

lives of their protagonists. *The Frozen Heart*, for example, opens with the funeral of the protagonist's wealthy and beloved father — a father who, as Álvaro, the hero, soon discovers, built his fortune on the victims of Francoist repression. Álvaro's dilemma is personal (How do you redefine your relationship to a dead father once you realize that he was evil?), but it is collective too. His quandary reflects that of an entire generation of Spaniards who have been hesitant to criticize the Franco period because it might force them to morally revise their own family history — not to mention its wealth and social status.

The novel resolves this moral dilemma through a double resolution. First, Álvaro falls in love with a descendant of the same Republican family whose possessions his father pillaged. Second, digging into his family's past, he discovers that his father's mother was a relatively prominent Republican who died in a Francoist prison. Yet despite the relative simplicity of this resolution — and its hint of melodrama — the novel does important political work. In the end, Grandes not only invites her readers to relate to the collective past in an affective rather

than aseptic way; she also shows that it's possible to do this beyond the framework of genealogy. The affective relation to the past that her work models is not limited to the virtuous — but apolitical — love we feel for our mothers, fathers, grandmothers, and grandfathers. Rather, it's an affective relationship that, by going beyond filial lines, can turn into a civic or political commitment.

For Grandes, writing historical fiction was an act of taking sides. For many Spaniards, reading her work was also. As a best-selling novelist deeply committed to the cause of historical memory, Grandes made it possible for her thousands of readers to establish an affiliative bond with chapters from their collective past absent from secondary history education, and which academic historians had long declared too toxic for public access. That remains her legacy for today. ▲

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## BOOK REVIEW

Sebastiaan Faber, *Exhuming Franco: Spain's Second Transition*. Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2021. 286pp.

Reviewed by Joshua Goode

The verb to bury has three different roots; one connotes covering in the earth; another, to be of a place; the third, to borrow. At first blush, that last root seems surprisingly disconnected. But when one contemplates the notion of the

buried past, buried history or buried memories, this last root of burying makes more sense. Any good historian, or therapist for that matter, will note that when one retrieves a memory, or contemplates a past event, there is usually a particular purpose for calling it up, as if borrowing it for one's present purposes. In his newest book, *Exhuming Franco*, Sebastiaan Faber captures this multiple meaning well as he explores the use and abuse of

memories of the Spanish Civil War and the Franco Regime in present-day Spain. For some, burying Franco and the Francoist past was to make it disappear. Calling it up now is painful and threatening. For others, the past was always there, being saved for later, awaiting its exhumation. Its return now is potentially salutary. Faber's book is a careful account of the multiplicity of meanings and purposes that calling up memories has today in Spain.

While Faber is probably best known to readers as an editor of *The Volunteer*, he is also one of the most important authorities on the memory debates in Spain. He is the author of two books and numerous articles on the subject. He also has a sharp and worldly eye about Spanish politics and history and their place in more international conversations. *Exhuming Franco* is a good example of his approach. The historian, Tony Judt, once described the postwar period in Europe as defined by how different countries came to terms with their actions during World War II. Here, Faber demonstrates how Spain fits into Judt's assertion. The presumption used to be that Spain was an outlier in this postwar reconciliation, confronting its past only in terms of how the Franco regime wanted to present it, never acknowledging crimes or making amends. Then, during the Transition to democracy, leaders followed Franco's propaganda with a concomitant squelching of any historical reckoning through a firm belief that to move on from the past, one had to keep it buried, unexamined. As Faber makes clear, Spain is no longer an outlier. In fact, the past two decades have observed the rise of a large-scale memory movement there. No more are pacts of silence or blanket amnesty laws of Spain's transition years easily abided or blithely supported. Grass-roots organizations and individuals have engaged in efforts to locate mass graves from the Civil War and exhume



the bodies of loved ones. Ferocious debates among academics, journalists, and many others about crimes that took place over the last 80 years are now playing out in talk shows, books, film and television debates. Laws dedicated to historical memory have been passed in 2007 and again in 2020. Official markers and monuments of the regime are slowly being removed. No longer being saved for later, history is everywhere being yanked up from ground. What makes Spain different is not that this reckoning is taking place but figuring out why it took so long to occur and deciding what happens now.

Faber offers a lucid answer to these questions. First, he provides introductory chapters that lay out the ways that Spain has uniquely unearthed and dealt with the past. He begins with the exhumation of Franco's remains in 2019 from the Valley of the Fallen to their reinternment in the family's plot. It is a good moment to begin with as this transfer seemed to fall so flat. Greatly anticipated and symbolically important, still, many found much to criticize in the way the event was covered, discussed, and justified. There was too much focus on Franco and too little on his victims. Some naturally saw the event as a chance to ruminate not so much on the Spanish past but on the Spanish present. Yes, the transition to democracy was now over. The important question became what comes next? In a small but telling detail, Faber points out a concerning note in the fact that so many members of the Spanish far right party, Vox, today are so young, born well after Franco's death. What fantasy do they imagine when they wear signs (as they do) that say, "Make Spain Great Again"?

After laying out his themes in the introductory chapters, Faber revisits them through more than a dozen interviews with key figures who have written about Spain's memory debates or who have worked at the center of them. The portrait that emerges is the many ways the past is used in contemporary Spain. Faber talks to Catalans who view the memory fights through the lens of recent state action to suppress regional independence movements. Some university professors see the educational system as the primary site of contest about the past and its meanings. Journalists focus on the role of the media in understanding the memory movement. Others fixate on the role the judiciary has played in letting perpetrators go or holding only some to account. Some want reparations and truth commissions. Others provide interesting views of the need for, or impossibility of, a national museum dedicated to the Spanish Civil War, like the museums on the Mall in Washington, D.C., or the Memorial to Europe's Murdered Jews in the heart of Berlin. Some describe the need to remove monuments and change street names as essential tools to fix Spain's democracy. Others view these efforts as empty gestures. Still others demand more of the moral outrage that would stem from putting on trial those who committed crimes of murder, corruption, expropriation, during the war and the regime—for which they were offered amnesty or immunity *en masse* in 1977. By

presenting different people talking about the same topic, Faber's book reveals a rather erudite and complex debate about the use of the past in Spain. The book has the feel of a respectful, well-informed and informative debate in Hyde Park corner.

There is one last theme that emerges in these pages that is perhaps the most essential and disheartening. Many of Faber's interlocutors decry the parlous state of historical awareness in Spain about the Civil War, the Franco Regime and even the Transition. Some of the problem is educational. There is a shocking dearth of time spent on the Civil War or Franco in Spanish primary and secondary education. Faber also tells a revealing story about Spanish demographics: the population of Spain increasingly has the same relationship to the events of the Spanish Civil War or the Franco Regime or even of the early years of the Transition that they have to the Inquisition. They were all historical events, over long before much of the population was even born. Over 40% of the current Spanish population was born after the ratification of the 1978 Constitution. Unmitigated moral outrage is hard to maintain if historical actors are disappearing and if the population is not even aware of their crimes. This too is not just a Spanish phenomenon and concern; Judt's postwar period is ostensibly over.

The conversation with Emilio Silva that concludes the book touches on all these themes and brings Faber's argument and framing of the work to its sobering finale. Silva, who co-founded the Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory, has led the movement to dig up the bones of Republican soldiers and other victims of Francoist forces. He is the obvious person to begin and end this book. His work has always attacked that core divide in the roots of burials: to make disappear or to save for later. The problem for Silva is not that there is too much talk about the past. There is still too much reluctance to have a real reckoning. And this reluctance is born of the habits formed in Spain's Transition and its pact of silence. Silence begets ignorance and ignorance plus time is the enemy of reconciliation. Teaching history is the only way forward: "If we think of Spain as a tree whose roots reach in the soil, it's clear that we are not drinking from the Second Republic or other progressive periods. The subsoil that feeds is still drenched in Francoism." ▲

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