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Still Violent After All These Years: Post-Franco Spain

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To reflect on violence is notoriously difficult. It is not only the subject itself but the multiplicities of grades and make it areas of practice that almost impossible to create a general concept of it. In its most simple description, violence is the act of physical aggression to cause harm or injury. Raymond Williams has noted the myriad senses of the word violence, which can encompass physical assault, the use or threat of physical force, representations of violence, unruly behavior, and verbal criticism (329-330). Reflecting a similarly wide range of signification, the essays presented in this issue consider violence during the most recent period of Spanish history. These seven articles incorporate a variety of historical documents, novels, films, paintings, music, and comics. The result is a genealogy of violence that challenges the official discourse of an end of violence after the transition to democracy by analyzing the presence of violence in cultural products and how it is constitutive of aesthetic approaches. The contributors' explorations help to conceptualize

and to understand the representation of acts of violence as well as the multiplicity and extension of violence in post-Franco Spain.

To contemplate violence critically is especially relevant and necessary now, [1] not only because it is foundational for the Spanish state and because it affects our everyday lives and culture, but because the nature of violence is changing: Spanish troops were briefly involved in the illegal occupation of Iraq; new terrorists have appeared in the form of transnational jihadists; international criminal bands have settled on the east coast; school bullying has been identified for the first time as unacceptable; and the old ways of intimate violence began to be publicly repudiated.

The contemporary Spanish state and its culture offer a compelling case study of violence. From its dictatorial past to a modern, developed present, Spain has supposedly eradicated some of the causal elements of violence. And yet violence continues to be an essential part of Spanish society and its political life. Post-Franco Spain envisions itself as a progressive, peaceful, wealthy, and democratic country that has overcome a violent past. But, despite efforts to forget, signs of violence are never far away as human remains of the Civil War are unearthed and military tribunals' archives are opened, not to mention media reports of terrorism, domestic abuse or criminality.

Violence is more present than ever in Spanish society and it is not just in the media. Whereas under Franco, all data on violence was concealed, current governments offer full public disclosure on the Ministry of Interior website. [2] Paradoxically, free expression and the democratic open flow of information create the perception of a violent society, while the dictatorship projected an image of peace and order at the same time that it incarcerated, tortured and executed thousands of citizens. The dictatorship was able to project this peaceful imaginary because it held the monopoly of force and signification by controlling information, denying public access to references of violence. Recent access to such information has allowed historians to begin to reconstruct the silenced political violence of the dictatorial regime and to create a genealogy of suffering that, beyond all justifications, is hard to contest.

With all this in mind, a historian starts us off with an article that shows the deep roots of violence in Spanish history and politics. Damián González Madrid provides an account of the political violence of Franco's regime in his "Violencia política y dictadura franquista." The author forwards an obvious yet disturbing idea for contemporary Spain: that repression during the Francoist dictatorship was conducted with the acquiescence and collaboration of the population. In some scholarship, the Spanish people have been depicted as powerless victims of a cruel authoritarian regime, implying that the apparatus of the dictatorship was ruthless but limited. The explanations for collaboration are as multiplicitous as the number of individual situations, but the indictment is severe in the face of the extent of the repression and the range of political violence exercised against those perceived to be dissenting. The factual frame offered by González Madrid pits the origins of the current political legality against the insoluble remainder of history. The article demonstrates that political violence, continuing well into the Transition, is foundational for the modern Spanish state.

Reflections on the state and violence are as old as modern political theory and Walter Benjamin's "Critique of Violence" is especially relevant for the Spanish case because it helps to explain the underlying violence in the political change to democracy. Through a discussion of the connections between natural and positive law, Benjamin sets the stage for a justification of the uses of violence (general strike, Sorel's direct action, or capital punishment), of violence as a fact of nature or as a result of history, and ultimately, to question the parliamentary German legality of the time. His goal is not to discuss the different forms of law but the foundational and fundamental role of violence, one that turns to question the legitimate use of force by focusing on means and ends. Benjamin concludes by highlighting two kinds of related violence: one that creates the law and another that sustains it. However separate Benjamin sees these two forms of violence, both are based on justified means for just ends.

Towards the end of his essay, Benjamin moves from what he calls mythical violence, that is, violence related to our classical past and the foundation of the law, to divine violence. This latter form of unalloyed violence is one that neither upholds the law nor creates a state, and is outside of discourse and language. By introducing this new form of violence, Benjamin

breaks from the dialectical opposition between violence that posits the law and violence that preserves it. It entails, instead, a sovereign act lacking meaning or explanation because is not framed by the law. It is violence, in Giorgio Agamben's interpretation, in which it is not possible to separate rule and exception. It emphasizes the foundational aspect of violence and law, precisely because it destroys the links between both of them (65). The perplexing conclusion for any modern state is that without violence there is no law and vice versa. [3]

The question of violence and the law is taken up in the second article of this collection, Cristina Moreiras Menor's "De lo natural a lo histórico. De lo ético a lo político: temporalidades violentas en Delibes y Camus." By comparing Miguel Delibes' novel Los santos inocentes and its eponymous film version by Mario Camus, Moreiras Menor interprets these texts as examples of two discrete forms of violence: one that is consequence of natural law, and another that is a result of historical changes. In rural post-war Spain, violence takes many shapes for the destitute farmer. The land owners rule their states in a quasi-feudal style and the presence of positive law and the state cannot be further away. In the novel, the exploitation and abuse of the working class leads to a Hobbesian scenario: the unlimited and unchecked rights of the landlord provoke the final and deadly response from an unexpected character. Moreiras Menor suggests that whereas Delibes presents an ethical response where natural law takes its course, Camus chooses a historical and political reading in which the protagonists are the victims of both the old regime and the normative practices of modernity. Exiled from the past and not yet in the future, the protagonist family serves as an ethical and political denunciation of the consequences of history and its violent repercussions.

Other forms of violence attending political change receive further attention in the third article of this collection. Ana Luengo concludes in "La necesidad de narrar la violencia: la otra cara de Barcelona en la novela negra" that the representation of violence is an index of historical change. The article shows how the noir genre shadows events in Spanish society, and suggests that the need to narrate violence is the need to narrate reality. The hard boiled detective novel portrays a society in which order has been disrupted and requires reparation, often by violent means. Through her Catalan examples, Luengo proposes that larger tensions in society are exemplified by the relations between cops and perpetrators. Francoist

censors forbade hard boiled detective novels on account of their intense realism. Neglecting that these detective novels provided a testimony of lower social class and state violence, the censors' argument was that they gave a bad example and created an image of disorder. During the Transition the genre met with commercial success and Luengo traces the shift from the novel's dirty realism during late seventies and early eighties to the more stylized reality of the last decade of the twentieth century. The author argues that despite a noticeable democratic change in the behavior of the characters, police continue to be depicted in a very similar way –an instrument of state and personal force that often and freely crossed the line of legitimate violence. Another noticeable change Luengo explains is in the reach of violence and the resolution of the crime. While in the novels of the Transition, order was re-established for a while and violence was restricted to the underworld, the novels of the nineties show an overarching violence and crimes that are only partially and momentarily solved, reflecting the period of epistemological uncertainty in which the novels were written.

González Madrid, Moreiras Menor and Luengo's articles illustrate that the state and the law are, by definition, violent. Not only does the state hold the monopoly of violence but the state is founded and preserved by violent acts justified and rendered non-violent by its own laws. Spain is no different in the foundational function of violence than any other state. Paul Ricoeur, agreeing with Hobbes, has noted while discussing collective memory that: "What we celebrate under the heading of founding events are, essentially, violent acts legitimated after the fact by a precarious state of right, acts legitimated, at the limit, by their very antiquity, by their age" (82). Relevant for his discussion of memory and its social function is that the Spanish state continues to struggle with the creation of a common historical narrative of the Civil War. This has in part been difficult either because the justification of such violence does not match the ends, or because the remnants of memory are still buried in unmarked graves. The Civil War continues to be the foundational moment for modern Spain and the struggle over its representation and meaning continues as is evident in the next article of the collection.

Pedro Pérez del Solar traces the rhetorical and pictorial constructions around the most famous of Picasso's paintings in "Amansar El Guernica." Painted to commemorate the bombing of a Basque town by German air-forces during the Spanish Civil War, the Spanish

Transition transformed it into a general anti-war statement with universal appeal. De-historicizing El Guernica was part of the amnesic process of the transition to democracy by which even a painting made in response to fascist aggression lost any connection to its conditions of production. Pérez del Solar traces this process in the comics of the time and he explains how while the official discourse was trying to remove the civil war connotations of El Guernica, comic's authors made stories and drawings that contrarily emphasized the historiographical elements of the painting. The author of this article illustrates that comics are a fresh and rich cultural production with clear critical perspectives on how meaning is contended and constructed.

The following article offers further reflections on pictorial representations of violence. Alexis Grohmann writes “Sobre guerra e hybris en El pintor de batallas de Arturo Pérez-Reverte,” following the novel in order to extract a deeper theory of violence. The novel questions how one can think about war after seeing it first hand, and what medium is best for conveying its violence and senselessness. How can we communicate a lived experience that can hardly be reproduced and even less shared? These questions, indeed, reveal the difficulty of symbolizing violence. In his reading, Grohmann presents the age-old paradigm of the human relation to violence: is it our natural state or, to the contrary, it is society, exploitation, and the law that produces a violent human being? Discussing this issue, Grohmann refers to the Greek concept of hubris, the excessive human pride that disturbs the natural limits of a balanced universe. Hubris is at the core of violence and, as classic mythology showed, results in the downfall of men. Grohmann concludes that in El pintor de batallas hubris is the origin of violence and war.

From the many kinds of violence that this collection examines, that directed against oneself cannot be left out and is the center of the next article. Maarten Steenmeijer explores the dramatic death of Kurt Cobain, the iconic singer of the rock band Nirvana, and its consequences in Spanish contemporary literature. The new generation of Spanish writers has grown up surrounded by modern international media and rock music. Coming of age in democratic Spain and open to the influences of the world, they have been portrayed as apathetic about political issues and history, as a hedonistic and nihilistic generation. Maarten Steenmeijer's “Autenticidad, muerte y martirio: Kurt Cobain en la narrativa española”

suggests that critics have to consider not only the referential presence of Cobain and his music in contemporary novels, but also his influence as well because of Cobain's commitment to the ultimate nihilistic action. Steenmeijer considers that Cobain, like young contemporary novelists, was aware of his alternative role and conscious of being the product of an industry. In an age of mass production, nobody escapes the market and the need for authenticity is more acute than ever. The novels he examines show, through the filter of Cobain's death, not only the contemporary drive to discover something authentic untouched by the market or the media, but also that the new generation attitude towards life is not a pose. Steenmeijer concludes that Cobain's suicide legitimizes the aesthetics of violence and nihilism found in current novels.

Isabel Cuñado, co-editor of this volume, closes the collection by reviewing the recent publishing boom of novels dealing with the Spanish Civil War. These novels are poignantly different from other testimonial, historical or realist novels in that they come after many years of amnesia and take to task the issue of memory. Cuñado calls these "postmemory novels" because the authors approach the issue from a generational distance, their knowledge mediated rather than experiential. Cuñado asks whether this boom was motivated by an editorial commercial campaign or a true collective drive to know. Whatever the answer may be, she evaluates the boom as positive not only because of the effort to recover, and come to terms with memory and history, but for the plurality of novelistic voices brought with it.

These seven essays contribute to the still limited study of violence in Spain by showing how violence is a constitutive element of contemporary culture. [4] Violence is multifaceted and many areas remain to be explored. Cultural forms of violence, for instance, though present in Spain, are often overlooked because they are not perceived as such. Bull-fights are a good example, and beg the question of how and when a society recognizes behavior as violent. In the intersection of the new and the old, when considering violence in twentieth-first century Spain a new set of questions will arise. With new forms of violence —international terrorism, domestic, sexual, and racist— occupying the headlines and the public imaginary, how will violence be symbolized? What kinds of violence will make it into the public realm and which will be obviated? Will new factors or actors modify the way we understand violence? Will

there be some forms of violence that are no longer acceptable for Spanish society? And if that is the case, will the rejection of some forms of violence create the conditions for a new community or a different national identity?

These questions are framed by the radical change in geopolitical, social, and economic realities of the twenty-first century. After September 11 and the Madrid train bombings, theoretical and practical considerations of violence need to be re-assessed. Hannah Arendt's "On Violence" feared the irruption of new actors that, using nuclear weapons, would question in the most radical way current constructions of nation, war, and power. She argued that small nations could cause, with the aid of technology, a great deal of violence outdating calculations of power based on wealth, fire power and capacity for attrition (10-11). As it turns out, the danger was not only in small countries as Arendt thought, but in new transnational agents that have effectively moved parts of the developed world from the fear of mutual total destruction to violent interventions that alter the traditional rules of engagement. In such an arena, Arendt's exhortation to re-think power and the use of force is more relevant than ever.

Due to the technological and commercial developments of globalization, the experience of violence can no longer be divided into systemic or catastrophic, local or international. The 24 hours cycle of news, together with specialized programming, produces a constant feed of images in which current and past violence stream directly into our homes. De-contextualized and without a clear relation to history, violence becomes an instrument of sensationalism and fear. Historical battles on one channel are possibly confused with the latest shoot-out or military offensive. This wide-open media representation of violence cannot be overlooked as it is part of a globalized world view in which all events are simultaneous and overwhelming. It desensitizes and preempts the reaction of the public by creating a continuous sense of emergency. All specific moments are washed out and substituted by something else in the visual avalanche of global pain and suffering. While the events and the images are global, the spectators are not. Joan Ramon Resina sharply points that "Globalization is economic power's most ambitious space-spanning thrust, but it operates within political geography" (Resina 54). Indeed, violent imaginaries, even if global, have to be enacted in a specific cultural and political reality and interpreted accordingly to local contexts and temporalities.

Future examinations of violence in Spain should take into consideration how the global onslaught of images affects current representations of violence. The predominance of the visual makes us question whether violence can any longer be transmitted through the literary in a society exposed to mass and global images of violence. What is left of experience to be transmitted in fictional accounts when the media offers real narratives and images of violence? And finally, what is the role of literature and art as it relates to collective memory and acts of violence in/of the community? Our essays in this volume offer preliminary answers to such questions, reflecting the disturbing and complex presence of violence in contemporary Spanish society, its representation, and the limits of our critical language to explain it.

Notes

[1] Forerunners, such as Marsha Kinder, proposed daring readings of Spanish films and the violence in them. Blood Cinema set methodological parameters that took into consideration several theoretical traditions while maintaining an eye for cultural specificity. Kinder argued that the violence in Spanish films responded to Catholic baroque counter-reformation concepts of death and sacrifice, as well as a denunciation of the hidden violence of the war and the dictatorship (Kinder 139). Since then, violence is getting more attention and recently has been analyzed in special issues of the Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies and Ciberletras.

[2] See http://www.mir.es/DGRIS/Balances/Balance_2006/pdf

[3] For more on State violence see Fernando Coronil and Julie Skurski (eds) States of Violence.

[4] Most of the work on violence can be found in the areas of history and the social sciences where there is an extensive bibliography mostly dealing with the civil war and Basque terrorism. There is a recent surge of studies on domestic violence.

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