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Accounting for Violence, Counting the Dead: The Civil War and Spain's Political Present

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Introduction

What is the weight of a human life? Its value is often construed as infinitely large and therefore fundamentally incomparable: as the truism has it, every unnatural or premature death is one too many. Yet in practice human deaths are regularly quantified in coldly straightforward terms in order to assess their relative importance. The trope of the scale—the balance—is a popular one in this context. Speaking on the United States drone program—in which unmanned, remote-controlled aircraft roam the globe in search of suspects to kill, regardless of their citizenship and without any semblance of due process—U.S. President Barack Obama acknowledged that drone strikes were to blame for the loss of innocent life, although he immediately went on to invoke mitigating factors. "[I]t is a hard fact that U.S. strikes have resulted in civilian casualties, a risk that exists in all wars," Obama said on May 23, 2013;

> For the families of those civilians, no words or legal construct can justify their loss. For me, and those in my chain of command, these deaths will haunt us as long as we live, just as we are haunted by the civilian casualties that have occurred

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> through conventional fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq. / But as Commander-in-Chief, I must weigh these heartbreaking tragedies against the alternatives. To do nothing in the face of terrorist networks would invite far more civilian casualties—not just in our cities at home and facilities abroad, but also in the very places—like Sana'a and Kabul and Mogadishu—where terrorists seek a foothold. Let us remember that the terrorists we are after target civilians, and the death toll from their acts of terrorism against Muslims dwarfs any estimate of civilian casualties from drone strikes. (Obama 2013)

Obama invokes the notion of weight twice here, though only once explicitly. The President believes it is his duty to "weigh these heartbreaking tragedies against the alternatives." At the same time, he states that the innocent deaths his orders have caused will never cease to haunt him; they will never stop weighing on his conscience. The value of a human life, then, appears in Obama's speech as both infinite *and* quantifiable: we are asked to accept the paradoxical notion that the President's decisions are based on cold, realistic calculation but also, at the same time, on empathy and the unflinching acceptance of personal, ethical responsibility. The loss of innocent life cannot be justified, Obama says; and yet he goes on to justify it, in the very next paragraph, as the tragic, unintended but unavoidable consequence of a decision meant to prevent a greater loss of innocent life in the future.

What is remarkable about Obama's speech is not just the contradictory nature of his statements, but also their level of sophistication. Unlike most of his predecessors, Obama resists dehumanizing the victims of the violence he has set in motion, and he explicitly justifies his decision by arguing that it will help save *non-American* lives. Judith Butler has called attention, by contrast, to the manner in which the Israeli government has consistently explained away its targeting of civilians by rhetorically turning every Palestinian—including women and children—into a potential weapon (for attacks on Israel) or a potential shield (to defend terrorists), marking civilians as a legitimate object of Israeli military violence wielded in self-defense.[1] In *Precarious Life* (2004) and *Frames of War* (2009), Butler argues that subjecting a life to violence, as for example in war, is more difficult once that life is apprehended *as life,* which for Butler means that it is apprehended—or, more actively, recognized—as precarious and grievable: "Without grievability, there is no life, or, rather, there is something living that is other than life" (Butler, *Frames* 15). This apprehension and recognition are in turn mediated through processes of representation such as photography. Thus, during the war in Vietnam, she writes in *Precarious Life,*

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> it was the pictures of the children burning and dying from napalm that brought the U.S. public to a sense of shock, outrage, remorse, and grief. . . . The images furnished a reality, but they also showed a reality that disrupted the hegemonic field of representation itself. Despite their graphic effectivity, the images pointed to somewhere else, beyond themselves, to a life and to a precariousness that they could not show. It was from that apprehension of the precariousness of those lives we destroyed that many U.S. citizens came to develop an important and vital consensus against the war. (Butler, *Precarious* 150)

"We read about lives lost and are often given the numbers," Butler notes in *Frames of War*,

> but these stories are repeated every day, and the repetition appears endless, irremediable. And so, we have to ask, what would it take not only to apprehend the precarious character of lives lost in war, but to have that apprehension coincide with an ethical and political opposition to the losses war entails? Among the questions that follow from this situation are: How is affect produced by this structure of the frame? And what is the relation of affect to ethical and political judgment and practice? / To say that a life is precarious requires not only that a life be apprehended as a life, but also that precariousness be an aspect of what is apprehended in what is living. Normatively construed, I am arguing that there ought to be a more inclusive and egalitarian way of recognizing precariousness, and that this should take form as concrete social policy regarding such issues as shelter, work, food, medical care, and legal status. (Butler, *Frames* 13)

Obama gestures toward the ethical position that Butler advocates inasmuch as he explicitly, and personally, grieves for the non-American, civilian victims of his actions, emphasizing the humanity and innocence of the victims, and the profound tragedy of their deaths. This change in political discourse arguably aligns with a more general cultural shift in attention—in historiography, legal studies, and ethics as much as in popular culture and the media—from the figure of the hero or perpetrator to that of the victim (Judt 828; Sarlo; Bilbija & Payne 18–19; Naqvi 1, qtd. in Gómez 94). If Obama consciously sets himself apart from other world leaders in his acknowledgment of non-American victims *as victims*, moreover, he implicitly draws on a version of U.S. exceptionalism that, in the recent past, has helped justify military and other interventions around the globe—one that posits the United States as exceptional because it takes on the moral burden of protecting the lives of all citizens of the world, not just its own (Levine; Neier 94–95).

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Another remarkable feature of Obama's speech is his assumption of accountability, even if it is on a moral and not a judicial level. To be sure, Obama and his attorney general have been notoriously unwilling to hold the Bush administration accountable for war crimes and torture committed as part of the so-called "war against terrorism." Still, the President's acceptance of *personal* accountability for his own administration's actions can be argued to reflect the effects of what Kathryn Sikkink has called the "justice cascade": the rapid rise of the idea that political and military leaders can and should be held individually and criminally accountable for violating human rights. Since the mid-1970s, Sikkink writes, "there has been a shift in the *legitimacy of the norm* of individual criminal accountability for human rights violations and an increase in criminal persecutions on behalf of that norm" (5). (Ironically, in this particular speech the assumption of personal responsibility serves Obama to justify actions that, many argue, actually violate principles both of the U.S. Constitution and international law. The privatization of political accountability, in other words, may have a downside.)

How do we move from questions of representation—questions about the public narration and depiction of violence—into a politics and ethics of life? It is one of the questions that propels Butler's project, and one that has a particular urgency for societies dealing with the memory of internal violence. Let's move some 75 years back in time, to the Spanish Civil War, when international public indignation over the deaths of innocent civilians as a result of military violence, particularly city bombardments, reached unprecedented heights—in large part thanks to the work of war photographers like Robert Capa and David Seymour (Capa et al.)—and when, in spite of this indignation, the majority of democratic powers, including Roosevelt's United States, decided against intervention. The Spanish Civil War is interesting in historical terms (how did public opinion and authorities frame the loss of innocent life at the time?), but also in diachronic terms (how has this framing of the events in Spain changed over time?).

Any discussion about the ethics of life in the Spanish context is obliged to take into account the tremendous loss and mutilation of life in the violent five decades between 1931 and 1981, as well as the ways in which democratic Spain has positioned itself in relation to that violence. In recent years, the precise numbers of dead caused by the Spanish war and its aftermath have returned to occupy a central place in the continuing debates about the conflict. And if counting the dead has been one problem for historians of the Civil War and Francoism, another, more complicated one has been to account more generally for the unspeakable violence that Spaniards inflicted on each other be-

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tween 1936 and 1975. In what follows I want to consider this double problematic—determining the number of victims and understanding the nature of the violence—in relation to an ethical and historiographical question: What is the proper attitude to adopt, from the present, vis-à-vis past acts of violence and their victims? I am particularly interested in positions that frame these four questions through notions of national or cultural identity. In reality, though, other more fundamental questions precede these four; fundamental questions that, in the Spanish context at least, are anything but resolved: Should there be a public conversation (discourse, dialogue, debate) about past violence in the first place? And if so, who should have it and what should its purpose be? Should the main goal of this conversation be to understand violence, clinically isolated, in its proper historical context? Or should it serve to inform a debate about forms of violence that continue to be operative in the present? Should the conversation about violence result in an assignation of guilt or responsibility, and a concomitant condemnation of the perpetrators and a recognition or reparation of the victims? Or should it resist the temptation of judicialization? I'll return to these larger questions at the end of this essay.

The connection between violence, cultural identity, and the Spanish Civil War is less far-fetched than it seems. A couple of instances immediately come to mind. The violence inflicted by Spaniards on each other between 1936 and 1939 has long been framed through culture: Spaniards, the argument went, are simply more prone to extreme violence than other peoples. Versions of this narrative, rooted in the so-called Black Legend, were prominent in the dictatorship´s justification for the 1936 coup and the regime's subsequent harsh rule (Aguilar 35), but also made their appearance in anti-Francoist accounts such as Gerald Brenan's *The Spanish Labyrinth.* ("The troubles of Spain," Brenan wrote, "come from the belief, shared by almost every element in the country, in violent remedies"; 148). Further, as Preston has most recently shown, the ruthlessness of Nationalist violence toward particular sections of the Spanish population was partly rooted in perceptions among the leaders of the military revolt, who had enjoyed long careers in Spain's colonial army, that Spanish peasants did not share these leaders' identity: they were seen as racially more mixed and therefore inferior.[2]

It can be also argued that, at the level of international politics, the connection between cultural identity and collective positions on violence have become increasingly explicit. Tony Judt has shown, for example, that the collective identity of Europe today is closely linked to the idea that a nation or a people cannot be fully European if they are not able or willing to come to terms with shame-

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fully violent episodes in their own history—primarily, but not exclusively, the Holocaust (803–804). "Coming to terms" here stands as a shorthand phrase for a series of actions and attitudes that range from the purely discursive and performative to the more practically political and judicial: they might include the creation of monuments to victims, the issuing of public apologies for crimes committed in the past, the persecution of war criminals, or the granting of reparations to victims or their descendants (Judt 826–29). Within the Spanish context, the enthusiastic embrace by the Generalitat Catalana of the recovery of historical memory movement (Fernández) and anti-bullfight legislation (see also other contributions in this volume), in explicit contrast with the much more reluctant positions adopted by the Spanish national government in Madrid, provides another example of the link between cultural identity and positions on violence. In this context we should also remember that, for post-Franco Spain, "Europe" and "European" have long functioned as synonyms for a much-desired modernity and normality in political, economic, and even literary terms.[3] As I have argued elsewhere, the same generation of intellectuals and politicians who orchestrated the transition to democracy, which failed in important ways to "come to terms" with the country's violent past (at least as that process is being interpreted internationally now), and which celebrated the transition as Spain's entry into European modernity, is ironically forced to adopt something akin to an exceptionalist argument to resist calls for a judicial accounting for that violence, for example by means of a truth commission (Faber, "Raising"). Meanwhile, developments in Spain over the past fifteen years, particularly in the wake of numerous exhumations of previously untouched mass graves from 1936–1939, have fundamentally transformed the ways in which the violence of the years 1931–1978 is being discussed, represented, and processed in the Spanish public and private spheres (Ferrándiz). And while Antonio Gómez is right to state that "for at least some demographic groups, the debate about the Spanish Civil War is also and primordially the debate about (some aspect of) twenty-first century Spain," efforts to translate the renewed interest for a painful past into a viable ethics and politics for the present have encountered significant roadblocks (Gómez 89). In this regard it is telling that one of the most visible recent calls for a moral reveille, by the prominent novelist Antonio Muñoz Molina, ends up dismissing Spain's widespread interest in the country's violent twentieth-century past in the years 2000–2008 as a *distraction* from the profound political and ethical problems facing Spain in the present, which were brought to light by the 2008 economic crisis (Muñoz Molina 12, 202).

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Counting the Victims

Statistics of casualties have been a source of controversy since the very outbreak of the fighting in Spain. As early as 1961, Hugh Thomas adjusted the total number of mortal casualties from the war down from the proverbial *millón de muertos* to less than half that number (Thomas, *Spanish Civil War* 632). Yet for a surprisingly long time, the numbers of victims employed by historians have been strangely fluid. In 1996, for example, Michael Richards wrote that "It has been estimated that as many as 200,000 men and women were executed in the post-war period alone" (179)—a number that Preston, in 2012, set at 20,000: a full order of magnitude less (*Holocaust* xi). This confusion about precise numbers of victims has practical explanations, to be sure. These include the distorted nature of official Francoist historiography, the systematic destruction of documents, and the fact that key archives were opened very late or remain inaccessible (Preston xvi). At the same time, the fluidity of the numbers indicates something about their rhetorical value a well.

Starting even before the war, during the mounting violence and political polarization in the years of the Second Republic (1931–1936), victim statistics had become a political tool. Once the war broke out, both sides felt the urgent need to discredit their opponents and garner international support. They were thus naturally tempted to inflate the numbers of victims caused by their enemies and downplay those resulting from their own actions. The Nationalists were particularly brazen in this regard. As Paul Preston writes, "[o]n 18 July 1938 in Burgos, Franco . . . claimed that 54,000 people had been killed in Catalonia. In the same speech, he alleged that 70,000 had been murdered in Madrid and 20,000 in Valencia. On the same day, he told a reporter there had already been a total of 470,000 murders in the Republican zone" (*Holocaust* xix). Conversely, the Nationalists systematically minimized or flatly denied their own responsibility for civilian deaths. Even today, for example, pro-Franco historians continue to claim that the death toll of the bombing of Gernika, in the spring of 1937, was minimal (Irujo 239–80; Viñas xxi; Southworth 507–31).

Another factor that has granted new relevance to the victims of violence is what has been termed the ethical turn in historiography. In the past couple of decades, historians have moved from a descriptive and explanatory mode, in factual and causal terms, to a mode of writing that, in addition to establishing facts and causes, seeks to pass judgment and apportion moral responsibilities.[4] This trend has also affected professional historians' accounts of the Spanish Civil War, and has coincided with the rise of the grassroots movement calling for a recovery of historical memory (Ferrándiz). As Santos Juliá explained some

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years ago, the generation of Spanish historians that grew up under Francoism and lived the transition to democracy as adults was convinced that the recent past should be approached as aseptically as possible. He and his contemporaries were "sobre todo interesad[os] no en recordar, sino en conocer el pasado, en investigar, en saber qué pasó" (above all, interested not in remembering the past but knowing it, investigating it, finding out what happened);

> Aquellos jóvenes prefirieron, pues, no fiarse de la memoria; más aún: optaron por echar la guerra al olvido en un sentido muy preciso: la consideraron como historia, como un pasado clausurado, algo que había afectado a sus padres, pero de lo que era preciso librarse si se quería desbrozar el único camino que podía reconducir a la democracia, a la libertad. . . . La guerra era sencillamente historia, objeto de conocimiento, no de memoria; su herencia no era bien venida. . . . De modo que nos pusimos a investigar recusando simultáneamente la presunta memoria recibida y las narrativas que les habían servido de vehículo, para volver la vista hacia la política, el sistema de partidos, la acción de los sindicatos, el movimiento obrero, la crisis económica, la lucha de clases, el papel de la Iglesia. De modo que, mientras España mudaba de instituciones, un montón de jóvenes investigadores se asomaba a ese pasado con el propósito de conocer, de identificar lo que había ocurrido. . . . aquella gente, por sus biografías, estaba más interesada en saber del pasado que en saldar alguna cuenta pendiente con ese pasado: no hicieron historia con el propósito de acumular pruebas para llevar ante un juez que dictaminara sobre culpas. (Juliá, "Bajo el imperio" 12, 14–16)

> (Those young [scholars] preferred, then, to not trust memory; what is more, they opted to confine the war to oblivion in a very precise sense: they considered it as history, as a closed-off past, something that had affected their parents but from which they needed to liberate themselves if they wanted to clear the only road that could lead back to democracy, to freedom. . . . The war was simply history, an object of knowledge but not of memory; its legacy was not welcome. . . . This is why we began to do research rejecting, at the same time, the supposed memory that had been handed down to us and the narratives that had been its vehicle, in order to turn our gaze to politics, the party system, the actions undertaken by the labor unions, the labor movement, the economic crisis, the class struggle, the role of the Church. This is why, precisely when Spain itself was changing its institutions, a lot of young researchers turned to that past with the goal of knowing it, of identifying what had happened . . . given their own life trajectories, those people were more interested in knowing about the past than in settling some account or other with

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that past: they did not practice history with the goal of accumulating evidence to bring before a judge in order for him to pass a guilty verdict.)

What Juliá expresses here, I would argue, is his generation's desire for a genealogical break. By treating the violent Spain that was lived and shaped by the generation of his parents as a past that is *not* welcome at the table of the present, his generation asserted its right to *disavow* any claim from the past on Spain's future: it assumed no duty, no debt, and no obligation (to continue the struggle, for instance, or to settle accounts).[5] Nor did it accept the notion of (political) violence as the Spanish curse. Instead, it expressed its commitment to building a Spain *not* defined by its own past. This process had an affective dimension as well: If the desire to be part of a modern, European Spain was driven by a measure of embarrassment, the transition to democracy that Juliá and his generation saw as their greatest accomplishment was a source of considerable pride.

What to Juliá and his contemporaries felt as a liberation, however, younger generations experienced as a void, unfinished business, and—ironically—a source of embarrassment. In contrast with their teachers, historians born in the 1960s have preferred to frame their work in ethical and political terms. In this trend they have no doubt been influenced by the historiography of the Holocaust, which has been framing the historian's task in part as a duty to remember and do justice to the dead, or, in Dominick LaCapra's words, "not only remembering what happened in the past but actively recognizing the fundamental injustice done to the victims as a premise of legitimate action in the present and future" (LaCapra 21, qtd. in Dintenfass 11). Juliá, who himself disagrees with this position, summarizes his younger colleagues' views, not inaccurately, as follows:

> [D]ijeron: aquí no se ha hecho justicia porque se ha olvidado a los vencidos, a los que combatieron por la causa de la República y sufrieron luego depuraciones, cárceles, fusilamientos. Nadie se ha acordado de ellos, nadie ha reivindicado su memoria, la legitimidad de su causa, nadie les ha organizado un homenaje. La indagación en el pasado recuperó así su carga moralista inspirada en lo que Ginzburg ha denominado modelo judicial. Los crímenes fueron tan monstruosos que pretender una neutralidad valorativa, quedarse sólo en la comprensión y en la explicación, mantener lo que Bloch consideraba como máxima perversión del oficio de historiador, esto es, convertirse en juez, se criticó como una abdicación del oficio. Tarea del historiador tendría que ser, por tanto, recuperar la memoria, o sea, no exactamente conocer esos pasados, sino exigir justicia. ("Bajo el imperio" 17–18)

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> (They said: justice has not been done here because the defeated have been forgotten, those who fought for the Republican cause and later suffered purges, prison, executions. No one remembers them, no one has defended their memory, the legitimacy of their cause, no one has organized any tribute to them. In this way, the investigation of the past recovered its moralistic charge, inspired by what Ginzburg has called the judicial model. The crimes were so monstrous that to strive for a neutrality of judgment, to stick to understanding and explanation, to maintain what Bloch considered as the greatest perversion of the historian's craft, that is, to become a judge, was criticized as an abdication of that craft. Hence it became the historian's task to recover memory, that is, not exactly to know those pasts, but to demand justice.)

For Juliá, the work of the academic historian should be confined to the disinterested search for the truth, narrowly defined as a *factual* truth (Mate 21). Representations of the past that are informed by political, emotional, affective, or ethical concerns, by contrast, fall under the notion of "memory" ("Presentación" 17; see also Faber, "Debate" 177–80). In response to Spain's adoption of the so-called Law of Historical Memory, moreover, Juliá has argued that the State has no business legislating on representations of the past, which in his view is tantamount to the imposition, from above, of one uniform version that, moreover, will tend to be self-serving. A number of his colleagues in the profession, however, have emphatically disputed both positions. Pedro Ruiz Torres and Pablo Sánchez León have argued against a rigid distinction between history and memory (Ruiz Torres; Sánchez León "Objetividad"). Ricard Vinyes, for his part, suggests that a democratic state does indeed have the obligation to help shape the narrative of a nation's past through a *política pública de la memoria*, precisely in order to "reconocer en qué se basa el sedimento ético de las instituciones que tenemos, del sistema de convivencia que nos hemos dado" ("Memoria" 57) (recognize the ethical foundation of our institutions, of the system of coexistence that we have adopted):

> Es el reconocimiento de este patrimonio y la demanda de trasmisión de este patrimonio, su valoración positiva, lo que *constituye* la memoria democrática con toda su pluralidad, y la instituye en un derecho civil —no en un deber moral— que funda y basa un ámbito de responsabilidad en el gobierno. Y el deber político generado en la administración es garantizar a los ciudadanos el ejercicio de este derecho con una política pública de la memoria, no instaurando una memoria pública. ("Memoria" 58; qtd. in Faber, "Usted" 20)

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> (It is the recognition of this legacy and the demand that it be transmitted, that it be given a positive value, which *constitutes* democratic memory in all its plurality, and institutes it as a civil right—not a moral duty—that founds, and lays the basis for, a climate of responsibility in government. And the political duty that the practice of governance generates is to guarantee to all citizens the exercise of that right, and to do so with a public memory policy, not by implementing a particular public memory.)

Vinyes's position brings us back to the link between cultural or national identity, on the one hand, and a collective position vis-à-vis a violent past, on the other. For Vinyes, a state-sponsored *política pública de la memoria* can serve to cement a collective identity in particular modes of public representation, ranging from school curricula to museums and monuments (Vinyes, *Asalto* 11–24, 65–72).

Accounting for Violence

This dispute among professional historians is a part of a wider series of recent debates waged in the public and academic spheres of Spain, in which historians, intellectuals, and citizens have disagreed sharply over a set of basic questions related to ethics and judgment vis-à-vis the Spanish Civil War, the Franco dictatorship, and the transition to democracy. At stake in these debates have been the duty or debt of the present generations toward those of the past—and whether it is proper to speak of such a duty or debt at all; the differences between the violence perpetrated on the Republican side versus that on the Nationalist side; and the distinctions between history and memory. Statistics have figured prominently in some of these debates. In addition to the numbers, however, three other components have played a key role in the ethical judgment of the past: the characterization of the victim, the imputed motivations of the perpetrators, and the level of knowledge and complicity of those in command on either side.

Among professional and amateur historians, several conflicting arguments have emerged that are worth a tentative attempt at categorization. Predominant among historians like Paul Preston, Ángel Viñas, and Helen Graham—scholars often identified as "pro-Republican"[6]—has been the argument that the differences between the two groups of victims—those who died in Republican territory and those who died in Nationalist territory—are of a qualitative and quantitative kind. Quantitatively, many more people died on the Nationalist side

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than on the Republican side. (The numbers according to Preston stand roughly in a proportion from three to one [xvii–xviii].) Qualitatively, most of the victims on the Republican side died as a result of uncontrolled outbursts of violence that the Republican authorities tried to quell and eventually succeeded in quelling. The victims on the Nationalist side, by contrast, were killed as a result of an explicit strategy consciously designed by the rebel leadership to sow terror among their political enemies.

> The repression carried out by the military rebels was a carefully planned operation to eliminate, in the words of the director of the coup, Emilio Mola, "without scruple or hesitation those who do not think as we do." In contrast, the repression in the Republican zone was hot-blooded and reactive. . . . Unlike the systematic repression unleashed by the rebels as an instrument of policy, this random violence took place despite, not because of, the Republican authorities. Indeed, as a result of the efforts of successive Republican governments to re-establish public order, the left-wing repression was restrained and was largely at an end by December 1936. (Preston xiii–xiv)

Historians in this camp also tend to adopt a position of solidarity and identification with the victims of Nationalist violence as representatives of the modern ethical and political values that we still recognize as our own: separation between church and state, women's emancipation, cultural diversity, or workers' rights (Graham 22). At the same time—much like Obama—they explicitly disassociate themselves from all forms of violence, clarifying that they do not aim to justify the violence committed on the Republican side. Others have rejected the argument that the violence committed by Republican sympathizers was largely uncontrolled and not part of an explicit tactic. The filmmaker and amateur historian Carlos García-Alix, for example, has argued that a conscious strategic use of terror was also part and parcel of factions aligned with the Republic: "Habría que plantearse si . . . existió una política de usar el terror como arma de disuasión frente al enemigo en el bando republicano. Y la respuesta es que sí la hubo." (Contratiempo 11:09) (The question that should be asked is whether . . . the Republican side, as a matter of policy, used terror as a weapon to deter the enemy. And the answer is that it did).[7]

A third group of historians believe that it is useless to think in terms of relative blame. Santos Juliá, for example, has argued that when it came to the *motivations* for violence, it is important to recognize that both sides were driven by ideologies that twenty-first century Spaniards can no longer recognize as their own. Those who murdered in the name of the Republic, Juliá writes, "consid-

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eraban la muerte de los representantes del viejo orden social como una exigencia de la revolución" (considered that the revolution demanded the death of the representatives of the old social order) and "creían que una verdadera revolución —que es una conquista violenta de poder político y social— solo puede avanzar amontonando cadáveres y cenizas en su camino" (believed that a true revolution—which is a violent conquest of political and social power—can only advance if it leaves heaps of dead bodies and ashes in its wake) ("Duelo"). Spaniards today, by contrast, should think of "los crímenes entonces cometidos en zona republicana como una tragedia por la que todos tendríamos que hacer duelo" (the crimes that were then committed in the Republican zone as a tragedy for which we should all mourn). For Juliá, the killings "nada tenían que ver con su defensa ni con los valores por ella representados, sino con el comienzo de una revolución social que, entre otras catástrofes como acelerar la derrota, significaría, de triunfar, el fin de la misma República" (had nothing to do with the defense of the Republic or a defense of the values that it represented, but rather with the beginning of a social revolution that, in addition to the fact that it accelerated the Republic's defeat, among other catastrophes, would, should it have succeeded, meant the very end of the Republic):

> Cuando se comparan los crímenes de los rebeldes con los de los leales, al modo en que Ossorio se lo decía a Azaña: ellos comenzaron; o se insiste en que fueron menos: ellos matan más; o se reducen a desmanes de incontrolados: ellos planifican; lo que se olvida es que esos crímenes obedecieron a una lógica propia, reiteradamente publicitada desde discursos de líderes anarquistas, comunistas y socialistas, repetidos cada vez que se cometía un crimen masivo: que era preciso destruir desde la raíz el viejo mundo, prender fuego a sus símbolos y proceder a la limpieza de sus representantes. ("Duelo")
>
> (When comparing the crimes of the rebels with those of the loyalists, it is like Ossorio told Azaña: they started it; or people underscore that [the loyalists'] crimes were fewer: "they kill more"; or [the loyalists' crimes] are reduced to uncontrolled excesses: they plan [their crimes]; what people forget is that those crimes obeyed their own logic, which was publicized repeatedly in speeches by anarchist, communist, and socialist leaders and reiterated every time a massive crime was committed: that it was necessary to destroy the old world from its roots, to set fire to its symbols and proceed to purge its representatives.)

Along similar lines, the novelist and literary critic Andrés Trapiello contends that the sheer intensity of the violence on both sides—the *qualitative*

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similarities, in other words—trump any considerations of the *quantitative* dimension. "Los crímenes, de una y otra zona," he writes, "fueron, ciertamente, equiparables" (*Las armas* 14*)* (the crimes committed in both zones were certainly comparable)*;* or, as one of his alter egos in the novel *Ayer no más* states: "Hubo cierta equivalencia en el horror de los crímenes cometidos en la Guerra. Y seguiría habiéndola igualmente si en una balanza hubiese doscientos mil y en la otra diez mil, si la naturaleza del crimen fuese la misma cuando hablamos de tal monstruosidad. La cifra exacta puede ser lo de menos" (140) (There was a certain equivalency in terms of the horror of the crimes committed during the war. And that equivalency would still exist even if one side of the scale had 200,000 crimes and the other 10,000, because when we talk about that level of monstrosity, the nature of the crime is the same. The exact numbers might well be less relevant). Trapiello, who has long been interested in the cultural production of intellectuals associated with the Nationalists, also attempts to complicate the binaries that are usually applied to the history of the Spanish Civil War. While it is true that it was the Republic that, by and large, represented the values of the Enlightenment, he writes, in practice there were liberals and anti-liberals, democrats and anti-democrats, on both sides (*Las armas* 14). For Trapiello, as for Julia, if there is anything worth rescuing from the war it is the position of those few, on either side, whose views and attitudes most closely match today's liberal-democratic consensus.

In Butler's terms, Juliá explicitly invokes the notion of grievability ("hacer duelo"), and seems to call for an end to *differential* grievability: the notion that *some* Spaniards should grieve for *some* victims ("their" victims), and other Spaniards for others. For Juliá, this need for a collective grieving beyond political divisions is closely linked with the idea that the violent political struggles from the past should never be translated into present politics. As he puts it, the legacy of those struggles is "not welcome" (*"su herencia no [es] bien venida*"). The aseptic shield that holds the legacy back is, for Juliá, the professional discipline of the historian—a discipline that those calling for a recovery of historical memory lack. I'll return to the role of professional competency in a moment.

A fourth, more unusual and solitary position is that of the American historian Michael Seidman. In two books on the Spanish Civil War, *Republic of Egos* and *The Victorious Counterrevolution,* Seidman has argued that historians have systematically overrated the ideological motivations of the individual actors involved. Most people just wanted to save their skin and protect their loved ones. Moreover, the eventual victory of the Nationalists over the Republicans had as much to do with material factors—each side's ability to provide food, comfort, and protection to those under their control or serving in their ranks—

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as with political or ideological factors. Seidman thus ends up imputing a new kind of rationality to those involved in the war, including those responsible for acts of violence. The repression and extortion in the Nationalist rearguard, for example, becomes merely an effective way to maximize social order and pro-Nationalist fund raising (Seidman 117–27, Faber, "Seidman" 89–92).

What makes the explanation and understanding of Spanish Civil War violence particularly complicated in Spain today is the intersection of historiographical, ethical and political factors. At stake is not only what exactly happened, and why, more than seventy-five years ago. All of the academic authorities who adopt positions vis-à-vis the violent events of the past are also, at the same time, positioning themselves ethically and politically in the present. This is why, as I have argued elsewhere, Juliá's rejection of "memory" as inherently more politicized than "history" (as practiced by professional academic historians) does not hold water (Faber, "Raising" 120). (In that sense, Ricard Vinyes's position, outlined above, is more logically and politically consistent.) Pablo Sánchez León has contended, from an entirely different position than Juliá's, that this complication has not been beneficial to the rigor and quality of historical scholarship on the Spanish Civil War. In fact, he suspects there had been nothing less than a "collapse of the scholarly edifice built by the efforts of at least two generations of specialists" and a regression to attitudes that were prevalent in the 1950s that have led to "a collective dead end" ("Violence"). His argument adopts a wide and original angle, and is worth presenting in some detail.

Sánchez León describes an increasingly polarized scholarly landscape that "has begun to resemble a Hobbesian state of nature where different groups of scholars and amateurs fight for their own living space by aggressively attacking the rest" ("Violence"). Sánchez León identifies two main camps. On the hand, scholars like Preston and Viñas defend a reading of the Civil War that blames the revolting military for the outbreak of the war; emphasizes the planned, deliberate, and massive nature of Nationalist violence; ascribes the violence committed in Republican territory to uncontrollable and criminal elements associated with revolutionary groups, particularly the Anarchists; and defend the repression of those groups by the Republican government as the only option available given the need to galvanize the Republican war effort. On the other hand, there are less clearly pro-Republican historians like Manuel Álvarez-Tardío and Fernando del Rey Reguillo, who express doubts about the commitment to democracy among the leaders of the Republic.

Beyond their many disagreements, however, Sánchez León argues that both groups share a number of basic features. Both present themselves as examples

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of scholarly rigor, which in both cases is equated with a dispassionate and exhaustive reliance on documentary evidence, while both discredit each other as blinded by political prejudice. In the end, both also revert back to the "discourse of shared responsibility" and a blanket rejection of violence on either side of the war, while "excesses and misdeeds on the Republican side are exclusively attributed to autonomous groups and networks of more or less formally Anarchist or revolutionary Communist allegiance." In addition to their shared "reluctance to theorize," Sánchez León writes, "both these pro- and anti-Republican lines lack a hermeneutical foundation. Far too often, Preston, Rey and Viñas simply equate documentation with information, and information with truth" ("Violence"). In the end, Sánchez León argues, both groups of historians can be considered conservative.

The kind of gridlock and regression that Sánchez León describes, as well as the tendency to sharply mark authorities and competencies with the purpose of excluding or delegitimizing competing narratives, has been typical of the public exchanges around historical memory. Elsewhere I have characterized these exchanges as a *diálogo de sordos,* and speculated what should happen for the public dialogue about the past to be more productive (Faber, "Debate"). It is worth exploring, however, what *productive* might mean in the Spanish case. Many critics and commentators, myself included, have almost automatically assumed that a productive dialogue would lead to a form of *resolution* of the gridlock: the identification of a shared set of values—associated with notions of tolerance, respect, and democracy—that would allow for a proper recognition of all victims' suffering, of all forms responsibility, and the possibility of moving on. In short: a form of reconciliation, understood as an overcoming of conflict.

Antonio Gómez López-Quiñones has convincingly pointed to the fallacies in this set of expectations, however. In a dense but lucid essay he calls attention to the many ways in which the lack of productivity of the historical memory debate in Spain can in fact be ascribed to a *depoliticization* of the issues at stake—a depoliticization that has severely limited the political potential, in Spain's present, of narratives and other representations of the past. The processes that have contributed to this depoliticization are several. They include the attempts, mentioned already, to limit the discourse about the past to particular professional guilds (historians, judges), or to shield Spanish history from other histories (the invocation of exceptionalism). But they also include, Gómez argues, an uncritical assumption of liberal-democratic commonplaces; the idea, for example, that the Spanish public sphere simply should be able to accommodate many different memories of the past in a peaceful juxtaposition. Gómez thinks this is a fallacy: "we should not conceive the Spanish historical memory as a pluralistic

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market of recollections where there are potential consumers (so to speak) for each one" (91).

The invocation of human rights and international law, along with the judicialization of the accounting for the violent past, have been effective in some respects—for example, in countering exceptionalist positions, forcing Spanish government action, and garnering support from international organizations. But in other respects, these strategies have contributed to a sapping of political potential. By invoking supposed pre- or extra-political or notions of humanitarianism and common decency (values assumed to transcend any political difference), they have also encouraged a privatization and individualization of the suffering of the victims and their families (Gómez 93). The victims' associations themselves have been a part of this process inasmuch as they

> treat the crimes of Francoism as tragic events that fundamentally concern the affected families and their private suffering. The public and political facets of these offenses, their trans-individual and non-family dimension, their inevitable "correlation with" and "implication in" the trajectory of some political parties, and their ideological connection with some radical movements are usually dissolved or lost. (93)

Similarly, Gómez argues that the centrality of victimhood has become the basis for a new kind of identity politics delinked from the (revolutionary, emancipatory, modernizing) politics that motivated the victims to be targeted by right-wing violence in the first place. The groups that have emerged in this process seek social recognition, to be sure; but they are united *not* by "pre-existing political programs or ideological attachments." What unites them instead is "a common identity that a past experience of human rights violations confers unto them. Their politics are a causal extension of this identity and this identity is the underlying base upon which their petitions are molded and predicated" (Gómez 96). Finally, and most importantly, the hegemony of liberalism in the dialogue about the violent Spanish past has served to incorporate "non-liberal political aspirations (that is, political goals that are inimical to the liberal project)" but at the price of "deactivat(ing) their inassimilable and most unsettling content" (88).

So while political landscape appears to have changed since the years of the Transition—critics and activists routinely refer to the "breaking" of the "pact of silence" around the year 2000—it could be argued that the aseptic barrier between past and present actually remains largely in place, functioning as a filter that removes the sting from any political projects from the past that might

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unsettle the legitimacy of the status quo. Going back to Santos Juliá's account of the attitude that his generation of historians adopted toward the previous generation's involvement and engagement in violence, it seems clear that the persistence of this filter is closely related to the blanket repudiation of political violence that the country's elites, bound and determined as they were to avoid a second civil war, adopted as an imperative for post-Franco Spain (Aguilar). Interestingly, even the more radical Left—the Left most critical of the Transition—has trouble accounting for the violence that its forebears embraced in the 1930s. (Explaining this properly would take more space than I have available here, but the persistence of terrorism and state-sponsored counter-terrorism in post-Franco Spain is doubtless a central factor; it was in that context that the notion of the *victim* as a central category first gained its prominence in the country's public sphere and political discourse.)

It is true, of course, that the widespread disavowal of violence as a legitimate political tactic—even, most recently, on the part of ETA—can be seen as a genuine accomplishment in Spain today. What Gómez and Sánchez León show, however, is that the blanket, almost knee-jerk, repudiation of violence has led to a series of distortions—both in the historiography of the Civil War, where historians have been too quick to attribute political violence to "rogue," non-State actors, and in political life, where alternative political projects are disqualified out of hand because of their past association with violent strategies. This critical reading of the way in which historical violence has been processed in post-Franco Spain aligns to some extent with the equally critical reading of Transition Culture (*Cultura de la Transición* or *CT)* developed by Guillem Martínez, Amador Fernández-Savater and others (Martínez). These authors argue that the post-Francoist status quo has been marked by a fear of popular political mobilization beyond the party system and the ballot box; a steady hold on power by political and economic elites, with significant support from a largely co-opted intelligentsia; and a deep-rooted reluctance to considering other forms of political and social organization than those enshrined in the 1978 Constitution (Martínez).

The twentieth-century history of violence in Spain is painful and complicated. Yet it could serve as an important point of departure for an intellectual or scholarly discussion about the precise uses and semantic changes in the *concept* of violence as it appears in public discourse between, say, 1931 and 2014; and for a broader, *political* discussion about major questions facing the country today. What does it mean, for example, to be Spanish in a Europe that prides itself on an open attitude toward difficult or violent pasts and a willingness to be held accountable for them? What forms of violence continue to operate in the coun-

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try—vis-à-vis the unemployed, for instance, in the foreclosure crisis, or with respect to illegal immigrants, animals, or the environment? (The fact that these forms of violence are less immediately visible or driven by law, policy, or regulation; or the fact that they are directed at nonhuman life, does not necessarily make them any less objectionable or identifiable as violence.) Does the violence with which, decades ago, certain groups and individuals defended particular values and projects—social justice, emancipation, workers' rights, cultural autonomy, an alternative economic system—invalidate those values and projects altogether in the present?

That this discussion is not or only very marginally held is, I would argue, due in part to the unwillingness among those in positions of authority—academic, political, or cultural—to allow the past to inform the present in politically meaningful ways. This unwillingness is not just manifested in self-propagating attitudes and behaviors, moreover; it is actually embodied in the *institutional structures* that shape public discourse and civic life in Spain. These include the media, the universities, the judiciary, the electoral system, and the internal organization of political parties. In recent years only the first and last of these categories (the media and party organization) have seen the timid emergence of some serious attempts at lasting reform. The immediate, refreshing results of these courageous but marginal attempts at institutional change—media outlets like *eldiario.es, La Marea,* Contratiempo (contratiempohistoria.org), or *Mongolia;* new coalitions within the smaller parties on the Left—seem to warrant a modest amount of optimism.

Returning to the larger questions posed at the beginning of this essay, it is clear that the answer to the first—should there be a public conversation about past violence in the first place?—is, in my view, affirmative. Participation, moreover, should not be limited to experts or authorities but instead be broadly civic. Its purpose should, indeed, be to understand violence in its proper historical context *but also* to include forms of violence operative in the present. And while a judicial or quasi-judicial framework—such as a Truth Commission—may be productive, it will likely not be sufficient.

Notes

1. "The Israeli government and the media started to say that everyone who was killed or injured in Gaza was a member of Hamas; or that they were all being used as part of the war effort; that even the children were instruments of the war effort; that the Palestinians put them out there, in the targets, to show that Israelis would kill

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children, and this was actually part of a war effort. At this point, every single living being who is Palestinian becomes a war instrument. They are all, in their being, or by virtue of being Palestinian, declaring war on Israel or seeking the destruction of Israel. So any and all Palestinian lives that are killed or injured are understood no longer to be lives, no longer understood to be living, no longer understood even to be human in a recognizable sense, but they are artillery. And of course, the extreme instance of that is the suicide bomber, who has become unpopular in recent years. That is the instance in which a body becomes artillery, or becomes part of a violent act. If that figure gets extended to the entire Palestinian population, then there is no living human population anymore, and no one who is killed there can be grieved" (Aloni; qtd. in Kellogg 79–80).

2. "The leaders of the rebellion," Preston writes, ". . . regarded the Spanish proletariat in the same way as they did the Moroccan, as an inferior race that had to be subjugated by sudden, uncompromising violence" (xii).
3. Thus, Jordi Gracia and Domingo Ródenas celebrate Spain's attainment of literary and intellectual modernity as "el despliegue diverso y desatado de una europeidad moderna, al fin normalizada" (5) (the diverse and unbridled unfolding of a modern Europeanness, finally normalized).
4. "[I]f history is unavoidably an ethical activity," Alun Munslow writes in his description of the ethical turn in history, "historians must recognize the moral preferences they have. The ethical turn suggests moral lessons do not materialize *from* the past; they are embedded in history as we construct it" (197). See also Dintenfass.
5. As Žižek reminds us, there is such a thing as excessive historicization (670).
6. The label is problematic; for example, historians of World War II are not usually labeled as "pro-Allied" (Faber, "Reframing").
7. Recent investigations are producing a much more nuanced picture; see Maria Thomas and Ledesma.

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