 prisoners. The testimonies gathered by Tomasa Cuevas in the 1970s, now available in one volume, contain episodes of extreme atrocity, of mental and physical abuse many times inflicted by the nuns who ran the women's prisons. The documentary *Els nens perduts del franquisme*, produced by Montse Armengou and Ricard Belis for Televisió de Catalunya, helped disseminate Ricard Vinyes's discovery that the Francoist state not only granted itself custody over some 30,000 children of *rojos* – partly based on a theory developed by the psychiatrist Antonio Vallejo Nágera, who argued that these children should be saved from the “degenerative environment” of their leftist parents – but that a number of them were illegally adopted by Francoist families.²

A second remarkable aspect is the resilience of the survivors. Most of the interviewed victims of Francoist repression have tenaciously held on to their political ideas. Several of Cuevas's witnesses returned to their clandestine party work immediately after being released from prison, and even now remain faithful to the politics of their youth. Some of the children who were taken from their parents at a young age and submitted to decades' worth of Francoist indoctrination, nevertheless grew up to be staunch leftists. Francisca Aguirre, who was separated from her father and sister and put in an orphanage, where the nuns told her what precise day her “criminal” father would be shot, remarks in *Els nens perduts* that the regime tried desperately to kill off the left's political dissidence, but that the nuns were right to suspect that the children of the *rojos* would end up thinking like their parents: “tanto mi hermana Susi y yo y la pequeña seguimos pensando lo mismo. Es decir, tenían razón, nosotros somos mala semilla.” Similarly, in spite of decades of imposed muteness, the victims' memories of their traumas are still vivid and right below the surface of their silence. This persistence of both memory and ideology illustrates the ultimate

¹ See the previous issue of *RHM* (Volume 58, June-December 2005).

² See Vinyes's essay in *Una inmensa prisión*.

failure of Francoist repression, whose main goal, as Carme Molinero writes in her introduction to the excellent collection *Una inmensa prisión*, “no era tan sólo castigar, sino, sobre todo, doblegar y transformar” (xix).

The third most noteworthy aspect of these nonfiction accounts is the level of denial among the perpetrators, their accomplices, and their descendants. This is especially true for *Els nens perduts*, whose critical force is largely derived from its editing, which consistently juxtaposes victims’ testimonies – backed up with statements by scholars – with footage from Francoist propaganda films, whose falsity becomes all too obvious. But while most of the narrative focuses on the victims, at a couple of key moments we hear the opinion of Mercedes Sanz-Bachiller – the Falangist widow who after her husband’s death would help set up Franco’s largest charity organization, Auxilio Social, inspired by Hitler’s *Winterhilfe* – trying to dispute some of the evident facts we have just heard. Is it true – she is asked – that the Francoist state routinely took children from their mothers by force, housing them in orphanages and letting them be illegally adopted by Francoist families? “En la España de Franco no ha habido tutela de parte del Estado,” Sanz-Bachiller says. “... No creo, ¿usted cree que ha habido? ... Ha habido deseos de que [esos niños] se incorporasen en la España Nacional. Pero ... ¿retirarlos de la familia? Eso no.” Were the children of *rojos* in the orphanages submitted to an inhumanely strict regime, with customary cruel punishment? Sanz-Bachiller is appalled by the idea: “El trato directo [con los niños] era generalmente por [miembros] de la Sección Femenina, ... por *mujeres* españolas. ¿Usted cree que hay alguna ... muchacha ... que sea capaz de tratar mal a un niño por una cuestión de discriminación política? ... ¿Usted cree que puede hacerles algún daño? No me lo creo.” Similarly, in *Les fosses del silenci*, a documentary by the same producers as *Els nens* about Francoist repression during the Civil War and recent attempts to dig up the remains of its victims, the interviewed conservatives do not show themselves from their best side. “Estos rojos de ahora,” Victoria Esteban says, “no sé qué afán tienen, de revolver, de tergiversar la historia, ... de envenenar, porque eso es lo que están haciendo. Es una campaña orquestada por el diablo ... Están metiendo el dedo en las llagas, lo están todo estropeando.”

In spite of their combative rhetorics of truth and denunciation, though, these nonfiction accounts are not without their problems. In the testimonies, memories are distorted and easily acquire a mythical quality. But this tension between historical fact and personal remembrance is not always sufficiently acknowledged, especially when the witnesses’ voices appear in a sentimentalized context.³ In the second place, the agenda of the authors, scriptwriters, and directors sometimes leads to over-evident gaps and exaggerations. Thus *Exilio*, a documentary about post-Civil War exiles, not only skirts all controversy, but also gives a disproportionate amount of attention to the Socialist party at the expense of the Communists, Republicans, and Anarchists. The Catalan documentaries, in turn, clearly relish the opportunity to accuse the centralist government. And as Bermejo and Checa have pointed out, other documentaries sponsored by autonomous regional governments have tended to grant

³ For a discussion of this issue, see the essay by Carles Feixa and Carme Agustí in *Una inmensa prisión*.

priority to a sentimentalist kind of local pride over historical accuracy (75-76). Rigor, it seems, is hard to come by in a public sphere as politicized as the Spanish one, where a book like Pío Moa's *Los mitos de la guerra civil* (2003), which combatively recycles Francoist readings of the war, can not only become a best-seller but also be recommended by the Prime Minister.

This does not mean, though, that a scholar's agenda or commitment necessarily has to affect her rigor. Javier Rodrigo's *Los campos de concentración franquistas*, which covers the history of Francoist camps from 1936 to 1942, shows that the opposite can be true as well. Written from a perspective of clear solidarity with the victims – the book opens with a short narrativized account of the terrible conditions in the Valencian “Campo de los almendros” – the study seeks to be a rigorous counterweight to the dozens of journalistic pieces on Francoist repression. All this media attention, Rodrigo argues, “obliga a tratar estos temas con el máximo rigor ...: es necesario partir de la reconstrucción histórica, de la documentación, de las fuentes orales y autobiográficas...” (17).

For Rodrigo, it is crucial that individual and collective memories be incorporated into the historiography of Francoist repression. While recently opened military archives are very helpful to get a sense of the numbers of camps and prisoners, for example, they present a very “cleaned-up” camp world. The victims' memories constitute “la fuente para cubrir el vacío que se establece entre el discurso de la burocracia y la administración y el de la vida cotidiana en los campos de concentración” (19). As a whole, Rodrigo's well-written study provides a balanced analysis of the birth and evolution of Spanish concentration camps. It shows how the Spanish *mundo concentracionario* was characterized on the one hand by a strictly bureaucratic organization, with classifications of prisoners into four categories (A, B, C, and D), concerted re-education programs and a highly profitable outsourcing of prison labor. On the other hand, it was marked by improvisation, arbitrariness, and chaos, as the numbers of prisoners far exceeded the capacities of Franco's Inspección de Campos de Concentración de Prisioneros (ICCP), founded in the summer of 1937.⁴

In the same way that, as Naharro-Calderón points out, there is no universal historical memory to be “recuperated” (“Trenes” 102), there are of course many different kinds of truth. The objective, impersonal truth of the historian is not necessarily more valuable than the subjective lived truth of a victim. Here the issue of genre is crucial. To return to the objections formulated against Santos Juliá's claim that Spain has no problem talking about its past, the task of “recuperating memory” is not limited to scholarly historiography. Registering the subjective voices of the victims' personal narratives is just as important, and the recent flood of publications is beginning to provide a space for them. “[L]a memoria,” Carme Molinero writes, “es una de las pocas herramientas que tienen las víctimas para reivindicar justicia cuando el daño ya no tiene remedio” (*Inmensa prisión* xxii).⁵

⁴ A summary of Rodrigo's study appears in *Una inmensa prisión*.

⁵ South African Justice Albie Sachs, one of the intellectual forces behind the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), distinguishes four different kinds of truth: microscopic truth, the correct answer to a set of narrow questions; logical truth (as in two and two makes four); experiential truth, emerging from an individual's interactive, social experience; and dialogic truth, which is the ever-changing result of “people arguing debating with, listening to each other” (61-62).

Besides historiography and testimony, though, one of the most remarkable aspects of the *moda de la memoria* currently keeping Spain captive is the tremendous popularity of *fictional* memory. Here the notion of truth becomes even more problematic. The Spanish Civil War has of course always inspired fiction writers; and there is no reason to dismiss fictional accounts, even from a historiographic standpoint. There are ways in which the Civil War novels by Max Aub, Ramón Sender or Mercè Rodoreda give a “truer” account of the war than many a rigorously researched historical study. As María Campillo argues in her essay on literary and fictionalized memory of life in prisons and concentration camps, sometimes fiction is the most “faithful” or authentic of available genres to represent an otherwise inexpressible experience,⁶ in part because literary narrative “puede multiplicar los puntos de vista mediante la focalización de una variedad de personajes” (*Inmensa prisión* 244).

But Aub, Rodoreda, and the authors mentioned by Campillo actually *lived* the war and repression, and even if they did not witness the events they narrate, they do belong to the community that remembers them collectively. More recent fictional accounts about the victims of the Civil War, exile, and Francoism, by contrast, are by younger writers at least two generations removed from the historical experience. The authors’ relative outsider status, the sensitivity of the topic, and the little exposure that the accounts of the real victims have had, raise difficult questions. Do these novelists have the *right* to write about the victims, assuming their voices and appropriating – and, through book sales, profiting by – their traumas? More importantly, can their accounts also be “true” in the sense that Aub’s and Rodoreda’s are? Here I will consider four examples, all bestsellers: Andrés Trapiello’s *Días y noches* (2000), set during the last days of the war and the first months of exile; Javier Cercas’s *Soldados de Salamina* (2001), which recounts the fate of a prominent Falangist intellectual who was saved from death by a Republican; Dulce Chacón’s *La voz dormida* (2002), an account of life in a women’s prison in post-war Spain; and Jordi Sierra i Fabra’s 1,100-page trilogy *El tiempo del exilio* (2002-03), which follows the lives of three families from the moment of their exile in 1939 to Mexico through the late 1970s.

That the topic brings up questions of legitimacy is clear from the fact that all four authors somehow feel they have to defend their take on the subject. All four claim to have done extensive research, and have stated in different forms that they were inspired to write their books by a combination of admiration and solidarity.⁷ Still, the legitimacy and truth value of their texts has been ques-

⁶ To that effect she quotes Jorge Semprún – “únicamente el artificio de un relato dominado conseguirá transmitir parcialmente la verdad del testimonio” (*Inmensa prisión* 239) – and Imre Kertész: “sólo con la ayuda de la imaginación estética somos capaces de crear una imaginación real del holocausto, de esa realidad inconcebible e inextricable” (241). Similarly, Rosa Regàs states: “la memoria se recupera no sólo a partir de la investigación, sino también a partir de la creación; es decir, a partir del arte” (*Memoria de los olvidados* 69).

⁷ Dulce Chacón has written for instance: “El protagonismo de la mujer no se ha conocido. Yo quiero rendir homenaje a estas mujeres, que perdieron la guerra y la posguerra. Recoger sus voces, que han sido condenadas al silencio, y hablar de las protagonistas que lucharon por un mundo mejor. Por eso escribí una novela ... construida a partir de testimonios orales. ... Creo que un país sin memoria es un país enfermo, como un hombre sin memoria es un hombre enfermo” (*Memoria de los olvidados* 77).

tioned on several counts – most immediately in terms of their historical accuracy. In Sierra i Fabra's case, the claim to accuracy is almost entirely limited to the novels' backdrop, since both the protagonists and the plot are completely fictional.⁸ But even Sierra's backdrop is marred by anachronistic slips: In *Los años oscuros* we see Max Aub entering a Mexican café in 1939, but he didn't arrive in Mexico until 1942.⁹

More interesting than slips like these, though, are the novels' express attempts at revisionism or at least demythification of the Republicans' self-image as disinterested fighters for utopian ideals. Both Trapiello and Sierra i Fabra, for instance, give an account of the trans-Atlantic boat passage of the first large group of exiles to Mexico, on the *Sinaia*, that is much more negative and disenchanted than the version registered in the official annals of the Republican exile community. In the case of Sierra i Fabra, there is an even stronger contrast between his fast-written and fast-reading saga of the four families and the official account of the exiles' fate in Mexico. In Sierra's story, the impassioned Communist Ramón Alcaraz is a stubborn and grudge-bearing man who, quickly contaminated by the Mexican environment, becomes a hopelessly corrupted capitalist. Ismael Puig, a survivor from Mauthausen unable to deal with his traumas, turns into a wife-beating alcoholic; and Berta Aguirre, a Republican woman whose husband went missing in the war, first becomes a dancer in a night club and then the poised *Madame* of Mexico City's most prestigious brothel. The only character who manages to remain true to himself is Valeriano Puig, a liberal journalist who very quickly understands that the Spaniards have come to Mexico to stay. *El tiempo del exilio* has been compared to a soap opera, and rightly so. The characters are driven less by ideas than by love, lust, greed, and envy; and the author does not shun stylistic cliché. The only complexity to the novel's structure are moments at which the omniscient narration is interrupted by a dialogue, set in the present, between the narrator and a listener – although these interchanges are mostly used to bridge the ellipses of the plot, to advance some proleptic teasers, and to proclaim a series of middlebrow life truths.

While Dulce Chacón's *La voz dormida* is similar to *El tiempo del exilio* in the sentimentality of its style, it is written with much more respect for its characters. Set in the Ventas prison of Madrid between the late 1930s and mid-1960s, and based on four years of research and interviews with survivors, it tells the story of a group of women as they live, suffer, and die in captivity. The narrator has a strong affective attachment to the women, and the reader's identification is further encouraged by the frequent use of free indirect discourse. Although the narrator's compassionate stance has a slight patronizing effect, in the end the tear-jerking melodrama of the stories does not affect their authenticity and only slightly compromises their ethical force. Readers familiar with the women's testimonies gathered by Tomasa Cuevas will recognize characters and

⁸ As I have noted elsewhere, Sierra's book has led to at least one indignant reaction from the exile community ("Entre el respeto" 41).

⁹ Naharro has also noted the historical inappropriateness of the novel's cover photo, on which we see a well-dressed family waving goodbye to a steamboat pulling out of the harbor ("Trenes" 107).

episodes; but in a sense, Chacón rescues the victim's voices by casting them in a more accessible fictional mold, much more likely than Cuevas's original work to enjoy wide dissemination.

The novels by Trapiello and Cercas are literarily more ambitious than those of Sierra and Chacón. Both are based on the conceit of the found manuscript, and both introduce the authors themselves into the fictional framework – tricks that, given the sensitivity of the material, makes them vulnerable to charges of historical falsification. Trapiello's *Días y noches* is the diary written by Justo García, a working-class Republican soldier, a document the author claims to have stumbled upon in the archives of the Fundación Pablo Iglesias. Beginning in the last days of the war, it recounts García's struggle for survival as he travels to the north and crosses the French border, is detained in a concentration camp, lives in poverty in Paris, and finally makes it onto the *Sinaia*, bound for exile in Mexico.

Días y noches is largely a story of disenchantment, in two distinct senses. First, it registers the Republicans' loss of hope and illusion, as they realize that three years of struggle and sacrifice turn out to have been for nothing. As García catches his first glimpse of the mass of disheveled Republican soldiers in retreat, he writes: "ahora va a empezar nuestra verdadera derrota. Mientras luchábamos éramos un ejército. A partir de aquí no somos nada. Menos aún que nada" (47). Secondly, though, the novel also paints a disenchanted – or at least critical – picture of the Republican camp as a whole. While García still believes that he has lived "momentos importantísimos para la Humanidad" and has fought "por la Justicia, por la Libertad, por el Hombre," he also realizes that the Republicans, especially the Communists, are anything but saints. Thus we see García's frustrated fellow soldiers commit repulsively immoral acts, ranging from pillage to the murder of innocent troops and civilians. García's role in these episodes shifts between that of a disgusted, but passive, onlooker and that of a guilt-stricken accomplice. When the ruthless Communist Barreno causes the shooting of a young boy who tries to avoid conscription, García calls it an "acto de barbarie." In Tarancón, while sleeping in the bed of a rich man murdered by Anarchists earlier that same day, he finds a golden watch and decides to keep it; but later he realizes with remorse that his father – a moderate socialist "de Pablo Iglesias" – would have disapproved (36). In spite of his desperation, then, García represents a last bastion of decency and sanity in the chaotic last throes of a barbaric war. Although the novel does not discredit the Republican cause as such, it does suggest that not all its purported defenders were worthy of its noble slogans.

Cercas's *Soldados de Salamina* immediately became a tremendous critical and commercial success. It has by now sold more than half a million copies in Spanish alone and inspired an equally successful feature film directed by David Trueba. The novel introduces a struggling writer by the name of Javier Cercas (but eight years older than the real-life author) who, working as a journalist, becomes obsessed with the remarkable story of Rafael Sánchez-Mazas, one of the founders of the Spanish Falange. Arrested while trying to flee Republican Madrid, Sánchez-Mazas formed part of a group of prisoners executed in the last days of the war; but miraculously the bullets missed him and he managed to escape. While the Republicans are hunting for him, he is discovered by a

soldier who, nevertheless, yells to his colleagues *¡Por aquí no hay nadie!*, effectively saving the Falangist's life. The novel is the story of the narrator's hunt for this soldier, trying to understand what might have moved him to spare Sánchez-Mazas.

A novel about novel writing as much as about the war, one of *Soldados'* overarching themes is the idea that the dead live on as long as we continue telling and hearing their stories – even if those stories are more faithful to the conventions of plot and narrative than to historical reality. As the text progresses, the narrator realizes that it is less important to tell Sánchez-Mazas's story – which, after all, was well-known – than that of his saviors: Miralles, the anonymous Republican soldier who later became a French resistance hero, and the three boys who helped the Falangist survive for several days in the woods. In the end, the Cercas character decides to write the novel to honor *their* memory: “mientras yo contase su historia Miralles seguiría de algún modo viviendo ...” (208).

Soldados, which presents itself oxymoronically as “un relato real,” masterfully blends fact and fiction, maintaining a subtle epistemological ambiguity throughout. But, as Naharro-Calderón has pointed out, politically it is subtly ambiguous, too (“Memorias” 10). To be sure, Cercas's narrator admires the Republican Miralles and holds a visceral contempt for Franco, a “militarote gordezuelo, afeminado, incompetente, astuto y conservador” (Cercas 86). But one of the main reasons of this contempt is what the narrator sees as Franco's self-interested appropriation and corruption of the ideals of the Spanish Falange – which, by contrast, is construed as pure, masculine, and revolutionary. The narrator, it seems, can't help but sympathize with Sánchez-Mazas, “poeta exquisito” (103), and admire the passion of his political convictions, which in the early thirties “aún poseían una flamante sugestión de modernidad”:

Por entonces a José Antonio le gustaba mucho citar una frase de Oswald Spengler, según la cual a última hora siempre ha sido un pelotón de soldados el que ha salvado la civilización. Por entonces los jóvenes falangistas sentían que eran ese pelotón de soldados. Sabían (o creían saber) que sus familias dormían un inocente sueño de beatitud burguesa, ignorantes de que una ola de impiedad y de barbarie igualitaria iba a despertarlas de golpe con un tremendo fragor de catástrofe. Sentían que su deber consistía en preservar por la fuerza la civilización y evitar la catástrofe. (86)

Elsewhere in the novel, the narrator speculates that many Falangists never would have embraced fascism if it had not been for the fact that they sincerely felt their existence threatened by leftist egalitarianism; “en el fondo nunca acabaron de creer del todo que su ideario fuera otra cosa que un expediente de urgencia en tiempos de confusión” (136).

Interestingly, the narrator thus advances two potential, though mutually contradictory, arguments that would help exculpate Sánchez-Mazas and his ilk. On the one hand, we are told that he was complicit in the violence but that his ideals were pure, like those of his fellow leading Falangist Ridruejo, who was “un hombre que se equivocó muchas veces, pero que siempre fue limpio y valiente y puro en lo puro” (128-29). On the other hand, the narrator suggests that Sánchez-Mazas was complicit, but that he never truly believed in what he

said (138). Naturally, the narrator never loses sight of the Falangists' political responsibility, and thus never allows himself to become an apologist for Spanish fascism,¹⁰ but his ambiguous explanations of their actions bring him at times strangely close to a form of justification: "Quizá," he concludes toward the end of the novel's second part, Sánchez-Mazas "no era otra cosa que un superviviente" (139) – a writer whose descent into politics, and whose paradoxical shame of victory, ruined a promising literary career.

Early in the novel, the narrator transcribes an article he wrote for the newspaper about the Machado brothers and Sánchez-Mazas, in which he calls attention to the fact that Antonio and Manuel Machado, though intimate friends, ended up in opposite political camps simply because Manuel happened to be in Burgos when the Civil War broke out; Cercas insinuates that the same could have happened to Antonio. An indignant reader accuses him of "revisionism," a charge that the narrator shrugs off. And yet, *Soldados de Salamina* has a revisionist flavor to it, less because it attempts to understand and explain the motivations of Falangism than because of the way it construes the relationship between literature, humanity, and politics. While political ideals are shown to exert a tremendous force on human actions, they are always, in the end, seen as fundamentally extraneous and inferior to both art and life. Sánchez-Mazas, we learn, let himself be forced into politics by circumstances, at the expense of his literature. And the pivotal moment of the novel – when the Republican soldier discovers Sánchez-Mazas, looks him in the eye, and decides to save his life – is construed as a triumph of humanity over politics. The novel's more general message seems to be that, in the end, there is something fundamentally contingent about political positions, and that therefore politics should never trump our sense of shared humanity. On the face of it, this is a laudatory moral stance. But as it is being presented by Cercas it also depoliticizes human existence: It is one step removed from the idea that if it were not for politics, we would all live in harmony. Or more specifically, if the working classes had remained content with their lot in the 'thirties, Sánchez-Mazas and his friends would have never had to organize a fascist party and unleash so much violence.

Cercas's delinking of life and politics is interestingly similar to a recent revisionist account of the Civil War by the historian Michael Seidman. In his provocative book *Republic of Egos* (2002), Seidman argues that, with the exception of their leaders, most of the people on the Republican side did not fight for ideals but for much more limited, egocentric motives. "Many if not most workers, peasants, and soldiers," Seidman writes, "were not militants but rather opportunists who joined the parties and unions of the militants not from conviction but rather because a party or union card was needed to get jobs, food,

¹⁰ After pointing out that Sánchez-Mazas, disappointed with Francoism, gradually withdrew from public life, he states: "Esto no significa, sin embargo, que Sánchez-Mazas fuera en los años cuarenta y cincuenta una suerte de silencioso opositor al franquismo: sin duda despreciaba la chatura y la mediocridad que el régimen le había impuesto a la vida española, pero no se sentía incómodo en él, ni vacilaba en proferir en público los más sonrojantes ditirambos del tirano ... y por supuesto tampoco lamentaba haber contribuido con todas sus fuerzas a encender la guerra que arrasó una república legítima sin conseguir por ello implantar el temible régimen de poetas y condotieros renacentistas con el que había soñado ..." (134).

and health care. ... Even the famous *milicianos* ... often had a shaky commitment to the cause" (11-12). More than by solidarity and conviction, the Republican side was dominated by "[o]pportunism and cynicism" (237). What is more, the "acquisitive, consumerist, and entrepreneurial impulses that many individuals exhibited during the conflict form the foundation for the present-day consumer society" (13).

The difference with Cercas's take on the subject is that in Seidman's view, ideals of revolution and solidarity are trumped by mundane, daily-life, and self-centered concerns, while in Cercas's plot Miralles's political position is overridden by a more widely conceived notion of human solidarity. Seidman's disenchanting view of the relationship between life and politics is echoed more clearly in Sierra i Fabra's trilogy, whose characters have a hard time remaining faithful to their political ideals and easily succumb to egotistic temptations. Seidman's and Sierra's daring demystification of Republican idealism serves a purpose insofar as it corrects the Republicans' mythical self-image of purely disinterested fighters for a better world or, in Francie Cate-Arries's words, "the *pueblo* of the Spanish Republic ... as the harbinger of passionate ideals, spiritual and moral fortitude, and indomitable resistance" (102). But they go too far: Their accounts are rooted in a certain post-modern and post-ideological arrogance that construes political activism in general as, in Mike Richards's words, "an aberration peculiar to 1930s Europe" (Richards 347).

In *Soldados de Salamina*, by contrast, Miralles's life-saving act becomes the object of the narrator's obsessive quest because he sees it as containing a "secreto esencial" (180), a key not only for understanding the war but for finally overcoming its divisions – something like a recipe for national reconciliation. This explains at least in part the book's tremendous popularity. *Soldados* has spurred the search for similar stories of solidarity across enemy lines, and the popular radio station Cadena Ser has endorsed a project entitled "La Octava Columna," whose goal is to collect these accounts. "Dice un viejo tópico que los primeros que mueren en las guerras siempre son los más valientes," the organizers write. "Es falso. Ocultos en ambos bandos existen héroes que anteponen el sentido de humanidad a cualquier ideología política" ("Octava"). These heroes are "gente de bien que raras veces es reconocida y a los que nosotros queremos hacer justicia." The people behind that initiative identify themselves as part of a politically mixed generation "que tuvo un abuelo en cada bando." They, too, emphasize the contingent nature of politics: "La historia nos ha enseñado que la vida te empuja hacia complejos caminos y sólo por cuestiones geográficas, morales, éticas, estéticas, culturales o de amistad"; "pertenecemos a una generación que comprende el significado de solidaridad y justicia, y dado que la garantía de un juicio justo es inexistente en una contienda, hemos decidido hacer justicia y permitir como único valor aceptable el de la humanidad" ("Octava").

JUSTICE

For the organizers of “La Octava Columna,” to do justice to these heroes means to resuscitate their memory. Here Cercas would agree: Ethics and justice demand that we remember our dead. For Cercas, this means telling stories about them, while understanding and accepting that stories are always part reality and part invention. But is telling the victims’ stories enough to remedy the repression of the war and Francoism, and the shortcomings of the transition? Or should there be trials, convictions, and reparations? These are difficult questions that Spain has long avoided asking but that are now being brought up with increasing urgency. In a gripping scene of *Les fosses del silenci*, as the archeologists are about to discover the first human remains in a mass grave outside the small Leonese town of Piedrafita de Babia, some older inhabitants of the town ventilate their cooped-up anger: “Lo malo es que los que hicieron esto ya no viven,” an older woman remarks. A man in his thirties says: “Todos los que faltan aquí, todos los falangistas y los parientes de los que hicieron la masacre, que vinieran aquí a caerse la cara de vergüenza.”

Since it has indeed been seventy years, in Spain it might be too late for what Desmond Tutu calls “retributive justice,” that is, adjudicating guilt to perpetrators through a formal judicial process. But the fact that many of the guilty parties have died might actually be an advantage. According to Tutu, if the goal is reconciliation, retributive justice can be counterproductive; it is much preferable “to do Justice to the suffering without perpetuating the hatred aroused.” This he calls “restorative justice”:

We recognize that the past can’t be remade through punishment. Instead – since we know memories will persist for a long time – we aim to acknowledge those memories. This is critical if we are to build a democracy of self-respecting citizens. As a victim of injustice and oppression, you lose your sense of worth as a person, and your dignity. Restorative justice is focused on restoring the personhood that is damaged or lost. But restoring that sense of self means restoring memory – a recognition that what happened to you happened. You are not crazy. Something seriously evil happened to you. And the nation believes you. That acknowledgment is crucial if healing is to go on and if the undercurrents of conflict are not to be left simmering. (Greer)

“Denial,” Tutu says, “doesn’t work. It can never lead to forgiveness and reconciliation. Amnesia is no solution. If a nation is going to be healed, it has to come to grips with the past” (Greer).

Should Spain then follow the examples of Chile, Argentina, and South Africa, and establish a Truth Commission? In February 2004, after years of silence on the issue, judge Baltasar Garzón finally gave his opinion on the eve of his departure to the United States to teach a year at New York University. It might indeed be time for a Truth Commission, he declared to Reuters; from a legal standpoint he did not see why the victims of Francoism would not be able to press charges against former regime officials. “Es obvio que hubo excesos y auténticos crímenes contra la humanidad en los primeros años de esa dictadu-

ra,” he said, “y que es necesario que en algún momento se establezca al menos una comisión de la verdad para establecer qué fue lo que sucedió y desvelar esa parte de la historia española” (“Juez”).

A development like this would be quite novel in Spain, and if a Commission is indeed established, it would be in part thanks to the new international climate that Garzón helped create – in which the United Nations, international courts, NGOs and international public opinion can exert an unprecedented level of pressure on sovereign national governments. In Spain’s case, that pressure is certainly increasing. On July 18, 2005, the 69th anniversary of the outbreak of the Civil War, for instance, Amnesty International released a 77-page report on *La deuda pendiente con las víctimas de la guerra civil española y del régimen franquista*. The report concludes that the ways in which the Spanish state has thus far addressed human rights abuses perpetrated during the Civil War and Francoism are not only deficient, but in clear violation of internationally recognized rights and treaties signed by Spain (Amnistia 63-64); it closes with a series of recommendations that urge Spain to adhere to international law and principles outlined by the United Nations.¹¹

RECONCILIATION

When, in December 2002, a Dutch journalist asked then Prime Minister José María Aznar whether he thought the Spanish government ought to apologize to the victims of Francoism – following the example of similar apologies by other governments – Aznar replied: “There is no reason why I should apologize for anything. The history of the Spanish transition is a history of profound reconciliation, and that is a basis on which we have to continue working” (qtd. in Silva, *Fosas* 118). The very forcefulness of the statement denies its content: By 2002 it had become abundantly clear that Spanish society was *not* reconciled, but also that the Spanish right was not going to recognize that fact, let alone help the process along.

Developments since 2000, however, together with books and films like the ones reviewed here, have started to push Spain down the long winding road toward reconciliation for which the architects of the Spanish transition thought they had found a shortcut. Spain’s current government has realized that forgetting, or pretending reconciliation has already happened, is not an option any more. The resistance, especially from the right, continues to be strong; but the government knows its policies to be supported by the polls, a large group of experts, and an important part of the international community. Moreover, it is ready to respond creatively to the opposition. Thus, when in

¹¹ In its recommendations, Amnesty calls for more stringent archival preservation methods; the establishment of a temporary body to investigate human rights abuses during the Civil War and Francoism; and the incorporation of a unit on human rights in primary and secondary education that would, among other things, address the fate of the victims of that period. Amnesty also urges the Spanish state to rehabilitate victims’ rights; to support the localization and exhumation of mass graves, as well as the identification of victims’ remains, returning them to their families; and to guarantee the right to reparations for all victims of repression and their families (65-67).

June 2005 the city of Salamanca, which houses the Archivo General de la Guerra Civil, refused to comply with a government order to return a cache of pilaged archival documents to Catalonia, the Minister of Culture not only said the decision was final, but also announced the transformation of the Archivo into a much more ambitious Centro Documental de la Memoria. This new Center, described as a “*macroarchivo de la Guerra Civil y el exilio*,” will not only gather, organize, and conserve any and all documents related to the Civil War and its aftermath, but will be “un dinamizador y difusor de la [memoria] que la rescata y la pone al servicio de todos.” It will have a specific educational section, and a section dedicated to assisting victims of repression “en los procesos de reparación por los daños sufridos, ofreciéndoles orientación, búsqueda y obtención de pruebas documentales, certificaciones, apoyo y asistencia” (*Presentación* 3-4).

As South-African archbishop Desmond Tutu said when he was heading up his country’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission, one way of making sure the past will continue to haunt a society is to maintain that it is past: “It is not enough to say let bygones be bygones. . . . Reconciliation does not come easy. Believing it does will ensure that it will never be” (Greer). The question for Spain is on what basis reconciliation will be able to succeed. Given the strength of regional identifications, this basis will probably not be a shared or uniform notion of Spanishness. Still, when the makers of the *Exilio* documentary tried to appeal to the Spaniards’ pride they might have hit the right tone: a shared sense of international prestige might help provide a push in the right direction.

Given that Spain’s refusal to deal with its past was partly related to its wish to become a “normal” member of the international community, it is ironic that the same international community is now encouraging Spain to come to terms with its history. This effort might well succeed. All of Spain’s governments since Franco’s death have been driven by a strong desire to bolster Spain’s status abroad, and for it to be perceived as a nation at the forefront of civilization. For Felipe González, this meant ignoring the Civil War and Francoism. For José María Aznar, it meant joining the United States in the war against Iraq. For José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, it means stubbornly advancing a progressive agenda, withstanding the fury of a strong conservative minority. But some stubbornness might be necessary to overcome the right’s decades of denial. As Albie Sachs writes, reconciliation does not necessitate massive forgiveness, but it does involve “laying the foundations . . . to live together in one country as human beings sharing certain common memories and common moral values.” People’s experiences might well be distinct, even divided; but reconciliation is not possible as long as one group denies the *existence* of the other’s victimhood: “if you had people saying it wasn’t so bad or it didn’t really happen . . . or maybe they asked for it . . . there would be such alienation, such a sense of distance that you wouldn’t be able to live in the country with each other” (64-65).

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