

# **Historical Comparison of the Politics of Historical Memory in Germany and Spain**

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## **Resum**

Els fets violents del segle XX no només formen part de la història, sinó que també formen part de les identitats i els records de molts supervivents, autors, veïns i membres de la seva família. Després dels règims feixistes i dictatorials, esdeveniments de violència massiva i genocidis, molts estudiosos han plantejat la qüestió de què s'ha fet i com s'haurien de preservar els records d'aquests fets violents i el seu paper als països europeus actuals. Aquest article explora els diferents enfocaments de la memòria històrica i la reconciliació a Espanya després de la guerra civil espanyola i la repressió franquista i a Alemanya després de l'Holocaust. Aquests dos països s'han considerat models oposats a la memòria històrica: mentre que Alemanya continua sent el 'paradigma' de la preservació de la memòria, Espanya es veu sovint com el país de l'oblit. Comparar les estratègies adoptades pels governs d'Espanya i Alemanya pot ajudar a comprendre els reptes i les complexitats de la preservació de la memòria històrica després d'un esdeveniment històric traumàtic, així com la seva influència en les actuals identitats i polítiques nacionals.

*Paraules clau: memòria històrica, reconciliació, oblit, Alemanya, Espanya.*

## **Abstract**

The violent events of the 20th century are not only part of history but also part of the identities and memories of many survivors, perpetrators, by-standers and their family members. After fascist and dictatorial regimes, mass-violence events and genocides, many scholars have raised the question of what has been done and how should the memories of such violent events be preserved, and their role in present day European countries. This paper explores the different approaches to historical memory and reconciliation in Spain after

the Spanish Civil War and Francoist Repression and in Germany after the Holocaust. These two countries have been regarded as opposed models for historical memory: while Germany remains as the ‘paradigm’ of preservation of memory, Spain is often seen as the country of forgetting. Comparing the strategies undertaken by the governments of Spain and Germany can help understand the challenges and complexities of the preservation of historical memory after a traumatic historical event, as well as its influence on present-day national identities and politics.

*Key words: historical memory, reconciliation, forgetting, Germany, Spain.*

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*Will the twentieth century be most remembered by its mass atrocities?<sup>1</sup>*

Martha Minow, 1998

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After the mass-violence events and genocides of the 20th century, several countries faced the challenge of having to find ways to reconcile and integrate their violent pasts into their official narratives and national identities. Perhaps the clearest example and the one that has received the most attention from academics has been the attempts of reconciliation and the development of historical memory policies in Germany after the Holocaust, the mass-murder and extermination of European Jews under the Nazi regime. In German, the term *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* reflects the idea of working through the difficult events of the past, and it is used specifically to refer to the post-1945 challenges and policies that have explored the ways in which German citizens have come to terms with their past. Because of the centrality and focus of historical memory policies during the transition to democracy after the Second World War, specifically in the Federal Republic of Germany and later on in unified Germany, *the German case* has been regarded as a paradigm of reconciliation in Europe and other countries that face a similar challenge to reconcile with a past of mass-violence, murder and genocide.<sup>2</sup> However, the process to develop official and national policies of historical memory did not happen overnight, and it is important to understand the complexities and challenges that characterized the remembering, teaching and understanding of what some consider to be the worst atrocity in human history. As the author J. Olick asks, “How do you [a state] generate legitimacy and identity when his-

<sup>1</sup> Minow, Martha, *Between vengeance and forgiveness*, Beacon Press: Massachusetts, 1998.

<sup>2</sup> “Other nations could learn from Germany’s efforts to reconcile after WWII”, Johns Hopkins Magazine, Summer 2015.

torical narrative – a normal and seemingly necessary source of national identity – raises more questions than it answers?”<sup>3</sup> As we will see, this quote reflects perfectly on the challenges of developing an official historical narrative both in Germany and Spain, where the past is difficult to face and continues to affect the people and construction of identity in these two countries.

This does not mean, however, that all other European countries followed Germany’s approach in making historical memory a priority in their agenda during the transition to democracy after a dictatorial regime. Spain, regarded as the *country of forgetting*,<sup>4</sup> has presented a unique approach to the politics of remembering, forgetting, and the understanding of historical memory as inherently politic. This unique approach has been analyzed and criticized by many scholars, politicians and Spanish citizens: from those that argue that it is an urgent necessity for Spain to confront its past, to those that believe that the attempts of ‘recovering memory’ that have been implemented in the last couple of decades threaten the lasting peace in Spain.

This paper aims to explore the differences and similarities of Germany’s and Spain’s approach to historical memory after a mass-violence event and genocide, particularly the Holocaust (1939-1945) in Germany and the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and Francoist Regime (1939-1975) in Spain. It is important to note that historical memory is a broad, complex concept that includes policies of legislation, education, public history through memorials and monuments, official narratives and private memories, just to mention a few. Thus, summarizing the different paths and strategies towards reconciliation and peace after a mass-violence event, repression or genocide is a complex task and it would be impossible to include all the nuances of these processes in a short paper. Thus, this paper explores the different stages of historical memory in both countries, focusing mainly on institutionalized and official narratives, legislation and a brief mentioning of education policies and their impact in the development of historical memory policies. The role and impact of other historical memory spheres and more specifically private and familiar memories of different historical events are necessary elements of the broad analysis, but one that due to constraints on length will not be analyzed here. Finally, it is also fundamental to state that by comparing the policies of historical memory in Germany and Spain, one is not comparing nor equating the brutality of the mass-violence events that took place in these two countries. While each historical event is different and will require different strategies of reconciliation and truth seeking, by analyzing and comparing the different strategies used by governments in their attempt to seek reconciliation, one can gain perspective to better understand what the challenges and comple-

3 OLICK, J. *The sins of the fathers: Germany, memory, method*. Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2016, p. 14.

4 BOYD, C. “The politics of history and memory in democratic Spain”, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*, 617(133-148), 2008, also referred to as “*El país de la desmemoria*” by Baquero, J.M. *El país de la desmemoria*, Titivillus Editorial, 2019.

xities are of seeking peace and reconciliation after a mass-violence event, repression or genocide.

## Development of Historical Memory in Germany

In both Germany and Spain, scholars have identified different stages of historical memory development. In Germany, three stages can be differentiated: a 'stage of silence' between 1945 and 1960; an emergence of conversations and policies of historical memory with a new generation between the decades of 1960 to 1980; and final stage of "normalization" and institutionalization of historical memory from the 1990s to the present.

Right after the capitulation of Germany in May 1945 and the liberation of the concentration camps where mass-murder and genocide took place under the Nazi regime, questions of German responsibility and participation in the Nazi genocide began to come to light. International authorities, scholars, philosophers<sup>5</sup> and journalists all around the world were wondering the same thing: to what extent were German citizens aware of the mass-killings taking place around them? Were all German citizens responsible and guilty for the atrocities of the Holocaust? These questions were accompanied by policies of denazification, the elimination of all Nazi symbols from the social, cultural, economical, judicial and political spheres in Germany and Austria,<sup>6</sup> as well as the judicial prosecution of perpetrators (the main example of which was the Nuremberg Trials between 1945 and 1946). Furthermore, according to Wolfgang Meseth, one of the main attempts to rebuild democracy in Germany (more specifically, in the Federal Republic of Germany, and after 1989, in the German state) was through the modification of the school curriculum.<sup>7</sup> As will be expanded upon later in the paper, the establishment of a standardized educational curriculum regarding the teaching of National Socialism would not only help Germany build a unique national and official narrative, but it also influenced today's "universalist ethical interpretation of the Holocaust."<sup>8</sup>

However, all these policies took place mainly at the public and state level. Meanwhile, German families and citizens avoided talking about the violence of the Third Reich and adapted to the new democratic state by obeying the new anti-Nazi legislation and not bringing up the horrors of the Nazi regime, or their implication in them. This has been regarded as a 'stage of silence,' in which legislation, education curriculum, Nazi memorials and monuments were eliminated, but silence prevailed at the individual and familiar level. Nora Krug, author of a graphic memoir that explores the question of German guilt

<sup>5</sup> See for instance: Jaspers, K., and Ashton, E. B. *The Question of German Guilt*. Fordham University Press, 1965; ARENDT, H. "Collective Responsibility" In: Bernauer S.J.J.W. (eds) "Amor Mundi". *Boston College Studies in Philosophy*, vol 26. Springer, Dordrecht, 1987.

<sup>6</sup> TAYOR, F. *Exorcising Hitler: The occupation and Denazification of Germany*, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2011.

<sup>7</sup> MESETH, W. "Education after Auschwitz: A comparative analysis of the teaching of the history of National Socialism in East and West Germany", *European Education*, vol. 44, no. 3, pp. 13-38., 2012.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15

and responsibility among third generation Germans after the war, explains in her book how the only conversations about Germany's Nazi past came from her school, and she did not learn about it at home. Another distinctive element of this period of time, which she also explores in her personal memoir, is the question of guilt and responsibility.<sup>9</sup> "Through my childhood, the war was present but unacknowledged (...) having to bear the consequences of another generation's actions seemed familiar."<sup>10</sup> The notions of guilt and responsibility were not, however, the same across Germany: as argued by Meseth, opposing politics of memory developed in West and East Germany, and national identities were created differently as a consequence. While East Germany externalized the guilt and understood the rising of the Nazi party as a problem inherent to capitalism and part of the Marxist understanding of history, West Germany interiorized the guilt of the atrocities of the Holocaust, and it was thus interpreted as a "particular problem of the German nation state and its origins."<sup>11</sup> Even though this understanding of responsibility will change over time, it is the basis for what J. Olick calls the *Politics of Regret*, what he understands as a new framework for understanding historical memory when regret and responsibility prevails in contemporary discourses of historical memory.<sup>12</sup>

During the 1960s, conversations about historical memory started to surface together with the emergence of a new generation that did not live through the atrocities of the war and the Nazi regime first-hand. This generation started questioning their family members about the circumstances of the war and their implication in the crimes, asking their parents and grandparents to talk about these events and their roles in the war, the Nazi regime and the genocide of European Jews. This phenomenon is accentuated by the airing of the American TV show *Holocaust*, which brought conversations from the public and institutional level to the living rooms of German families. This was also another phenomenon that brought conversations about the Holocaust not only to German families, but also families from many other European countries that were starting to learn about the mass-violence events and genocide that took place under the Nazi regime. It is during this decade as well that increased efforts were made to emphasize democratic values in West Germany's education as part of the strategy against antidemocratic and antisemitic attitudes.<sup>13</sup> Especially after the attack on a synagogue in Cologne during Christmas in 1959, in which antisemitic slogans were written on its walls, and what was understood as a failure of the education efforts to increase historical consciousness and values of tolerance and respect among the new generation. With this generation and new conversations about their historical consciousness, a new notion of historical memory emerged, one that focused on starting conversations about the mass atrocities of the Nazi

9 Ibid., p. 14.

10 KRUG, N. *Belonging. A German reckons with History and Home*, Scribner: New York, 2018.

11 Ibid., p. 18.

12 OLICK, J. *The Politics of Regret. On Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility*. Routledge, 2007, p. 14.

13 Meseth, 2012, p. 20

regime and their culpability as third-generation Germans after the war, both at the familiar and the public level.

Conversations, historical consciousness and different notions of historical memory continued to emerge and develop until the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 and the subsequent unification of Germany under one democratic, unified state. Starting in the 1990s, a new challenge appeared: the unification of two different historical narratives and understanding German past in the former East and West Germany. As analyzed by W. Meseth, during the 1980s, West Germany had emphasized the education of the Holocaust by including visits to memorials and museums, teaching students about local history and inviting survivors to their classrooms. By the time of the German unification, the former East Germany had to adopt similar historical memory approaches, and the overall understanding of how to include education about the Holocaust in the school curriculum started to shift. The development of different notions of historical memory were partly influenced by historiographic debate, or *Historikerstreit*, which analyzed the uniqueness of the Holocaust. Thus, scholars from the fields of history, psychology and anthropology among others discussed whether the Holocaust should be considered as an extreme consequence of capitalism-driven fascism and could thus be included in the broader classification of 20<sup>th</sup> century European fascisms, or if on the contrary, it was a unique event that could not be analyzed through any means of comparison because the historical circumstances that allowed for the mass-atrocities of the Holocaust were unique to German history.<sup>14</sup> The latter being the case, was argued, the responsibility of remembering the Holocaust was unique to the German people. With the unification of Germany, however, the crimes of Stalinism were starting to be seen as “atrocities so extreme that they amounted to a rupture of civilization”<sup>15</sup> in a similar way to the understanding of the Holocaust, which prompted discussions and comparisons not only between the Stalin and Nazi regimes, but other totalitarian regimes and dictatorships around the world. Thus, “the German unification made it possible to compare National Socialism with Stalinism, thereby reframing the Holocaust from a specific problem unique to German history to an example of totalitarianism from which important lessons could be drawn about human rights”.<sup>16</sup>

This phenomenon created a shift from the 1990s onward in the historical narratives of the Holocaust and their integration the German society, which has been referred to as the ‘normalization’ stage. The school curriculum, for instance, started to emphasize values of peace, tolerance, rejection of

<sup>14</sup> See, for instance, BAUER, Y. *Rethinking the Holocaust*, Yale University Press, 2001; Bauman, Z. *Modernity and the Holocaust*, Polity Press, 1989.

<sup>15</sup> Meseth, p. 25

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

racism and antisemitism and a broader notion of global human rights, rather than focusing on the uniqueness of guilt and responsibility of the German citizens for the crimes of the Nazi regime. That is not to say, however, that all responsibility and duty to remember has been removed from the German notion of historical memory of the Holocaust. As recently as 2019, German chancellor Angela Merkel stated that Germany has an “unending responsibility to remember the Nazis’ war crimes”, and that this responsibility is “part of our national identity”, as she visited the Auschwitz extermination camp in Poland on the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the camp’s liberation.<sup>17</sup>

The process of memorialization continued to take place in different parts of Germany, but the building of memorials and monuments for the victims of Nazism in different parts of the country could now be a unified-state project that would reflect the national historical narrative of the country. Many authors have analyzed this process of memorialization<sup>18</sup> by looking at monuments, memorials, art or how the Berlin Wall itself became a symbol of Germany’s historical memory and its challenges.<sup>19</sup>

What is more, according to Levy and Sznajder, this process of normalization started to take place across national borders, creating what they call a “cosmopolitan memory”<sup>20</sup> of the Holocaust. In other words, the authors explore how “this event can be remembered and memorialized by people who do not have any direct connection to it”,<sup>21</sup> and how the formation of transnational memory notions can become the foundation for a global formation of human rights politics. In other words, they argue that the fact that memorials and museums, as well as school curriculums all around the world, include education and reference to the Holocaust means that a transnational memory of the event has been created.

Understanding the different stages of historical memory development in Germany is necessary to acknowledge the complexity of historical memory after a mass-violence event and genocide, and how even though the German approach to historical memory is recognized as paradigmatic, it was not a simple process that happened overnight and today there are still many debates on the notions and implications of historical memory, guilt and responsibility. Today, students all around the world learn about the Holocaust. In Spain, for instance, it has been argued that students know more about the Nazi regime than about Francoism,<sup>22</sup> an argument that will introduce the next part of the paper: the development of historical memory in Spain.

17 “Auschwitz visit: Angela Merkel says Germany must remember Nazi crimes”, BBC News, December 6th 2019. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-50671663>

18 See YOUNG, J., *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*, Yale University Press, 1993 and *At Memory’s Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture*, Yale University Press, 2002.

19 HARRISON, H., *After the Berlin Wall. Memory and the making of the New Germany*, Cambridge University Press. 2019.

20 LEVY, D.; SZNAIDER, N. “The Holocaust and the Formation of Cosmopolitan Memory”, *European Journal of Social Theory*, 5(1):87-106, 2002.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 88

22 DÍEZ, J. *La asignatura pendiente*, Plaza y Veldés, 2020.



## Development of Historical Memory in Spain

It might be difficult to find a single Spaniard that has not heard the phrase ‘the recovery of historical memory would open the wounds that were closed during the democratic transition’<sup>23</sup> at least once. However, the debates surrounding historical memory are not simply about whether or not the Spanish government should prosecute the perpetrators of the Francoist regime and publicly recognize its victims. Instead, these conversations, which can be heard anywhere in the country (from the political sphere, to Spanish living rooms, to classrooms across the country), represent only one of the multiple layers of complexity of the problems and disagreements on the politics of historical memory in this country.

One of the first elements that distinguishes Spain from other countries that have undergone a process of transition from a totalitarian regime to democracy, is the lack of agreement regarding historical narratives. That is, there is no agreement about a single historical narrative of the Spanish Civil War and the Francoist regime and repression. Some authors argue against the classification of the Francoist regime as ‘fascist’ or even a dictatorship,<sup>24</sup> while others consider the coup d’état carried out by F. Franco in 1936 - which sparked the beginning of the Spanish Civil War - as not only legitimate but necessary to defend Spanish democracy from the increasing influence of the Soviet Union and the threat of communism,<sup>25</sup> or as a necessary defense of a threatened Catholicism.<sup>26</sup> Another example is the use of the word ‘genocide’ and ‘[Spanish] Holocaust’, which can be seen in many academic works that analyze the Spanish Civil War and the dictatorship, yet almost none provide a justification for the choosing of this terminology.<sup>27</sup> It would be impossible to mention all of the different historical analyses and academic opinions about the history of the Spanish Civil War and the Francoist regime, but the aforementioned historiographical debates reflect on the failure to agree on a singular national historical narrative. Representative of this lack of agreement, is the first law on historical memory since the death of the dictator, the transition and the application of the Amnesty Law and the ‘agreement of silence’ with regards to Spain’s violence past. This Law, presented in 2007 as the Historical Memory Law, attempted to lead a change in the politics of historical memory in Spain. One of its most interesting policies, however, was the respect to the right for individual memory and the avoidance of a reference to a national memory or a unique narrative, “recognizing only each citizen’s right to personal and fa-

23 As stated, for example, by M. Rajoy during his presidency between 2011 and 2018: “Abrir heridas del pasado no conduce a nada”, *El País*, September 2008.

24 BOYD, C. 2008.

25 JULIÁ, “Memoria, Historia y política de un pasado de guerra y dictadura”, in Juliá (ed.) “Memoria de la guerra y del Franquismo”, 2006.

26 RUBIO, M. “Fue la persecución por las izquierdas a los católicos equivalente a un genocidio?”, in “Memoria histórica amenaza la paz Europea”, ECR Group 2020, p. 48.

27 See, for instance: F. J. Contreras and M. Rubio in “Memoria histórica amenaza la paz Europea”, 2020; Mir Santamaría, “La otra memoria histórica”, 2011; PRESTON, P. “The Spanish Holocaust”, 2011; Míguez Macho, “The genocidal genealogy of Francoism: violence, memory and impunity”, 2016 (This being one of the only academic works that include analysis of the terminology).

mily memory”<sup>28</sup> In order to understand why this policy was considered necessary (and still, widely criticized as a threat to the Spanish peace accomplished through silence during the transition), it is necessary to analyze the stages of historical memory awareness since the transition to democracy after the death of the dictator F. Franco in 1975.

Two years after the death of the Spanish dictator and one year before the 1978 establishment of the first democratic constitution in over 40 years of dictatorship, the Amnesty Law of 1977 was presented as the only option for moving forward towards a peaceful future. This law disregarded any crime committed during the Spanish Civil War and the post-war repression, by both the Francoist regime and the resistance, as a symbol of setting aside a divisive and violent past to move forward as a fully democratic and peaceful country.<sup>29</sup> This Amnesty Law reflected the so-called ‘*Pacto del Silencio*’, an agreement by which it was decided that all Spanish citizens shared the responsibility for the atrocities committed during the war, and therefore it was better to forget the differences that set them apart before and during the Francoist regime in order to move forward as a peaceful country. This, however, also meant the silencing of the crimes that took place under the totalitarian regime of F. Franco and the Civil War: “by privileging the memory of democratic failure while silencing the memory of authoritarianism and repression, the texts prioritized the political values of tolerance and stability over those of freedom and justice”<sup>30</sup> While it has been argued that still by the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century most Spaniards agreed that this was the right policy for the peaceful future of Spain, P. Aguilar argues that, in regards to responsibility, there is significantly more consensus about the Civil War than about Francoist repression.<sup>31</sup> This agreement on a shared responsibility and necessity of silence, Boyd argues,<sup>32</sup> lasted until the beginning of the 1990s. At this time, different local and regional histories and archival research started to emerge as a threat to the national narrative established after 1975, historians start to question the notion of ‘shared responsibility’ and new generations that were born after the dictatorship start to question the sacrifice of truth for the sake of peace. The role of the emergence of a new generation during the 1990s and 2000s will become increasingly important in challenging of policies of historical memory. Several authors have analyzed the role of school textbooks and teaching in forming this new generation’s understanding of the Spanish Civil War and the Francoist regime, the most recent to do so being Javier Díez’ *La asignatura pendiente*,<sup>33</sup> in which he argues that while students’ interest about this period increases, this is not accompanied by changes in the education curriculum. While their parents and grandparents had the option to remember or to forget the Spanish past, today’s younger generations perpetuate the

28 Boyd, 2008, p. 145.

29 AGUILAR, P., HUMLEBAEK, C. “Collective Memory and National identity in the Spanish Democracy”, *History and Memory*, vol. 14, no 1-2, pp. 121-164, 2002.

30 Boyd, 2008, p. 138.

31 Aguilar and Humlebaek, 2002, p. 130.

32 Boyd, 2008, p. 137.

33 Díez, “La asignatura pendiente”, Plaza y Valdes, 2020; also see Gutiérrez, “La memoria histórica en los libros de texto escolares”, Producción Editorial, 2012; Boyd, 2008, p. 137.

Pacto del Olvido without being given the chance to remember something that they have not learned.

The development of policies on historical memory from the 1990s until today has to be understood within the political context in Spain, which also affected the education curriculum. In 1996, shortly after the Partido Popular (PP) rose to victory in the Spanish government, the politization of history education started to take form. Esperanza Aguirre, the new minister of education, argued that the previous Socialist government (1992-1996) was guilty of “one of the most subtle forms of the political utilization of history”,<sup>34</sup> and integrated a reform (known as LOGSE) to improve humanities and history education at a national level. This was a response to the increase in the aforementioned local and regional histories, and one of the main goals of this reform was for students to “learn the same thing independently of the autonomous community in which they reside”.<sup>35</sup> This policy did expectedly encounter resistance from regional governments that saw it as nationalistic<sup>36</sup> and disrespectful to the regional historical narratives. These debates opened up one of the most important questions, still unanswered, in the journey to understanding the complexities of the politics of historical memory in Spain: Is there only one Spanish history and memory? And should there be?

By the 2000s, with 45% of the Spanish population being too young to recall the dictatorship<sup>37</sup> and the emergence of more claims about the necessity to rethink Spain’s *Pacto del Olvido*, historical memory was already considered a political strategy to attack the opponent. The PP claimed that by opening up conversations about historical memory and the recognition of the victims, Spain would open the wounds that were effectively closed during the transition to democracy. On the other hand, the PSOE regarded the right-wing PP as ‘enemies of memory’. It was in this climate of polarization and politization of historical memory policies that a new association emerged seeking justice for the victims of the Spanish Civil War that were still disappeared and buried in locations unknown to their families. The Association for the Recuperation of Historical Memory (*Asociación para la Recuperación de Memoria Histórica*) started and continues to carry out archaeological excavations and DNA identification of victims buried in mass-graves all around the country. This attempt to recover and identify human remains was supported by the aforementioned Historical Memory Law of 2007, and as shown by the historian Stanley Payne,

34 Boyd, 2008, p. 140.

35 RUIZ TORRES, “Los discursos de memoria historiac en España”, *Revista de Historia Contemporánea*, 7, 2007, p. 69.

36 See Aguilar, 2002 for an analysis of national identity and how ‘Nationalist’ was often associated with the repressive and violent regime of F. Franco.

37 Boyd, 2008, p. 142

it encountered resistance and skepticism by not only the right-wing parties, but also several historians: “durante los siguientes cuatro años [from 2007] la financiación pública apoyó la aprobación de una larga serie de proyectos específicos de discusión histórica, agitación política y búsqueda de los restos de víctimas (...) de los cuales varios cientos fueron finalmente desenterrados, número lejano a los ‘miles’ que se buscaban en las ‘fosas comunes’”.<sup>38</sup> One can see opposition to these policies and questioning of their legitimacy not only by political parties but also historians and other scholars. The exhumation of victims of the Civil War and its broadcasting in several national TV channels did, however, bring conversations about historical memory in Spain to the living rooms of Spaniards. Debates that were, until then, secluded to the political and academic spheres reached individuals and families across the country, offering the perfect opener for conversations about remembering and forgetting among Spanish citizens.

By 2010, the debates on the politics of historical memory in Spain started to attract international attention. In 2009, the United Nations condemned Spain’s Amnesty Law and according to the Human Rights Committee, of which Spain is also part, advised to address the human rights violations that took place during the Spanish Civil War and the Francoist Regime.<sup>39</sup> However, the Spanish government refused to make any changes to their approach to historical memory, and in 2011, with the Partido Popular leading the government, all funding to the policies stated by the 2007 Historical Memory Law was eliminated. However, debates and conversations about Spain’s necessity to face its past did not disappear, and an increasing number of international scholars began to analyze the dynamics of Spain and its historical memory, as well as the crimes that took place during the Spanish Civil War and the Francoist regime that are not acknowledged in Spain.<sup>40</sup>

Many debates on Spain’s recovery and silencing of historical memory intensified after the PSOE’s proposal in 2017 of expanding the 2007 Historical Memory Law to include the establishment of a Truth Commission that might help seek truth and reconciliation in Spain, as well as after the removal of Francisco Franco’s remains from “Europe’s last monument to fascism”<sup>41</sup> in 2018, which once again intensified the debates surrounding historical memory, this time focusing on the preservation of several street names and symbols from the Francoist period all around the country.<sup>42</sup>

38 PAYNE, S. “La memoria histórica y la ruptura de la democracia española”, in *Memoria Histórica amenaza la paz europea*”.

39 Noticias ONU: “ONU señala que España debe revocar ley de Amnistía”. February 2012. <https://news.un.org/es/story/2012/02/1234621>

40 See, for instance: BRIENNES, S. “Spaniards in Mauthausen. Representation of a Nazi Concentration Camp, 1940-2015”, Toronto Iberic World Rights 2018; BRIENNES, S., HERRMANN, G. “Spain, the second world war, and the Holocaust. History and representation”, Toronto Iberic World Rights, 2020.

41 BAER, A. “Europe’s last monument to fascism and Spain’s memory problem”, Minnesota Post, October 2019. <https://www.minnpost.com/community-voices/2019/10/europes-last-monument-to-fascism-and-spains-memory-problem/>

42 For a survey of Francoist symbols in Catalonia, see Bono and Guixé (dir) “Cens de simbologia franquista de Catalunya”, directed by Direcció General de la Memòria Democràtica, 2010.

## Spain and Germany's historical approach to historical memory

Having broadly explored Spain's and Germany's approach to historical memory following the events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we can identify several similarities and differences in how these two countries have conceptualized the importance of historical memory. It is imperative to note that this comparison does not attempt to compare the actual historical events. The Second World War and the Holocaust, on one hand, and the Spanish Civil War and the Francoist regime were fundamentally different and unrelated policies of historical memory are to be expected. This comparison, however, helps understand how different collectives and governments integrate an arduous past into their national identity formation, history and education. By researching the different approaches to peace and reconciliation that different countries have taken one can identify similar strategies and trends that might help seeking national unity and reconciliation after mass-violence events.

One of the first similarities they have presented in their approaches to historical memory that can be identified is the first stage of silence that characterize both the German society after 1945 and the Spanish *Pacto del silencio* that aimed to set aside differences and work towards a peaceful future. Even though the nature of these two silences was fundamentally different (Spain's agreement of silence was deliberate and established by the government, whereas Germany's first 'stage of silence' took place in the private and family sphere while memory policies were institutionalized at the state level), further research to understand the root, influences and consequences of a period of silence after a mass-violence event or genocide can inform the ways in which both citizens and governments first approach a difficult past in a moment of transition to democracy. It is important to note, moreover, that in both cases this silence was broken (or challenged) by the emergence of new generations that did not experience these traumatic events firsthand, and sparked conversations at both the public and private level. The role of new generations that did not experience the event firsthand and their own interpretation of the historical events, are fundamental to understanding how intergenerational memory operates and how these memories (or, as argued by M. Hirsch, "post-memories")<sup>43</sup> can challenge the established understanding of how to deal and come to terms with a difficult past. Can historical memory policies and interpretations remain the same after several decades have passed? How do or should they change to accommodate the demands of new generations that did not experience the event firsthand, and whose unders-

43 HIRSCH, M. *The Generation of Post-memory: Writing and visual culture after the Holocaust*, Columbia University Press, 2012.

tanding might come, partly, from family experiences and storytelling rather than actual memories?

This change in new generations' historical consciousness might have been motivated by different factors: curiosity and interest, political beliefs, school education or personal family experiences of both events. The manner in which each country has attempted to break these silences highlights one of the main differences in how Germany and Spain have approached the politics of historical memory. While Germany underwent the challenge of identifying and forming a unique national historical narrative of the Holocaust after the unification of the FRG and GDR, Spain still struggles with many different historical interpretations of the Spanish Civil War and the Francoist Regime. As mentioned, historical and political debates around violence, legitimacy of the regime and politicization of historical memory policies continue to build on Spain's difficulties seeking reconciliation after a traumatic event. Different regional histories and political interest in today's Spain add another layer of complexity to the matter and make it more difficult to form a single national historical narrative and thus the formation of a national historical memory about the events. A specific example about the polarization regarding historical memory and historical narratives is the lack of a standardized educational curriculum and the ongoing debates (which in many cases come from the political party in power) regarding what and how the Spanish history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century must be taught. In a similar way, historical research is often seen as political depending on the focus of the research pursued and continues to be limited by the lack of archival access.<sup>44</sup>

The aforementioned politicization of historical memory is another element that reflects on the differences between how Germany's and Spain's government understand its historical memory policies. This can be clearly seen through the attempts to exhume human remains from mass graves that the Association for the Recuperation of Historical Memory has been carrying out since the turn of the new century. To the right-wing supporters and political parties in Spain, which oppose the excavation of the mass graves and identification of the victims, this process is seen as a way to demonize the Francoist regime, claim exaggerated numbers of victims and, once again, reopen wounds that were closed during the transition to democracy through the creation and support of historical memory policies. The debates surrounding the exhumation and identification of victims reflects how polarized the Spanish political and social sphere is when it comes to measures necessary for the reconciliation of the country's society after the events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

44 GONZÁLEZ QUINTANA, A., BIESCA, S., BERROJO, L. (2019) "El Acceso a los Archivos de España", Fundación Francisco Largo Caballero

The understanding of historical memory after a mass-violence event, dictatorial repression or genocide has received increasing academic attention over the last few decades. This paper started with M. Minow's quote from her book about transitional justice as a way to attempt healing after a large-scale tragedy. The first sentence the reader encounters in the introduction states, "Will the twentieth century be most remembered by its mass-atrocities?" To this, and to spark questions for further research, I would ask how, by whom and under which circumstances will these atrocities be remembered? And how can this memory help build justice, reconciliation and peace?

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