



## **Discussion** **Digging up Spain's Dead**

### **Georgina Blakeley**

Welcome to the Open University's Open Politics podcast on Digging Up Spain's Dead.

### **Paul Preston**

I don't see how any society can live on the basis of pretending that, that things didn't happen. I think every, every nation needs to know its own past.

### **Emilio Silva**

We never expressed the big tragedy we lived during Franco's Dictatorship and now we are making a process for this expression.

### **Georgina Blakeley**

An increasing number of people in Spain are beginning to confront the silence that has surrounded the Civil War and General Franco's dictatorship. I'm Dr Georgina Blakeley and in this podcast I'll be exploring the reasons for this silence and why it's taken so long to break.

In 1936, civil war erupted between those who supported the democratically elected left-wing Republican government and the right-wing nationalist rebels led by General Franco. There was brutal killing on both sides, but today over 100,000 republican victims are still missing. It's only in the last decade that the families have felt able to start searching for their dead.

### **Emilio Silva**

My name is Emilio Silva, I am the grandson of a man who was killed during the Spanish civil war. In the 16 of October of 1936 my grandfather was killed with another 14 people, all civilians, and their bodies were put in a mass grave in a ditch outside the road and during 64 years they were there. But, 21 October in 2000, we open the mass grave. Until this day I only was looking for the solution for a personal problem. I want to put the bones of my grandfather with the bones of my grandmother. But during the exhumation, some people of this area came to the place of the grave say: I am looking for my brother, I am looking for my father. Paul Preston Because the Republic was defeated, there was never any attempt to find out about their dead.

### **Georgina Blakeley**

Paul Preston, Professor of History at the London School of Economics.

### **Paul Preston**

On the other hand, the dead of the Right were discovered, were named, were excavated, reburied if the families wanted it, they were, they were celebrated. The big difference is that the bulk of the families of Republicans have not had that kind of closure, many, many, many of them don't know where their relatives are buried, they are in common graves, they're not sure where. And what they want, is simply to find, to find these.

### **Georgina Blakeley**

The Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory is a group of archaeologists and volunteers that work to document the stories of the victims of the Civil War and help locate and open the mass graves across Spain. Emilio Silva is one of the co-founders of this Association.

### **Emilio Silva**

Most of us are relatives from the missing people from the Spanish Civil War of the Franco's repression. And we are trying to get justice for our families and for the Spanish Society, to look for the missing people, to generate knowledge about the tragedy of our families.

### **Georgina Blakeley**

Franco's repressive dictatorship lasted for almost four decades. When he died in 1975, parties from the left and the right made a pact of silence to draw a line under Spain's violent past in order to start the Transition towards democracy. Professor Paul Preston:

### **Paul Preston**

Effectively the Pact of Forgetting is, really, it's a concession made by the Left to the Right which is so immensely powerful. You've got to remember that the point at which the Transition negotiation starts, and it is a negotiation, that the Right is still immensely powerful. So of course there has to be a negotiation because there's no way the Left can impose democracy, and part of the concession is: you won't talk about what happened, so you then get that the deal is that there will be no prosecution or, you know, no judicial proceedings against either those who have committed acts of terrorism against the regime, any armed opposition, and there wasn't much of that, nor any crimes against humanity committed in defence of the regime, which of course were massive, was colossal, so this is effectively a huge concession by, by the Left.

### **Emilio Silva**

Families like my family have to live during the Dictatorship like this past its not the past, like the killed of my grandfather never exist. And we have to build another identity, because we have to live like we don't witness of the crimes of Franco. And during the Transition we continued to live like there's no witness of the crimes of Franco.

### **Georgina Blakeley**

So why are the people of Spain only now beginning to confront their past and discuss their history?

### **Paul Preston**

I think there's a huge difference in perception on both Right and Left about the whole question, why the Left has been so slow to, you know, is basically a question about fear, about fear of upsetting a very delicate process of transition to democracy, that's a fear that comes from the strength and power of the Right. Why the Right has not wanted any change or any investigation or any of this is obvious, it would be smearing the memory of their hero, General Franco.

One of the reasons that has brought it to the fore is the fact that one body of people who never respected or obeyed the Pact of Forgetting are local historians. Many of the books that are produced consist almost entirely of lists of names. For many of the families, to appear in the back of one of those books is the only gravestone that their loved one will ever have. But secondly, a generation has come to maturity, in the late nineties, the early 2000s, who, one could say, collectively are the grand-children, the ones whose parents were told to, to keep quiet, but who now feel, why should, why should they keep quiet, why can't they asked, what actually happened to my grand-mother, what actually happened to my grand-father and so on?

### **Emilio Silva**

The new generation of the grandsons start to look for these missing people, I think because we are people with no fear.

Our generation think that there is an important political question, to look for these people. We have to give reparation to the relatives, and we have to tell the story to the Spanish society because 80 percent of the spaniards never study at school nothing about the Franco's Repression.

But I think first of all is to recover the bones, because the families need to put the bones in a cemetery, it is very important, to finish this process. The second objective is to recognize the

importance of these people who fight for the Social Justice in the 30's and who fight against the dictatorship during 40 years.

**Georgina Blakeley**

As well as finding and reburying the dead, Emilio Silva also wants people to remember those who have kept silent for so long.

**Emilio Silva**

When we open a mass grave, when we start to fight for a debate in the Spanish society about the past, the pathological relation between present and the past in Spain, we are breaking down the taboo. And then we start to listen the story of the people, the story of the people to survive, like my grandmother. My grandmother was living in a concentration camp during 40 years because the killers of her husband, the killers were the authorities in the village.

And when my grandmother was in front of the killers, they have to smile and say: "Hello, good morning". And they are the people who killed her husband, but they are respectable people in Franco's Regime. And when the archaeologists start to open the mass grave they are opening a lot of things..., a lot of things, and the people start to talk.

**Georgina Blakeley**

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