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DISSIDENCES

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When Francisco Franco, a Spanish dictator for almost 40 years, died in a hospital in Madrid in 1975, a transitional process from a dictatorial to a democratic state was initiated. The Transition—as this period is generally known—was conceived with the political imperative to peacefully resolve once and for all the violent ideological differences that haunted Spaniards since the Civil War (1936-1939) broke out and erased the Republic (1931-1939) and its many social, cultural and political achievements. It was intended as a tool for a congenial coexistence between the sides implicated in the war, offering the anti-Francoist forces a place in the new political life in *exchange* for not digging too deeply into the many crimes and abuses committed during the Franco regime.

As a result, the state erected by the dictatorship started to slowly evolve into a democratic structure with one significant peculiarity: those in charge of the army and police forces, the Church, the judicial or economic system fully implicated in supporting the regime were never removed or asked to resign from the positions of power they held. Moreover, they did not even feel obliged to do so. The anti-Francoist forces were legalized and allowed to engage in political activities as long as they did not question the process or those formerly in charge of the Franco state. For the left, this attitude meant the refusal by the Transition to recognize its historical struggle against the regime and its never claiming legal responsibilities from those implicated in the dictatorship. The democratic parties were allowed to participate openly in the new political system as long as they did not go too far in questioning the role of the heirs of Francoism in the public arena.

As it has been noticed throughout these years, the Spanish Transition to democracy was atypical in relation to other transitional processes like those in Portugal and Greece, the many in Latin America, or the experience in South Africa. In Spain, no one seemed interested in creating a Truth Commission, in paying attention to the victims of the Republic—the regime constantly commemorated its victims at the hands of the Republican forces—or in bringing to justice those who committed crimes under the protection of their law, some of them still alive when Franco died in 1975 (Aguilar 70). Given the disparity of power and influence between the right and the left, it is not surprising how the Transition was accomplished: as a series of steps that would mainly entail a transformation of an authoritarian state into a more open and democratic one, if only formally. The Transition was conceived as the configuration of a new architecture of power evolving but by no means totally separating itself from the dictatorial regime. The new Spanish

democracy was far from being free of pollutants coming from the past.[1] Here lies the set of problems I will be discussing in this essay.

Looking back at this period thirty-five years after the death of the dictator, it should be noted that the process was successful for the most part, even though today the many people who died at the hands of the repressive forces are still waiting for some form of reparation on behalf of the democratic state.[2] It is also true that this has been the most politically stable period in contemporary Spanish history. However, reconciliation—the putting aside of the political tensions leading to the Spanish Civil War and the struggle to achieve a peaceful and democratic coexistence among different political sensibilities—has not been fully achieved. How could it be otherwise when the political right refuses to condemn Franco's dictatorship or when the Catholic Church will not acknowledge its direct implication in the repression after the war, ignoring the many voices within their ranks to do so, or when the real economic powers originated during the dictatorship are still at play?[3] Is reconciliation possible if the terms are solely defined by the winners of the war?

If the Transition had the advantage of appeasing many of the anxieties of those directly implicated in the Francoist years despite the constant threat of military coups—the most infamous being the actual coup that took place on February 23, 1981—it paid the high price of ignoring and silencing the history of exile, resistance, opposition, incarceration, repression, and the assassination of dissidents. The official recount of the past by the Transition left many areas in need of understanding and clarification. It fell very short of healing the numerous wounds opened during the war and the following dictatorship. It fell very short of a true reconciliation.

In order to accomplish and give substance to this task, I will start by arguing in favor of a politics of remembrance whose aim will be to re-enact the memory of suffering and oppression

previously discarded. This memory will demand to be fully incorporated into those still too optimistic versions of the Spanish Transition to democracy. Its final goal is nothing other than realizing truth.

In order to carry out reconciliation, we need to lay the ground for a community where the foul play between friends and enemies (Carl Schmitt) is eradicated once and for all. Now, it no longer matters who was a friend or an enemy.[4] What is relevant for this discussion is that reconciliation requests that my previous enemies change their criminal ideologies: they must move away from all of the justifications informing their past persecution of dissidents like us. In the same vein, those persecuted will not respond to the physical and psychological aggressions they underwent with a claim for similar violence. Retribution, that is to say, the understandable cry to inflict equal pain upon those who committed criminal acts, will not take place. If this were the case—if we were not to divide ourselves between enemies and friends—reconciliation could then focus on those who suffered unfairly and became victims on both sides, without diminishing, of course, the legal responsibilities these same victims might have incurred. Avoiding the distinction between friend and enemy is the first step in a lasting reconciliation, a doing justice to the victims irrespective of their ideological distinctions.[5]

Nonetheless, in the anti-Francoist resistance, many could not reconcile because they were simply left absent in the Transition to democracy; their recognition was forgotten in order to facilitate the change. However, this was not the case in regards to the victims honored by the

Francoist side. During the regime they were constantly used to remind us of the legitimate origin of the war and of the repressive regime that followed.

One side had too much memory and the other was in lack of it. The latter is the origin of what has been termed as the excess of memory: an endless coming and going to and from the historical past to recover the dissident voices lost in the Transition. Memory also comes into play as a means of achieving truth, the truth of those who with their actions of resistance and opposition laid the path to the current democracy. This memory has been categorized as an excess not only because of the innumerable accounts brought to the public sphere but because of its recurrent and repetitive nature. What has not been resolved in the political or social arena with a full and collective recognition of the victims has emerged as a surplus of personal accounts. Of course, every testimony matters for its therapeutic value. At the same time, the overabundance of personal narratives does not distinguish between what is important for everyone from what only has a legitimate relevance for a few. In other words, memory will be more difficult to envision as reconciliation for all.

If reconciliation is ever going to be achieved—albeit its being an open-ended process that refuses total closure because of its dialogical nature—it is imperative to give truth a central role in this process. If this were the case, the dictatorship's operation of purposely confusing the victim with the perpetrator of the crime or of depriving the Spanish Republic of its legitimacy would be eradicated. Thanks to truth, it would no longer be possible to ground the dictatorship on this confusion.

It must be noticed at this point that searching for truth in the past has little to do with rewriting a heroic narrative of resistance.[6] Quite the opposite: it is a coming to terms with the experiences of pain, suffering, and death undergone by those who decided to resist a criminal

military coup and the ensuing dictatorial state, or by those who were subjected to persecution and death because of their dissidence. In our present political arena, these memories reenact neither a narrative of epic characters fighting against fascism nor a traumatic narrative encapsulated in a circle of inexhaustible pain. The time has come now to confront heroic narratives with the miseries every war brings about and to confront traumatic recounts with exercises of memory that should be useful today. Thanks to these retellings we will not forget the debt that we have incurred with the victims given our enjoyment of a present much less violent than theirs.

Having said this, when recounting the past I do not want to imply that we have to dismiss the distinction between those who did right from those who did wrong. In the same vein, truth must first be established if we want to effectively deal with the traumatic event, to work through it, to break out of the circularity of a sickness of memory where one single event perpetually repeats itself. In other words, I am not refusing the introduction of moral and political criteria in the exercise of memory. Without them there could be no reconciliation.

The exercise of memory I am proposing advocates for the manifestation of our interdependency with those who preceded us in time. I am appealing to a we, to a community politically grounded on the rejection of violence. Those who exclude will be guilty of having been engaged in political cleansing. The Francoist army tried to exterminate all dissidents, regardless of the severity of their possible political infractions. On the Republican side, given the confusion the military coup caused, some were guilty of hunting down their own internal dissidents, less enthusiastic political players, or even those who did not look proletarian enough. In spite of this, it should be pointed out that the Republican authorities were always against this lawlessness while the Franco regime, on the other hand, abode by it as its primary way of governing, and with no remorse.

Now all victims come together in opposing the executioners no matter their ideology or the final objectives of their policies, irrespective of their kindness or wickedness. At this point, the distinction between left and right in relation to the war does not hold anymore; instead what becomes the central issue is who was respectful of the dissident or who tried to eliminate him/her with every available means.

This does not imply that all victims were innocent. It means that if they committed crimes they should be brought to justice irrespective of the unfair situation that victimized them.[7] Interdependency will be the common ground for bonding with those previous enemies who also suffered persecution or death; it does not matter if they were kill by the right or wrong side. We come to understand that we could have been them and that they could have been in the same position we are today, given a different set of historical circumstances. There are no differences in the effects of political violence upon their bodies and ours. There is no place for the distinction between friends and enemies, between my side and your side, in our endeavors with the past.

The learning we derive from the past—that the Civil War is a story of suffering and death—encompasses the fact of our being bonded to those who lived before us. Bonding is not a mere identification with others, a simple manifestation of sympathy towards their unfortunate lives. Instead, it is related to our accepting the political substance in those lives that still informs us today. In other words, if those who lived in the past are missing from the more celebratory historical accounts of the Spanish Transition, we are also missing; we have also gone astray. If those who were killed by the Republican side in retaliation for the military coup are missing from our recounts of the past—because of their having being utilized or manipulated by the dictatorship [8]—then we are not moving forward, towards reconciliation. As Judith Butler

states, we are "constituted and dispossessed by our relations" (24) with those before us. Their absence from the Spanish transitional process is a way of dispossessing ourselves of political participation. Making them present, symbolically bringing them back to life today, is a way of fully constituting ourselves as agents with the purpose of modifying—why even not making better—our present moment in time.

At this point, what might have sounded like an uncontrollable rehearsal of more and more pain from the Spanish Civil War, another turn in the inexhaustible circle of traumatic remembering, now signifies a rupture with the memories put into circulation by the Transition. We are not in the presence of a mere repetition of memories of the same nature. Instead this is the staging of a practice of remembrance aimed at producing a crisis in the official and received accounts of memory, one directed to opening a crisis in the understanding of the past. We are in the presence of an event, following French philosopher Alain Badiou's terminology. This event of crisis is political because it resists what already exists; it ruptures the official rendering of the Transition. It becomes a collective claim (Badiou 24, 141) for a more truthful representation of what happened during the Spanish Civil War and the dictatorship. The politics of remembrance we are advocating will have as their outcome a political memory whose goal, following Badiou, is a new knowledge (23) once ignored until the event of crisis took place. We could even say that it was silenced since it did not fit in the narratives of the Transition.

This new knowledge points to an internal concept of truth (Badiou 24). The truth emerging from the event is a new conceptualization of the past, nonexistent until the crisis of memory broke out. Even though this truth is not absolute—it does not pretend that its contents are unchangeable—I agree with Tzvetan Todorov when he states that, "the absence of absolute truth in the domain of meaning does not suggest that any interpretation is as good as any other"

(123). The good interpretation, so to speak, is the truth that synthesizes the experiences of interdependence, of the effects of ideology upon human bodies when it implies their extermination, of the rejection to build reconciliation upon the silencing of the most disturbing aspects of the past. And it is the truth thanks to which we listen to and make ours the voices—the peaceful ones—coming from the past. Badiou's truth, the truth articulated in the event of the excess of memory, is better than the one the Spanish Transition put forward in the guise of forgetting and the refusal to engage with the muddy waters of history. As such, the truth of this memory is a tool to improve our understanding of the past, an instrument to minimize the number of dark areas within history rejected by hegemonic narratives like those of the Spanish Transition.

Notes

[1] Among other titles, *Traces of Contamination* (2005), edited by Eloy E. Merino y H. Rosi Song, analyzes the perseverance of fascist and falangist discourses in today's democratic Spain.

[2] The Basque Government passed a timid law in 2010 where the crimes and abuses committed by the repressive forces working for the Spanish state will be recognized within the Basque Country.

[3] What has lead José Vidal-Beneyto to say that the social system has not changed from the Franco years (24, 157). Likewise, Julián Casanova has studied in detail the collusion of interests between the Church and the Francoist state in the repression and killing of dissidents.

[4] If this were the case, if we were still within this dichotomy, we would have the right to reject reconciliation with our enemies as the concentration camp survivor Jean Améry states in his essay "Resentment." Resentment is directed against those who were my enemies and who did not show signs of repentance and also against those who decided to turn the pages of history and conceive the criminal acts as belonging to a bygone time without any attempt at finding the truth.

[5] If it is true that one can be a victim and at the same time a ruthless criminal, for most of the victims this was never the case. We are trying to overcome a classification of victims according to their ideologies. The reconciliation process could never be grounded on the reenactment of the same violences taking place at the beginning of the war.

[6] According to Tzvetan Todorov "we can already see the two main forms of historical narration: the heroic narrative, which lauds the triumph of 'our side,' and the victim narrative, which relates its sufferings" (142).

[7] Something very different from what Catalan historian Ricard Vinyes seems to imply when he warns us about using suffering and pain as the guiding principles in the writing of history. Having being a victim does not make our positions fairer or more inclined towards justice. It is true that a history full of emotion and nothing else would be more a narrative of trauma than a historical account. By the same token, a history deprived of the victim's accounts would strike us as a cold rendering of facts. Even the most objective facts are always highly imbued with emotional and moral value. Améry's resentment is a constant reminder of what is at stake in an excessively academic exercise of history. Vinyes advises us against getting lost in traumatic renderings of history not against supplementing history with memory.

[8] Not everyone assassinated at the hands of Republican forces, and exploited by Franco's propaganda machinery to justify the coup and in whose names the regime justified its existence, were heartless supporters of Franco. Perhaps the time has come for their families to claim their memories without ascribing the dead to either of the contending sides of the war and much less to the bloody fascist rhetoric put into circulation by the dictatorship.

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