

The Suppleness of Stone: Spain's Valley of the Fallen, from Dictatorship to Democracy

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Abstract

Four decades after the death of dictator Francisco Franco, Spain continues to come to terms with the legacy of the Spanish Civil War (1936-9) and the Franco dictatorship (1939-75). Physical artifacts dating to the war and dictatorship inject urgency and complexity into debates about the past. The most conspicuous of these artifacts is *El Valle de los Caídos* (Valley of the Fallen), a monumental complex erected by Franco in the mountains outside of Madrid. Contemporary detractors of the Valley of the Fallen argue that its basilica, crypt, monastery, religious studies center, and freestanding cross—the world's tallest—exalt Franco and his military triumph in the Civil War. Critics also object to the presence of the dictator's tomb and its privileged position beneath the main altar. This article analyzes the present-day controversies surrounding the monument, arguing that the dictator's original construction of the Valley as a 'sacred' space continues to structure the limits and possibilities of its re-evaluation. Disputes over how to integrate the monument into a new, post-Franco political landscape indicate widespread uncertainty on the uses of the past in the present.

Introduction

In contemporary Spain, material records of the Civil War (1936-9) and the Franco dictatorship (1939-75) render the past uncomfortably present. Indeed, it was the 2000 discovery of a mass grave dating to the war in the town of Priaranza del Bierzo in León province that helped launch Spain's so-called "memory boom." With this exhumation began a period of intensive, prolific inquiries into twentieth-century traumas that persist to this day.¹

¹ Carlos Jerez-Farrán and Samuel Amago, "Introduction," in *Unearthing Franco's Legacy: Mass Graves*

This article, though, approaches the ongoing relevance of the Civil War and dictatorship through el Valle de los Caídos, a monument that requires no physical unearthing. The Valley of the Fallen is Franco's largest and most enduring built legacy. Better described as a monumental complex than a mere monument, its component parts consist of a massive esplanade, an underground basilica and crypt, a monastery, a social studies center, and the world's tallest freestanding cross, all chiselled into an imposing peak in the mountains outside Madrid [see Figure 1]. Franco ordered the construction of the Valley to honor the Civil War's Nationalist casualties—those who died fighting to overthrow Spain's democratically elected Second Republic. Over time, the monument systematically acquired more extensive meanings. During the dictatorship, the Valley served as the site of state rallies, as a destination for visiting dignitaries and heads of state, as the final resting place for over 30,000 Civil War dead, and, eventually, even became the tomb of Franco himself.²

Franco's megalomaniacal ambitions led him to design a monument that he hoped would be grand enough to "defy time and forgetfulness."³ This effort has proven puzzlingly effective. After Franco's death in 1975 and the simultaneous demise of his regime, the Spanish transition to democracy provided the country with a "new beginning"; however, the Valley of the Fallen endured.⁴ Despite the fact that the monument exalts Franco and the Nationalist triumph, it retained its physical and operative integrity after the democratic transition and still does as of this writing.⁵

Unsurprisingly, many Spaniards perceive the Valley as irreconcilable with today's democracy. Contentious debates now animate the otherwise inert monument, transforming its grounds into the site of impassioned confrontations between priests and government officials, neo-fascists, and human rights activists.

and the Recovery of Historical Memory in Spain, eds., Carlos Jerez-Farrán and Samuel Amago (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 4.

² The exact number of casualties interred in the Valley's crypt remains unknown. According to a 2011 government report, there are 33,847 registered casualties, over 12,000 of those unidentified. See Ministerio de la Presidencia, *Informe: Comisión de Expertos para el Futuro del Valle de los Caídos* (Madrid: Ministerio de la Presidencia, 2011), 3. Total numbers, though, are likely to be much higher. Justin Crumbaugh uses the figure of 70,000. See Justin Crumbaugh, "Afterlife and Bare Life: The Valley of the Fallen as a Paradigm of Government," *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies* 12, no. 4 (2011): 419.

³ All translations are the author's own. "Decreto de 1 de abril de 1940, disponiendo se alcen Basílica, Monasterio y Cuartel de Juventudes, en la finca situada en las vertientes de a Sierra de Guadarrama (El Escorial), conocida por Cuelgamuros, para perpetuar la memoria de los caídos de nuestra gloriosa Cruzada," in *El Valle de los Caídos: Idea, proyecto y construcción*, ed., Diego Méndez (Madrid: Fundación Francisco Franco, 1982), 314.

⁴ Laura Desfor Edles, *Symbol and ritual in the new Spain: the transition to democracy after Franco* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 42.

⁵ As is explained in this article, the monument's physical and operative integrity has been compromised in some measure by a decline in tourist infrastructure dating to the transition, and temporary closures for renovations.

While it may seem inevitable that Franco's cherished shrine has become a controversial site in democratic Spain, in fact, this development is recent enough to bear further scrutiny. Understanding the nature of the disputes that presently embroil the monument also requires asking what took them so long to develop.

Existing scholarship on the Valley relates its iconography to the objectives and methods of the Franco regime, investigating how the dictator gave physical shape to his Civil War narrative.⁶ Building on this research, it will be suggested here that close observation of the monument's physical forms—along with the meanings ascribed to those forms by the regime through language and ritual—can also yield insights into present-day controversies. Franco's characterization of the Civil War as a Christian "Crusade" and Nationalist casualties as "heroes and martyrs" receives expression in the monument, but not as we might expect. Instead of visual depictions of Franco, the Nationalists, or the conflict, the monument features an artistic and architectural vocabulary rich in religious and historical referents. Thus the conceptualization of the Valley as a "magnificent temple" to the "heroes and martyrs of the Crusade" presents post-Franco Spain with an awkward conundrum: desecrate a church and cemetery, or tolerate a Francoist icon?⁷ The dictator's material and rhetorical construction of the Valley as a "sacred" space, it will be argued, continues to structure the limits and possibilities of integrating the site into a new, post-Franco political landscape.

The endurance of the Valley is also contingent on another less visible authoritarian legacy. Spain's transition to democracy, scholars and pundits observe, was predicated on a preference among political elites and the public alike to avoid a thorough reckoning with the country's past.⁸ From the end of the Civil War onward, the horrors of violence suffered and deprivations endured caused Spaniards across the political spectrum to fear another conflict. During the dictatorship, moreover, the Franco regime successfully exploited this fear of descending into a second civil war.⁹

⁶ For the first independent, critical analysis of the Valley's conceptualization and design, see Daniel Sueiro, *La verdadera historia del Valle de los Caídos* (Madrid: Sedmay Ediciones, 1976). Fernando Olmeda's *El Valle de los Caídos: Una memoria de España* (Barcelona: Península, 2009) bridges the gap in serious book-length scholarship on the monument between Sueiro's 1976 *La verdadera historia* and the twenty-first century. See also: Katherine Hite, "The Valley of the Fallen: Tales from the Crypt," *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 44, no. 2 (2008): 110-127; Crumbaugh, "Afterlife and Bare Life," 419-438; and, Noël Valis, "Civil War Ghosts Entombed: Lessons of the Valley of the Fallen," in *Teaching Representations of the Spanish Civil War*, ed., Noël Valis (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2007), 425-435. For a comprehensive guide to the visual arts during the Franco dictatorship, see Ángel Llorente, *Arte e ideología del franquismo, 1936-1951* (Madrid: Visor, 1995).

⁷ Méndez, *Valle*, 314.

⁸ See especially Paloma Aguilar, *Memory and Amnesia: The Role of the Spanish Civil War in the Transition to Democracy*, trans. Mark Oakley (New York: Berghahn Books, 2002), 149-161.

⁹ Antonio Cazorla Sánchez outlines the regime's manipulation of social attitudes, examining what he terms "the politics of fear." See Antonio Cazorla Sánchez, *Fear and Progress: Ordinary Lives in Franco's*

Franco and his collaborators cast the coup as a Nationalist-led “Crusade” to liberate Spain from the allegedly volatile, inept Second Republic. Until Franco’s death, the regime continued to stoke fears of imminent bloodshed.¹⁰ Thus, the transition’s aims and values can be understood both in terms of Spanish aversion to reliving war and in terms of the regime’s inflammatory Civil War narrative—which, of course, only intensified this deeply-held aversion.

Significantly, the same political premises that facilitated the transition also resulted in a long-term governmental policy of accommodating the Valley, Spain’s most explicit, divisive reminder of the Civil War and the dictatorship. Today’s lack of coherence as to how to renegotiate the meanings of this monument—and indeed, whether this is possible at all—signals deeper uncertainties in Spain about the uses of the past in the present. Accordingly, analyzing the shifting place of the Valley in Spain’s public sphere both enriches and complicates our understanding of the post-Franco interplay between history, memory, and public policy.

A Biography of the Valley of the Fallen: Words, Ritual, and Stone

The study of monuments tends toward privileging either their aesthetic composition or public reception. But as Ekaterina Haskins asserts, “Monuments are at once historically anchored expressions of particular ideologies *and* magnets for rival interpretations of identity and history”.¹¹ An integrated approach that evaluates both form and reception best suits the Valley of the Fallen, for the controversies which now overwhelm the monument hinge on the messages etched into and enacted on its premises. The Valley’s magnetic pull, in other words, derives from differing responses to the ideology and associations contained in its “anchored expressions.”

As with other war monuments, the creators of the Valley intended its forms to function as a material framework for remembrance, what James Mayo calls “a social and physical arrangement of space and artifacts to keep alive the memories of

Spain, 1939-1975 (London: Wiley Blackwell, 2010), 18-23. See also Aguilar, *Memory and Amnesia*, 33-48, 136-148.

¹⁰ Well after the conclusion of the Civil War, Franco continued to perpetuate the fears and grievances it produced. For a speech delivered at the Valley in which he does precisely this, see “Discurso de S.E. el Jefe del Estado,” *La Vanguardia*, April 2, 1959, accessed February 17, 2012, http://www.generalisimofranco.com/valle_caidos/inagu/vanguardia03.jpg. For a scholarly account of the regime’s methods of perpetuating the Civil War, see Zira Box, *España, año cero: la construcción simbólica del Franquismo* (Madrid: Alianza Ensayo, 2010): 124-131, 286-341.

¹¹ Ekaterina V. Haskins, “Russia’s Postcommunist Past: The Cathedral of Christ the Savior and the Reimagining of National Identity,” *History & Memory* 21, no. 1 (2009): 28. Emphasis added by the author.

persons who participated.”¹² Many scholars, though, would replace “memories” with “memory,” for often monuments strive to induce a particular historical consciousness to the exclusion of others.¹³ The origins of the Valley follow this latter formula. The monument’s components and their interrelationships concretize the Franco regime’s politically expedient narrative of the Civil War, representing an attempt to replace the plural, divergent memories that Spaniards had of the conflict with the single memory of the winning side.

Pierre Nora’s assertion that *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory) arise out of a lack of organic consensus about the past helps to explain Franco’s vision for the Valley.¹⁴ Franco and the Nationalists imagined that their 1936 military coup would result in a quick victory over the Second Republic. Instead, a full-blown Civil War ensued, one that lasted three years and bitterly divided the country. A large part of the Franco regime’s postwar mission thus involved the shaping of the public’s memory of the war, as well as its attitude toward the regime that initiated the conflict and emerged victorious from it. As demonstrated convincingly by Paloma Aguilar in *Memory and Amnesia*, the regime strove throughout the dictatorship era to widely inculcate a narrative of the Civil War as necessary, justified, and even inevitable.¹⁵ This effort produced a range of physical manifestations throughout Spain. To assemble a network of “mnemonics in the theaters of collective memory,” the regime re-named streets and parks, commissioned paintings and sculptures, and erected other buildings and monuments in addition to the Valley.¹⁶

In the context of the Franco regime’s comprehensive project to instill its memory of the war among Spaniards, the Valley is distinctive for its physical scope, the totality of its symbolic vision, and the specifics of its artistic and architectural vocabulary. The monument’s founding decree reflects the forces that impelled these distinctions. In a 1940 ceremony at the chosen site—before an audience that included representatives from Spain’s newly installed fascist regime, as well as ambassadors from Hitler’s Germany, Mussolini’s Italy, and Salazar’s Portugal—Franco claimed:

The dimension of our Crusade, the heroic sacrifices that victory entails and the

¹² James M. Mayo, “War Memorials as Political Memory,” *Geographical Review* 78, no. 1 (1988): 62. For a study of the public glorification of war and its participants in Europe, see George Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

¹³ See Sabine Marschall, *Landscape of Memory: Commemorative monuments, memorials, and public statuary in post-Apartheid South Africa*, (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 2, 7-8, and James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), x-xi.

¹⁴ Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire,” *Representations* 26 (1989): 12.

¹⁵ Aguilar, *Memory and Amnesia*, 31.

¹⁶ Andrew M. Shanken, “Planning Memory: Living Memorials in the United States during World War II,” *The Art Bulletin* 84, no. 1 (2002): 137. For a detailed study of the Franco regime’s deployment of art and architecture, see Llorente, *Arte e ideología*.

significance that victory has had for the future of Spain in this era, cannot continue to be perpetuated by the simple monuments so often used in towns and cities to commemorate the important facts of our History and the glorious episodes of our sons.¹⁷

By finding inadequate the “simple monuments” raised by individuals and communities throughout Spain during the conflict, the dictator signalled his intention to manage the legacy of the war through the creation of a single physical site of memory. Emboldened by the monumental constructions of his Axis allies, Franco planned to develop a new commemorative vocabulary equal to what he termed Spain’s “Crusade” and the Nationalist casualties the regime elevated to devotional status.¹⁸

Rather than figuratively represent the “glorious episodes” of the Civil War, though, Franco began to design a monument that would legitimize his rise to power—that is, that would lend the regime’s origins and rule sought-after authority and historical precedents. As Kirk Savage writes of the commemorative landscape in Washington D.C.’s National Mall, the inherent conservatism of monuments makes monument-building ideal for states seeking to represent traditional and idealized versions of themselves. Monuments are presented to the national and international public as “old and venerable, as if [they] had always been there, in more or less that form.”¹⁹

The Valley perfectly conforms to Savage’s description. Perhaps most obviously, Franco specifically strove to infuse the monument with architectural styles characteristic of civilizations he admired, with a particular reliance upon *El Escorial*, the palace, monastery, and royal pantheon built by Philip II (1527-1598) at Spain’s imperial zenith.²⁰ Also related to making the Valley appear as though it had always been there was its integration into the surrounding landscape. Each of the Valley’s components connects the monument intimately to the mountains of the Sierra de Guadarrama, which Franco prized for their geographical centrality and considered evocative of the “essential” Spain. Lastly, the monument’s all-pervasive Catholic forms and functions contribute to the sense that the Valley is “old and venerable” by connecting it to 2,000 years of Christianity.

The regime’s choice to link the Valley visually, rhetorically, and ritually to the

¹⁷ As cited in Méndez, *Valle*, 322.

¹⁸ Llorente, *Arte e ideología*, 79.

¹⁹ Kirk Savage, *Monument Wars: Washington, D.C., the National Mall, and the Transformation of the Memorial Landscape* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 7.

²⁰ For more information on El Escorial and the complex’s chief architect, both enormously influential to the Valley, see *Juan de Herrera y su influencia: actas del simposio, Camargo, 14-17 julio*, dir. Miguel Ángel Aramburu-Zabala and coord. Javier Gómez Martínez (Santander: Fundación Obra Pía de Juan de Herrera, Universidad de Cantabria, 1993).

Catholic, imperial Golden Age produces repercussions to this day. As we will see, the Valley's Christian forms and functions have allowed the post-Franco right to claim the monument with minimal political fallout. These same features divide the left, meanwhile, over whether religiosity can mitigate the monument's problematic history.

Franco, in collaboration with the chief architects of the Valley, conceived of the complex in spirit and form as a twentieth-century place of Christian pilgrimage. Before the architectural program for the Valley had even been developed, Franco imagined that on its grounds, "future generations will gather in tribute and admiration of those who left them a better Spain."²¹ Years later, at the inauguration of the Valley in 1959, Franco struck similar rhetorical chords. He characterized the completed monument as "a great temple to God, which expresses our gratitude and is worthy of holding the remains of those who bequeathed us their holy and heroic deeds."²² Present-day visitors to the monument can still see and feel these lofty, patently partisan sentiments cloaked in the legitimizing veneer of Catholicism.

Visitors to the Valley will first detect its soaring cross, the monument's most iconic component. As intended by the cross's architect, its towering height and geometric simplicity mark the site as Christian even at great distance. Indeed, the cross so effectively commands attention that visitors driving along the approach road that leads to the monument may overlook four small chapels atop a nearby ridgeline [see Figure 2]. However, these structures form an integral part of the narrative encoded in the Valley. As stations in the Way of the Cross, these chapels metaphorically trace Christ's final footsteps from his condemnation to death to his crucifixion. Physically, they lead the visitor to the Valley from the woods, ringing the monument's periphery along a route culminating in the main altar of its basilica, carved out of the mountain peak directly beneath the cross.

Throughout this pilgrimage route, the regime inserts itself into the Passion, equating its own wartime "sacrifices" with the sacrifice of Christ. Visitors are progressively prepared for the most explicit—and to the regime, discursively central—co-opting of the Passion, which occurs at the main altar of the basilica. The approach road leading to the monument, for instance, tilts upward, "invit[ing] the lifting of the soul."²³ Once at the monument proper, the immense, 30,000 square meter esplanade can only be crossed by climbing two flights of ten steps each,

²¹ Méndez, *Valle*, 314.

²² Franco, "Discurso," 2.

²³ Don Justo Pérez de Urbel, *El monumento de Santa Cruz del Valle de los Caídos* (Madrid: Instituto de Estudios Madrileños, 1959), 10.

simulating “the ascent to moral perfection inspired by faith.”²⁴ And before finally entering the basilica, the guidebook published by Spain’s federal heritage organization, the *Patrimonio Nacional*, instructs visitors to once again look up. “He who contemplates” the cross, the *Patrimonio* exhorts, “is now prepared to penetrate the interior of the temple of the Fallen and understand it”²⁵ [see Figure 3].

The “temple” itself functions as a miniature processional route, accruing volume, decorative elaboration, and lighting toward the main altar. Throughout, the regime appropriates the sacredness of the Christian nave to enfold references to its wartime experience. For visitors with the *Patrimonio*’s guidebook, specific references to the war abound. Chapels off the sides of the nave, for example, are dedicated to:

Patrons of the armies of the Land, Sea and Air: the Immaculate, Our Lady of Carmen, and Our Lady of Loreto; to the left, the Virgin of Africa, who commemorates the beginning of the war and the passage of the Strait, that of Merced, patron of captives, whose grace spread through all of the prisons of Spain during the years of the crusade, and that of Pilar, present here for being in the Ebro where the war ended.²⁶

Katherine Hite finds the sixth chapel, *Our Lady of Africa*, particularly noteworthy. She observes that the chapel identifies the continent from which Franco began the Nationalist insurgency in 1936.²⁷ Here, the reference to the Civil War is far from oblique.

Still, the main altar stands as the regime’s most explicit incorporation of its Civil War narrative into the Passion. Beneath Christ on the cross—carved from wood “cut personally by the *Generalísimo* Franco”²⁸—lie the tombstones of Franco and of José Antonio Primo de Rivera, the founder of Spain’s fascist-inspired political movement, known as the *Falange*, and “martyr” of the regime after his 1936 execution by the Republican government. Elsewhere in the Valley, the commentary of official guidebooks proves useful, even necessary, for understanding the regime’s coded self-identification with Marian virgins, warrior saints, and hooded archangels. The main altar, though, speaks for itself by drawing an unambiguous parallel between the lives and deaths of José Antonio, Franco, and Christ.

Franco’s intention to erect a Christian tribute to the Nationalists and their

²⁴ *Monumento Nacional de Santa Cruz del Valle de los Caídos* (Madrid: Editorial Patrimonio Nacional, 1970), 12.

²⁵ Pérez de Urbel, *El monumento de Santa Cruz*, 23.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

²⁷ This conception of the “savage Muslim other” present throughout the nave is yet another indication that Franco looked toward the Catholic Kings as models and also adopted their anti-Islamic rhetoric. Hite, “Tales from the Crypt,” 116.

²⁸ Pérez de Urbel, *El monumento de Santa Cruz*, 30.

victory remained consistent from the conceptualization of the monument during the Civil War through its completion in 1959. But changing circumstances inside and outside of Spain during that twenty year period, in turn, impacted the Valley. Of particular relevance to the monument was the dictator's decision in the late 1940s to pursue relations with Western powers after a long period of international condemnation. During this phase of diplomatic outreach the regime increasingly considered the Valley an ideal place to project a carefully modulated picture of the country's religiosity.

The perception of Valley's newly global profile led to the reformation of exploitative construction practices at the monument and the refining of its strident *nacionalcatolicismo* (National Catholicism). In 1949, the regime partially suspended its prison-redemption scheme, under which political prisoners endured forced labor at the Valley and other sites in Spain.²⁹ Around the same time, the regime shelved plans to embellish the Valley's crypt and arcade with scenes of warring Christians and Muslims inspired by the Spanish *Reconquista* [see Figure 4].³⁰ A particularly potent signal of changing times came in 1958 as the regime transferred the remains of wartime casualties from their graves throughout Spain to the Valley's crypt. Contrary to Franco's original stipulations, Republicans were transferred to the crypt as well but given treatment grossly inferior to their Nationalist counterparts.³¹

In each of the above cases, impressions rather than actualities mattered. Franco now sought to give the Valley a conciliatory gloss, presenting the same monument anew to the domestic and international public as a site of postwar reconciliation. This rhetorical re-packaging is particularly evident in the 1959 guidebook published by the *Patrimonio Nacional*: "The great outstretched arms of the Cross embrace all Spaniards, without invidious distinctions, in its slender uprightness, like a lighthouse of faith, in memory of all those who lived up to their ideals in the name of Spain."³² In this description, the cross becomes a sign of God's attentive watch over Spain, and even his sanction of the regime. But while the guidebook claims that the cross "embrace[s] all Spaniards," in fact, the Valley's

²⁹ On the exploitative use of the regime's political enemies as construction laborers, see Olmeda, *Valle*, 45-9, 69-78, 85-95. For testimonies of the prisoners, see Sueiro, *La verdadera historia*, and Katherine Halper's film, *La memoria es vaga* (San Cristobal de la Laguna : Impulso Records, 2005).

³⁰ The so-called *Reconquista* was an approximately eight-hundred-year period beginning in the eighth century and ending in the fifteenth century during which Christian kingdoms regained Muslim-controlled areas on the Iberian Peninsula.

³¹ While the regime initially barred Republicans from burial at the Valley, by 1958 thousands of Republicans were being transferred to its crypt. As Crumbaugh writes, "The difference was that the Republican dead went unidentified. They were not treated as *caídos* strictly speaking but rather corpses of a lower order." Crumbaugh, "Afterlife and Bare Life," 425.

³² *Monumento Nacional*, 7.

“lighthouse of faith” shone for Spain’s Civil War victors but not its losers. The regime’s postwar repression of Republicans continued throughout the dictatorship, and the Civil War memory that the Valley perpetuated was, and is, irremediably partial.

The transfiguration of political ideology into religious iconography makes the narrative contained in the Valley at once explicit and veiled—in some ways as prominent as its cross and in other ways as buried as its underground crypt. Franco’s construction of the Valley as a “sacred” site may be compromised by the visual and historical record, but nonetheless has proven effective enough to continue to shape the place of the monument in the public sphere well after his death.

“Giving Ground”: The Valley during the Transition, 1975-82

Monuments, Sabine Marschall writes, are “society’s most deliberately designed, official, lasting, and emblematic cultural products codifying memory.”³³ As such, monuments offer insights into the ideological principles, historical outlook, cultural values, and aesthetic preferences of their creators. But equally revealing is the fate of monuments after political reversals. How do governments and societies come to terms with the commemorations left behind by earlier, controversial regimes?

As we have seen, constructing the Valley of the Fallen allowed the Franco regime to articulate its narrative of the Civil War, to assert its nationalist and Catholic values, and to stake an enduring physical claim on the future. The very success of Franco’s endeavor has proven problematic for post-Franco Spain. Since the dictator’s death in 1975—and with him, the demise of the regime—the Valley has appeared at odds with the liberal democracy Spaniards successfully created in the wake of a decades-long dictatorship. Even so, Spain’s departure from the dictatorship has not yet translated to a rejection of its most recognizable icon. While the built legacies of discredited governments in Western Europe and beyond have often been destroyed, defaced, or overhauled, the Valley stands today exactly as Franco intended.³⁴

That Franco’s legacy would endure intact at the Valley became apparent upon

³³ Marschall, *Landscape of Memory*, 2.

³⁴ For a comparative perspective on built environments and transitions to democracy, see Gavriel D. Rosenfeld, *Munich and Memory: Architecture, Monuments, and the Legacy of the Third Reich* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2000). This account of post-WWII Munich explores, among other things, the ways in which citizens rehabilitated a cityscape deeply imprinted with the memories of Nazism. Also recommended is Sergio Luzzatto, *The Body of Il Duce: Mussolini’s Corpse and the Fortunes of Italy* (New York: Picador: 2006), which studies post-fascist Italy through the mortal remains of Mussolini.

his death, on November 20, 1975. The dictator's decision to be buried at the Valley—apparently uncertain ahead of time, but probable given his strong self-identification with the project—has marked the interpretation of the monument ever since.³⁵ Today, Franco's privileged location beneath the high altar is perhaps the greatest point of contention for critics of the monument. While calls for the removal of the Valley's cross, for instance, produce widespread outcry, Franco himself has fewer defenders.³⁶

But the dictator's funeral service was itself significant. The deep, widespread interest in the intricacies of the ceremony suggested that the event itself might contain signs as to the future of Spain. Understandably, the country was gripped with doubts: could Francoism outlast Franco? Would Spain continue along the trajectory outlined by the dictator, or would a new political cast institute systemic reforms? At the time, no one knew the answers to such questions.

Franco's funeral in fact foreshadowed the gradual, evolutionary nature of Spain's transition. For as Joan Ramon Resina contends, the shift from dictatorship to democracy was not a political or social revolution but rather, "the intergenerational handling over of institutions."³⁷ Franco's service, a decorous, well-attended, state-sanctioned celebration of the memory of the former dictator, makes this plain. During the mass led by the Valley's monks, a call-and-response ritual indicated the dictator's ongoing relevance. After the singing of *Cara al sol*, the anthem of Spain's fascist party, the crypt's loudspeakers projected "Caudillo [Commander] of Spain!" to which the audience replied, "Present!"³⁸ Also important was the presence of Spain's newly installed monarch, King Juan Carlos I, and his wife Sofia. In the months following this service, Juan Carlos I would preside over the legal dismantling of Francoism and the creation of Spain's democratic institutions and processes. But one of the King's first official duties was to arrange and direct the funeral service. This seeming contradiction helps indicate the careful balancing act managed by Juan

³⁵ For more information on Franco's decision to be inhumed at the Valley, see Olmeda, *Valle*, 333, 338-9.

³⁶ A 2011 government commission charged with adapting the Valley to Spain's post-Franco political and social context grappled at length with this issue. Franco's privileged position within the monument, the commission reported, impedes the stated goal of restructuring the monument so that it honors all Civil War victims. For the commission report, see Ministerio de Justicia, *Ley de la Memoria Histórica* [Ley de 52/2007 de 26 de diciembre], Public Law 52, Spanish Statutes at Large, (2006): 13, accessed on March 12, 2014, <http://www.boe.es/buscar/act.php?id=BOE-A-2007-22296&p=20100324&tn=0>

³⁷ Joan Ramon Resina, "The Weight of Memory and the Lightness of Oblivion: The Dead of the Spanish Civil War," in *Unearthing Franco's Legacy: Mass Graves and the Recovery of Historical Memory in Spain*, eds., Carlos Jerez-Farrán and Samuel Amago (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 227.

³⁸ Olmeda, *Valle*, 343.

Carlos I, who led an uncertain political transformation while assuaging fears of a second descent into strife.³⁹

During the transition, Franco's legacy continued to shape political rhetoric and practice. Spain's transition-era leadership operated under an implicit agreement to avoid official condemnation of the Franco regime, culminating in the 1977 Amnesty Pact which granted a general pardon to all crimes committed during the war and dictatorship. Scholars offer differing explanations for the avoidance of reprisals and the effect of this avoidance on Spain's political and social landscape. Aguilar argues that Spaniards valued future harmony over past re-crimination, leading to a so-called *pacto de olvido* (pact of forgetting) which ultimately facilitated the transition. As she writes: "Negotiation, pact-making, giving ground, tolerance—in short, the famous consensus—were established to the point that they became, at certain crucial moments, an end in themselves rather than a means."⁴⁰ Other scholars emphasize that the vibrant cultural output related to the war and dictatorship even during this period negates the notion that Spain "forgot." And others still, like Jo Labanyi, stress the rich, detailed memories of outwardly silent Spaniards who suffered atrocities during the war and dictatorship. For them, silence was not a failure to remember but instead a means of coping with nearly four decades of political repression.⁴¹

Aguilar's notion of the "famous consensus" aptly characterized the new transitional government's engagement with the Valley, a site which starkly illuminates the many continuities between the Franco and post-Franco eras. On the six-month anniversary of Franco's death, the *Confederación Nacional de Combatientes* (National Confederation of Combatants), a Francoist organization, planned to pay homage to Franco in Madrid's *Plaza de Oriente*. According to the organization's official statements, the ceremony would demonstrate, "Before our people and before the world, our fidelity to the memory of the *Caudillo* and loyalty to his historical testament and to the Regime."⁴² The transition government prohibited the ceremony

³⁹ For a thorough chronicle of the King's influence on Spain's transition, see Paul Preston, *Juan Carlos: Steering Spain from Dictatorship to Democracy* (New York City: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004).

⁴⁰ Aguilar, *Memory and Amnesia*, 151. See also: Omar Encarnación, "Civil Society and the Consolidation of Democracy in Spain," *Political Science Quarterly* 116, no. 1 (2001): 53-79, and Carolyn Boyd, "The Politics of History and Memory in Democratic Spain," *Annals of American Academy of Political Science* 617 (2008): 133-48. For a comparative perspective on the Spanish transition and its aftermath, see Paloma Aguilar and Katherine Hite, "Historical Memory and Authoritarian Legacies in Processes of Political Change: Spain and Chile," in *Authoritarian Legacies and Democracy in Latin America and Southern Spain*, eds., Katherine Hite and Paola Cesarini (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 191-232.

⁴¹ Jo Labanyi, "The languages of silence: historical memory, generational transmission and witnessing in contemporary Spain," *Journal of Romance Studies* 9 (2009): 24.

⁴² "Girón acata la decisión del Gobierno: 'No habrá manifestación,'" *El País*, May 18, 1976, accessed

from taking place in Madrid, citing the intentionally provocative nature of its proposed program. But surprisingly, the Ministry of the Interior suggested the *Confederación* consider a ceremony of religious character at the Valley instead. The leadership of the *Confederación* accepted, and 5,000 Spaniards attended the organization's ceremony at the Valley. Despite the government's initial consent to a ceremony of "religious character" at the monument, the actual event featured a profusion of Falangist songs and speeches, strongly recalling ceremonies held at the Valley during Franco's lifetime.⁴³

While the *Confederación* had initially hoped to march in Madrid, its eventual ceremony at the Valley set an important precedent: Franco's supporters went on to use the Valley annually with the tacit approval of the transition government. Since 1976, Franco's supporters have convened routinely at the Valley to celebrate "20-N" (November 20th, the anniversary of the deaths of Franco and José Antonio), and July 18th, the start of the Civil War. Though attended by progressively fewer Spaniards, these gatherings violate both the transition government's original stipulations forbidding political acts at the Valley, and the sacredness of the monument's crypt. After all, this part of the monument is a basilica designated by the Vatican and the final resting place of tens of thousands of Civil War dead.⁴⁴

That the transition government allowed politically redolent events to take place in the Valley's crypt, overlooking the ways such events compromised the monument's supposedly religious nature, indicates its steadfast insistence on moderation and consensus. Even as the transition government distanced itself from Franco-style authoritarianism, its concessions to extremists like members of the *Confederación* played a key role in the continuation of the Valley as a site for the glorification of Franco and his legacy.

February 17, 2012,

<http://www.elpais.com/articulo/espana/Giron/acata/decision/Gobierno/habra/manifestacion.html>.

⁴³ These songs and speeches are described in greater detail in "Gritos contra Fraga y aclamaciones al 'bunker,'" *El País*, May 21, 1976, accessed February 17, 2012,

<http://www.elpais.com/articulo/espana/Gritos/Fraga/aclamaciones/bunker.html>.

⁴⁴ Although Franco's death was officially reported as occurring on November 20th, the same date as Falange founder José Antonio, a conspiracy theory quickly emerged which alleged that Franco had in fact died days earlier and that the regime concealed this from the public in order to solidify the link between Franco and José Antonio. Paul Preston's definitive biography of Franco suggests the dictator in fact died in the early hours of November 20th, after his life support was terminated at 11:15 p.m. on November 19th. Paul Preston, *Franco: A Biography* (New York: BasicBooks, 1994), 778. In 1960 Pope John XXIII designated the Valley a minor basilica, a church distinguished by the head of the Roman Catholic Church for its religious, historical, or aesthetic significance. At the designation ceremony, the Vatican's visiting representative declared the monument a "sign of human Redemption [...] for the whole Spanish nation," even as the regime continued to perpetuate divisions dating to the Civil War. As cited in Olmeda, *Valle*, 264.

“Is the Valley of the Fallen recoverable?”

As Spain’s democracy solidified, transition-era political mindsets—themselves largely conditioned by Francoism—continued to shape the place of the Valley of the Fallen in the public sphere. The monument passed above the political fray into the 1990s and the new millennium. Indeed, in 2001, Alberto Medina Domínguez declared the Valley an “empty” monument. In his cultural study of transition-era Spain, Medina Domínguez describes the once-bustling tourist attraction as silent, abandoned, and conspicuously expunged of Franco’s presence—the perfect metaphor for Spain’s “obsessive extermination of the memory of Franco after his death.”⁴⁵

But within just several years, the Valley had become what Justin Crumbaugh calls a “lighting rod in the recent push to reconstruct and reassess the history of the war and post-war.”⁴⁶ This rapid, profound transformation from vacant to explosive reflects a broader change in Spain. During the millennial “memory boom,” Spaniards vigorously began to re-interpret old histories and produce new histories. Spurred in part by Argentina and Chile’s serious examinations of their respective military dictatorships, Spain too pushed the past into the fore.⁴⁷ The most viscerally affecting re-examination of the past involved exhumations of graves dating to the war and post-war periods. Emilio Silva’s well-known effort to locate, exhume, and rebury his Republican grandfather led to the creation of the *Asociación para la Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica* (Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory) and propelled the unearthing of thousands of victims. Meanwhile, both fictional and nonfictional accounts of the war and dictatorship flooded bookstores, cinemas, and other public forums. Alongside these historical inquiries, the Valley became a key topic of deliberation and a touchstone for larger questions about the legacy of the Civil War and Franco’s dictatorship.

The Valley’s ‘sacredness’ came under scrutiny, paradoxically, following the passage of a law that classified the monument as hallowed ground. After the transition, pro-Franco demonstrations had continued at the Valley but suffered from

⁴⁵ Alberto Medina Domínguez, *Exorcismos de la memoria: Políticas y poéticas de la melancolía en la España de la transición* (Madrid: Libertarias, 2003), 14.

⁴⁶ Crumbaugh, “Afterlife and Bare Life,” 419.

⁴⁷ For an exploration of this “boom,” including commentary on the Valley, see Antonio Cazorla-Sánchez, “Revisiting the legacy of the Spanish Civil War,” *International Journal of Iberian Studies* 21, no. 3 (2008): 231-244. For an in-depth historiography of social histories of the Civil War and dictatorship produced during this ‘boom,’ see Julián Casanova, “History and memory: a new social dimension,” *International Journal of Iberian Studies* 21, no. 3 (2008): 187-200.

declining numbers and progressively negative press coverage. The Spanish media increasingly emphasized the far-right political content of these commemorations, describing not just their participants but their acts too as belonging to the political periphery.⁴⁸ Given these significant changes in public perception, it would seem as though the Valley and Franco's legacy more broadly were ready for critical rethinking after the new millennium. Spain's 2007 *Ley de la Memoria Histórica* (Law of Historical Memory) appeared poised to facilitate such rethinking.

The Law of Historical Memory had been a campaign promise of the *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* (Spanish Socialist Worker's Party or PSOE) in the 2004 general elections, championed by party president and eventual prime minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero. This sweeping legislative package condemned the Francoist regime and addressed Nationalist, Republican, and non-partisan victims of the Civil War and dictatorship through such means as increasing reparations for those who lost family members during the war and funding the exhumations of mass graves across Spain. Given Spain's Amnesty Law and the absence of retrospective justice measures, the law's supporters considered it a crucial step toward addressing unresolved wounds. Meanwhile the PSOE's opposition party, the conservative *Partido Popular* (Popular Party or PP), repeatedly denounced the law for the "problems and divisions" it would introduce in Spain.⁴⁹

For all of the controversy generated by the Law of Historical Memory, it in fact took a tepid approach to the Valley. The Amnesty Law contains key provisions on persisting Francoist symbols, banning these from public buildings and spaces across Spain. As stipulated by Article 15: "The offices of Public Administration, in the exercise of their authority, shall take appropriate measures to withdraw all shields, insignia, plaques, and other commemorative objects or references which extol, individually or collectively, the military uprising, the Civil War, and the repression of the dictatorship."⁵⁰ While many such "commemorative objects" had already been removed after Franco's death on the initiative of individuals and local governments, the law at last established nation-wide standards. These standards, it is safe to say, appear to apply to the Valley. The monument, after all, is itself a "commemorative object" which exalts the 1936 coup and the outcome of the Civil War. Its construction,

⁴⁸ For instance, the article in *El País* on the 20-N celebration of 1980 is titled, "The far-right commemorated the anniversary of the death of Franco and José Antonio," *El País*, November 21, 1980, accessed February 17, 2012,

http://www.elpais.com/diario/1980/11/21/espana/343609220_850215.html.

⁴⁹ "Las delegaciones del Gobierno en Aragón y Madrid anuncian la prohibición de manifestaciones para el 20-N," *El País*, November 13, 2007, accessed February 17, 2012,

<http://www.elpais.com/diario/1981/11/20/espana/delegaciones/gobierno/aragon/madrid/anuncian/prohibicion/manifestaciones/20N.html>.

⁵⁰ Ministerio, *Memoria Histórica*, 12.

moreover, was accomplished only with the repression of Franco's political adversaries. As Franco's principal built legacy, it even appears that there would be no better application of Article 15 than to this very monument.

Nevertheless, the Law of Historical Memory rescues itself from passing judgment on the Valley. In Article 16, devoted specifically to this monument, the law orders that, "The Valley of the Fallen shall be governed strictly by laws of general application governing places of worship and public cemeteries."⁵¹ Thus the Law exempts the Valley from the legal standards applied to Francoist statues, street signs, and other, lesser symbols, on the basis of its status as a functioning monastery and basilica, and the final resting place for over 30,000 Civil War dead.⁵² The last half of Article 16 accentuates the irrationality of the Valley's classification as a place of worship and public cemetery. The article also orders that, "In no part of the grounds can any acts be carried out which are political in nature or which tend to extol the Civil War, its protagonists, or Francoism."⁵³ This well-meaning but baffling addition is clearly intended to authoritatively prevent, once and for all, the political rallies taking place at the Valley annually since Franco's death—rallies theoretically banned but tolerated in practice. However, prohibiting acts which honor the war and the regime in a colossal monumental complex whose every built component does precisely this seems fundamentally misguided.

The Law of Historical Memory accepts as a premise one of the regime's fictions: the notion of the Valley as a non-partisan, public, and purely religious monument. But despite Franco's rhetorical appeals to the "inclusive embrace" of the arms of the Valley's cross in the 1960s, he routinely negated the possibility of the monument serving as a site for all Spaniards. Given the corruption of the monument's religious spaces through the insertion of blatant political symbols and the contradiction of the monument's standing as a "public" cemetery through the inferior treatment of Republican casualties, the Law failed to question the Valley's legitimacy as a place of worship and a public cemetery.

Unsurprisingly, the Valley continued to generate controversy even after the passage of the Law of Historical Memory. An article in *El País* on the 2007 celebration of 20-N announced "The last 'ultra' gathering at the Valley of the Fallen."⁵⁴ But this was a premature goodbye; the years after 2007 were marked by a spate of confrontations at the monument that suggested tensions had escalated rather than

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ministerio, *Informe*, 3.

⁵³ Ministerio, *Memoria Histórica*, 12.

⁵⁴ "La última concentración 'ultra' en el Valle de los Caídos," *El País*, November 18, 2007, accessed February 17, 2012, <http://www.elpais.com/articulo/espana/ULTIMA/CONCETRACION/ULTRA/VALLE.html>.

abated. Three years after the “last” gathering of Francoists at the Valley, for instance, newspapers reported on a “[p]rofusion of acts on the 35th anniversary of the death of Franco”⁵⁵ and “[m]aximum tension at the Valley of the Fallen between neo-Nazis and defenders of Historical Memory.”⁵⁶ The monument had been closed temporarily since the spring of 2010 due to structural instabilities, which the PSOE’s detractors construed as a politically motivated attempt to dislocate the Valley’s resident Benedictine monk community.⁵⁷ Because of the closure, the 2010 iteration of 20-N occurred alongside the road leading to the monument. Armed with Francoist and Republican flags, Franco’s supporters and detractors hurled insults that invoked memories of the Civil War, the legacy of the dictatorship, and political affairs in present-day Spain. Reporter Natalia Junquera, responsible for *El País*’s coverage of the Valley, ended her article on 2010’s 20-N with a rare bit of editorializing: “Thirty-five years after the first 20-N,” she commented, “celebratory acts of commemorating and paying homage to Franco continue. Every year more, in fact...More than three decades after the death of Franco.”⁵⁸

Clearly, the Law of Historical Memory fell short of resolving tensions at the Valley. It may even have contributed directly to the increased charge palpable in the Sierra by galvanizing liberal opposition to Franco and the uninhibited perpetuation of his legacy at the monument. Prior to 2007 the Valley was the realm of Franco’s few remaining *ultras* and *nostálgicos*; now they were met on its esplanade by the dictator’s equally impassioned and more numerous detractors. Furthermore, the Valley had acquired a disturbing relevance beyond Spain. The monument attracted neo-fascists from all over Europe, leading a member of the *Federación Estatal de Foros por la*

⁵⁵ Natalia Junquera, “Profusión de actos en el 35º aniversario de la muerte de Franco,” *El País*, November 20, 2011, accessed February 17, 2012, <http://www.elpais.com/articulo/espana/Profusion/actos/35/aniversario/Franco.html>.

⁵⁶ At the 20-N demonstration in 2010, the “defenders of Historical Memory” were members of the *Federación Estatal de Foros por la Memoria* (State Federation of Forums for the Recovery of Memory), an organization committed to locating and unearthing mass graves dating to the Civil War. Natalia Junquera, “Máxima tensión en el Valle de los Caídos entre neonazis y defensores de la Memoria Histórica,” *El País*, November 20, 2011, accessed February 17, 2012, <http://www.elpais.com/articulo/espana/Maxima/tension/Valle/Caidos.html>.

⁵⁷ That fall, the Valley’s Benedictine monks went so far as to hold several religious services in the forests that encircle the monument. The press coverage of holy men cast out of their basilica into the woods further sensationalized disputes regarding the monument. See Natalia Junquera, “Los monjes del Valle de los Caídos desafían el cierre del templo,” *El País*, November 8, 2010, accessed February 17, 2012, http://elpais.com/diario/2010/11/08/madrid/1289219059_850215.html. See also Juan Diego Quesada, “El prior del Valle de los Caídos: ‘Nos persiguen como en 1934,’” *El País*, November 15, 2010, accessed February 17, 2012, <http://elpais.com/articulo/espana/prior/Valle/Caidos/persiguen/1934.html>.

⁵⁸ Natalia Junquera, “‘Vamos a tener que volver a sacar las escopetas a la calle,’” *El País*, November 21, 2011, accessed February 17, 2012, <http://www.elpais.com/articulo/espana/Vamso/tener/volver/sacar/escopetas/calle.html>.

Memoria (State Federation of Forums for the Recovery of Memory) to claim that the monument “has been converted into the grand Nazi monument of Europe.”⁵⁹ This perhaps exaggerated statement—in reality, pro-Franco and neo-fascist gatherings were few in number and poorly attended—does help shed light on the newly polarized atmosphere at the monument. Left-leaning Spaniards apparently indifferent to the gathering of a few Francoists were incited to counter-demonstrate by the presence of neo-fascists. Thus it was only after 2007—thirty years after Franco’s death—that the Valley became a site of genuine contestation.

The provisions in the Law of Historical Memory concerning Francoist symbols were among the most difficult to draft and implement. As underscored by the 2007 comments of the PSOE parliamentary spokesman, material remnants of the war and dictatorship confront the ideals of the transition against the demands of democracy. “The transition had a very specific purpose—democracy,” said the spokesman. “And democracy is incompatible with the existence of symbols that celebrate a dictatorship.”⁶⁰ But Franco’s designation of the Valley as a consecrated site complicates this pronouncement. At the 2010 showdown between neo-Nazis and human rights groups in the shadow of the Valley’s hulking cross, one protester claimed the cross “is the same as the swastika in Germany.”⁶¹ This intentionally aggressive charge captures the degree to which the Valley is the symbol of a repressive and now discredited regime. But it also, inadvertently, calls attention to an aspect of the monument’s distinctiveness. A cross, of course, is legible outside of Francoism. The dictator co-opted this Christian icon, but it has been and will continue to be used in different contexts. So while the Valley’s cross and other components may provoke anger, shock, and pain in victims of the dictatorship and their advocates, to remove them proves more complex than removing a symbol like the swastika that is illegible outside of its ideological context.

The controversies over the Valley involve more than the prominent cleft between small numbers of remaining neo-fascists and the rest of Spanish society. Deep fissures divide even those who would like to see the monument reflect democratic change in Spain. As journalist and philosopher Josep Ramoneda asked in *El País*, the fundamental question facing Spain remains: “Is the Valley of the Fallen

⁵⁹ Patricia Campelo, “Los incumplimientos en tres años de la ley de la memoria histórica,” *Público*, December 27, 2010, accessed February 17, 2012, <http://m.publico.es/353565>.

⁶⁰ Victoria Burnett, “Bill in Spanish Parliament Aims to End ‘Amnesia’ About Civil War Victims,” *New York Times*, October 28, 2007, accessed February 17, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/28/world/europe/28spain.html?pagewanted=all>.

⁶¹ As cited in Junquera, “Vamos a tener que volver.”

recoverable?”⁶² The proliferation of opinion pieces, blog entries, author interviews, and radio and television programming addressing this question confirm that the answer eludes consensus. To writer Antonio Muñoz Molina, “The cross, the entire basilica, the statues, all...would be a perfect educational illustration of the ethic and aesthetic of fascism.”⁶³ Muñoz Molina makes the popular suggestion that a museum be added to the Valley which would document the history of Spanish fascism and its resisters. “Like the torture center in Buenos Aires or a concentration camp, the best fate possible for a place of dishonor is to be converted into a civil sanctuary of memory.”⁶⁴ As appealing as this proposal may be, it provokes yet another string of questions: what “memory” would such a museum preserve? Who decides? Would the monument retain its basilica and monastery? Or, as human rights groups allege, is the site’s sanctity compromised by its problematic history? Elvira Lindo’s droll quip that, “The problem with the Valley of the Fallen is the Valley of the Fallen”⁶⁵ at times seems like a rare point of agreement.

After the unqualified failure of the Law of Historical Memory to resolve the predicament at the Valley, in 2011 the PSOE adopted a more actively critical stance. While the Law of Historical Memory accepts the monument on Franco’s terms, as a “place of worship” and “public cemetery,” by 2011 the government indicated its apparent willingness to consider a profound rupture with the past. The PSOE charged a thirteen-person commission with deciding whether the dictator’s remains should be ejected from the Valley—a long-time desire of the left—and asked for recommendations that would “convert the Valley of the Fallen into a place of ‘memory and reconciliation.’”⁶⁶

But despite the outward boldness of this approach, the PSOE’s effort in fact bears the lingering influence of the “politics of consensus”—a tenuous approach toward rethinking Spain’s most overt, conflict-ridden reminder of the Civil War and

⁶² Josep Ramoneda, “El destino de un icono fascista,” *El País*, December 1, 2011, accessed February 17, 2012, <http://www.politica.elpais.com/politica/2011/actualidad/1322679435.html>.

⁶³ Antonio Muñoz Molina, “Valle del Recuerdo,” *El País*, November 27, 2010, accessed February 17, 2012, http://www.elpais.com/articulo/portada/Valle_de_los_Caidos/Guerra_Civil.html.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* The Buenos Aires torture center Muñoz Molina refers to is the *Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada* (Navy School of Mechanics [ESMA]). During Argentina’s military dictatorship, 1976-1983, ESMA was used as a detention center and became the site of torture and executions. In 2004 the National Congress converted ESMA into a museum and cultural center that commemorates the Dirty War’s victims, recounts the history of the dictatorship, and hosts events in affirmation of democracy and human rights.

⁶⁵ Elvira Lindo, “Los restísimos,” *El País*, December 4, 2011, accessed February 17, 2012, <http://www.politica.elpais.com/2011/12/04/actualidad/1322972333.html>.

⁶⁶ As cited in Natalia Junquera, “Un arzobispo y 12 expertos dirán si Franco sigue en el Valle de los Caídos,” *El País*, May 28, 2011, accessed February 17, 2012, <http://www.elpais.com/articulo/espana/arzobisp/expertos/diran/Franco/sigue/Valle/Caidos.html>.

dictatorship. Tempering its stated readiness to overhaul the monument if necessary, the PSOE took pains to assemble a purposefully multidisciplinary and diverse group through discussions with both parliament and the Catholic Church. Ultimately, the Commission consisted of historians, anthropologists, philosophers, theologians, a Benedictine monk, and an archbishop—a group the PSOE claimed was endowed with “scientific authority and ideological plurality.”⁶⁷ Even the group’s title, the *Comisión de Expertos para el Futuro del Valle de los Caídos* (Commission of Experts on the Future of the Valley of the Fallen) seemed intended as a reassuring pronouncement of the group’s expertise and the forward-looking scope of its inquiry.

The Commission’s report, released on November 29, 2011, recommends serious change at the Valley. It advises the removal of Franco’s remains along with the conversion of the monument “into a place of memory for the victims and the casualties of the Civil War.”⁶⁸ Concretely, this mandate would involve installing an artistic inscription of those interred in the crypt; constructing a meditative space; and, adjoining a museum-like Center for Interpretation. Most importantly, the report effectively proposes dividing the Valley into two parts: the basilica, to be under the authority of the monastery and Catholic Church, and the rest of the Valley, to be administered by the Spanish State. This division, of course, upholds the underlying sanctity of the basilica.

However, despite the Commission’s thorough research and thoughtful suggestions, the PSOE again averted a reckoning at the Valley. Political timing rendered the work of the Commission irrelevant. Because the Commission released its findings after the electoral loss of the PSOE and outright victory of the PP in the general elections of November of 2011, it seems certain that the report’s proposals will go unimplemented. Closer inspection of the process and its outcome reveals that more than a missed deadline crippled this latest effort. Rather, a disconcerting insistence on what Aguilar calls the “the famous consensus” again appears to have hindered the need to come to terms with this colossal legacy of the dictatorship. The PSOE granted the Commission with only recommendatory power, made the adoption of its proposals contingent on the agreement of the Catholic Church and Franco’s family, and allowed its report to be delivered after election day, to an incoming conservative prime minister who has repeatedly communicated his opposition to the Law of Historical Memory.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Natalia Junquera, “El futuro del Valle de los Caídos se decidirá después del 20-N,” *El País*, October 10, 2011, accessed February 17, 2012, <http://www.politica.elpais.com/politica/2011/10/10/actualidad.1318244442.html>.

⁶⁸ Ministerio, *Informe*, 17.

⁶⁹ The hostility of the PP to the Law of Historical Memory is made plain by the party’s 2010 refusal to agree to the law’s implementation at the Valley of the Fallen. All other Spanish parties voted in favor

The PP's hostility to the Law of Historical Memory assures the improbability of changes to the Valley for the near future. It appears that the liberal PSOE will integrate the recommendations of the Commission into its political agenda, given the role it played in establishing and supporting the group. But this too is uncertain: the PSOE could conclude that the Valley is a political minefield and divert its attention away from the monument, and the divisiveness and controversy that always seem to accompany it. Simply put, it is impossible to speak of the Valley's future with certainty, except to say that the monument will in all likelihood remain a permanent fixture in debates over the past.

Conclusion

Shortly after the conclusion of the Civil War, Franco traveled to Burgos to inaugurate a monument to the Nationalist commander Emilio Mola. There, he sketched plans for a future project, a national monument of unprecedented scale and sophistication: "Our monument to victory will not be another stone mausoleum, nor a group of sculptures, a thing of the past, [but instead] will have larger dimensions, will have a basilica, monastery, and youth hostel."⁷⁰ Franco's rejection of the mausoleums and sculptures belonging to "the past" has produced consequences likely unforeseeable to the dictator. The Valley of the Fallen is simultaneously condemned as the incarnation of Franco and claimed as a holy sanctuary. The monument's religiosity emboldens its defenders and confounds its detractors, generating divisions both between and within the democratic right and left.

Since its wartime conceptualization the Valley has demonstrated surprising suppleness, acquiring and mislaying meanings with the passage of time. First envisioned as a reliquary for the casualties of the victorious Nationalists, the Franco regime eventually proffered the monument to Spain and the world as a symbol of Christian reconciliation. After Franco's death, the monument became the realm of Francoists and weekenders, the former to pay homage to the gravestones of Franco and José Antonio, and the latter "for the same reason one went to El Escorial, because it [...] pertained vaguely to the world of the historic."⁷¹ Now, the Valley injects urgency and complexity into debates about the past. Proposals for the future of the monument range from preservation to demolition, reflecting the plurality of

of the motion. See Natalia Junquera, "Todos los partidos, salvo el PP, instan al Gobierno a cumplir la ley de memoria en el Valle de los Caídos," *El País*, September 22, 2010, accessed February 17, 2012, http://elpais.com/elpais/2010/09/22/actualidad/1285143436_850215.html.

⁷⁰ As cited in Olmeda, *Valle*, 27.

⁷¹ Muñoz Molina, "Valle del Recuerdo."

interpretations of the war and dictatorship.⁷²

While the controversies surrounding the Valley no doubt signal a lack of common agreement over Spain's twentieth-century traumas and their contemporary relevance, this should not be perceived as inherently negative. In fact, public debates on the Valley signify acts of personal and collective renegotiation. As individuals, organizations, and political parties imaginatively re-situate the monument in a changed political landscape, they also help to counter the outwardly stable, hegemonic memory it represents. Admittedly, newspaper opinion pieces and abandoned commission proposals do little to chip away at the cultural power of monuments. Nonetheless, vibrant social discourse pushes against the limits of engaging with the past, thus expanding possibilities for the future of the Valley of the Fallen after Franco.



Figure 1. The Valley of the Fallen, from the approach road to the monument (photo: author, 2012).

⁷² As of this writing, the most recent controversy at the Valley involves the budget of the governing *Partido Popular*. In spring of 2013 it was revealed that the PP authorized the expenditure of nearly €300,000 in public funds for the restoration of the monument's main façade. Opposition leader Ramón Jáuregui demanded an explanation: "Does the Government consider it more important to repair the sculpture of *The Piety* than to dignify the ossuary of the 33,847 dead deposited there? Why has this site been opened to the public and to tourism, being what it is and still representing what it represents?" Nonetheless, the PP responded that it would proceed with the expenditure. Natalia Junquera, "El PSOE pide explicaciones por un gasto de 300.000 euros en el Valle de los Caídos," *El País*, May 26, 2013, accessed February 17, 2012, http://politica.elpais.com/politica/2013/05/26/actualidad/1369598477_816389.html.



Figure 2. On the ridgeline, one of the chapels in the Valley's outlying Stations of the Cross (photo: author, 2012).



Figure 3. A view across the esplanade, centered on the cross, the Pietà sculpture, and the door to the crypt (photo: author, 2012).



Figure 4. A view of the wall behind the arcade, where plans from the 1940s would have placed inlaid reliefs of Crusade scenes. Ultimately the regime chose to leave the wall unadorned (photo: author, 2012).

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