El Valle de los Caídos: Spain’s inability to digest its historical memory

Michael Heard Johnson

Bard College

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El Valle de los Caídos:

Spain’s inability to digest its historical memory

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Historical Studies
of Bard College

by
Michael Johnson

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
May 2016
Thank You

I would like to thank my advisor, Cecile Kuznitz, for all the help over the past two semesters. Without her guidance, my project would not be what it is today. I would also like to thank my parents, aka my heroes. I love you Mom and Dad.
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Francisco Franco, the former fascist dictator of Spain, ruled his country with an iron fist. Any dissent was swiftly and brutally crushed. His neutrality during the Second World War left him more or less untouched by either the allied or axis forces and gave him an isolated setting in which he could quietly rule Spain in complete totality. Franco’s fascist sensibilities were born out of his military background and its authoritarian demeanor. He was a strong Catholic and that too informed his ideological leanings. Franco used his military experience, his faith, and a variety of other tools to place himself firmly at the helm and lead Spain under totalitarian rule.

What exactly is fascism? In short, it is an authoritarian type of rule in which a single group or party cultivates unilateral control, through popular and/or ruling elite support, and much of the social power is given to the industrious elite. Fascism is an attempt to strip the working class of any democratic rights; it is a marriage of capitalism and the government. Fascism can be born out of the ruling class’s fear of social revolution.¹

Fascism insights a fear of the unknown and often times harkens back to a more idyllic time. Furthermore, the top to bottom model of authority of fascism fits in well with the familiarity that so many people have with religion. In Spain, for example, Catholicism is far and away the most practiced religion. The highly authoritarian structure of the Catholic hierarchy with the pope firmly in control is not so dissimilar from the authoritative configuration of fascism; Spain’s people had already had experience with an authoritarian structure.

Franco employed various mediums and tools to perpetuate his fascist structure of government. One of the most intriguing tools of control that he used was architecture, specifically through El Valle de los Caídos, his great Basilica and memorial to the Spanish Civil War’s fallen. In today’s Spain, El Valle de los Caídos embodies the greater Spanish inability to discuss and digest its dark and deadly past. El Valle de los Caídos, Franco’s personal obsession, has come to represent not only the repressive and atrocious instances of suppression perpetrated by Franco’s regime but also the Spanish inability to collectively digest and memorialize the past. It is surprising that in a democracy such as Spain’s—one that has endured and lasted since Franco’s death in 1975—this lingering prudence is still so prevalent. Even in the country that was responsible for prosecuting the former Chilean dictator Pinochet, arguably one of the most violent despots of the post-war era, there still endures the inability to confront Spain’s own dark past.

This has in turn left a portion of the Spanish population reeling in pain and unable to properly mourn their murdered relatives. In fact, for some, just simply mentioning El Valle de los Caídos stirs up painful images of slaughtered family members and is a soar reminder of these peoples’ own government willfully avoiding any real attempt to digest this historical memory. During the summer of 2009, I participated in a Spanish immersion program that involved a month long trip to Spain. My high school Spanish studies professor and his wife, who is originally from Malaga, Spain, led the program. As our thirty-person group was driving to El Escorial, Philip II’s palace north of Madrid, we were to pass El Valle de los Caídos. Various members of our group, including my self, raised the question of visiting El Valle as well and were swiftly vehemently told that this would not be a possibility.
As our professor told us that a visit to the site would happen, I could see his wife’s face visibly turning red. During the aftermath of the Spanish Civil War, her family left Spain for France and did not return until after Franco died in 1975. Multiple members of her family were brutally murdered by the Franco regime. Without any real attempt by a state body to approach the memory of such a site, a trip to El Valle de los Caídos would only drudge up emotional wounds that have been open and haunting her and her family for generations.

Spain’s bloody civil war, in which Francisco Franco’s Fascist Falange party thwarted the loosely aligned Republican left, lasting from 1936 to 1939, has left a permanent mark on every aspect of Spanish life. Approximately 500,000 soldiers, politicians, and civilians perished during the bloody three-year span.2 Franco began his rule via radio broadcast on April 1st, 1939; he announced to Spain that totalitarian rule would now become Spain’s way of governing.3

Ever since the Spanish transition to democracy following Franco’s death in 1975, the Spanish government has explicitly attempted to suppress the memory of the civil war and Franco’s rule in hopes of maintaining stability between the left and ride sides of the political spectrum. This willingness to forget began with the Pact of Forgetting in 1975, a pact that laid out the understanding that no person from the Franco regime would be

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3 Francisco Franco, "General Franco's Broadcast Speech." (Speech, Madrid, May 27, 1939), EBSCO
persecuted for any wrong doing⁴; essentially giving said members immunity from prosecution for any sort of war crime and/or human writes violation, thus easing the transition from dictatorship to democracy.

This extremely controversial decision still remains in effect today, although there have been various efforts made by more liberal leaning governments in Spain during the past decade or so to try to approach a way of remembering the viciousness of the Franco regime in a way that will maintain political stability but also begin healing the still open wounds now over a century old.

What makes it so difficult for Spain to collectively forget the regime is the fact that there are reminders of Franco’s government everywhere from street names and statues to buildings and monuments. While there has been a considerable effort made to remove reminders such as these from public life in Spain, it has still remained difficult to completely rid Spain of all such content; this is wherein lies the focus of this thesis, specifically focusing on El Valle de los Caídos. This site is arguably the embodiment of the ego and brutality of Franco and his highly suppressive government.

The structure, which doubles as a Catholic Basilica, was publicized by the Franco regime as a memorial meant to honor fallen soldiers and civilians from both the Republican and Fascist sides of the Spanish Civil War. This can be understood as nothing more than a cruel joke conceived by Franco: he is able to build this massive monument under the guise of memorializing the war’s fallen, but all the while it is implicitly clear that El Valle de los Caídos is Francisco Franco’s shrine to himself; it is a megalomaniacal attempt to assert himself in the same light as one of the greatest and strongest leaders

Spain has ever had, he wants to be Spain’s twentieth century Philip II, the extremely prosperous Spanish Golden Age King. It is through this understanding that one is able to most understand the contextual relationship that the architecture and history of the site share. Its architecture implies so much; Franco uses its style to call upon Spanish history to imply something about him.

The style and construction of El Valle de los Caídos indicates quite a bit about Franco’s mindset and his understanding of himself in the contexts of Spain and the greater political world; Phillip II had El Escorial so Franco must create his own El Escorial. To Philip II, his grand palace, El Escorial represented how he wanted the rest of Europe to think of Spain. Its prominence and grandeur symbolized the immense amount of wealth and power that Spain had enjoyed during its Golden Age as well as its strong Catholic tradition. El Escorial, completed in 1600, was done in the Herrerian style, the style that defined much of Golden Age Spain. El Valle de los Caídos style is a revival of the Herrerian sensibilities that define El Escorial’s structure and style as well as the greater structural dialogue of Phillip II’s Spanish Empire.

Franco wanted to be regarded like a king, as a member of an elite lineage that only a small fraction of a percent is worthy of being. Thus El Valle de los Caídos; he saw no better way to forever compare himself to the likes of Phillip II and his royal tradition.

To Franco, Neo-Herrerian style is what the United States’ founding fathers saw in Neo-Classicism—a chance to embody a past time of greatness and prosperity. Where Neo-Classical style for the U.S. implies prosperity through democracy, Neo-herrerianism

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suggests prosperity through monarchal and totalitarian rule during a time when Spain was a successful empire. His intentions were clearly laid out in the Neo-Herrerian design; Franco wanted to link himself to the past Catholic Kings, like Phillip II. He hoped that El Valle de los Caídos would solidify him as one of World History’s prominent figures, in the same way that El Escorial did so for Philip II.

The use of Neo-Herrerianism by Franco as a direct and purposeful reference to past Spanish monarchal successes of Phillip II and the Spanish Empire in the midst of its Golden Age is essential to Franco’s narrative of himself as ruler of Spain. He wanted Neo-Herrerianism to more or less be the standard architectural style of his regime, these were his intentions for Spain and this style would convey that message. The classic Spanish style is meant to imply prominence, greatness, and regality as solid characteristics of Spain and its government. He recognized the impactful capability that architecture can have in conveying and defining a message; architecture dictates space and how a person or a group of people interact with that space. Architecture was a reliable tool that Franco could use to rule his country.

Construction of El Valle de los Caídos began in 1940 and lasted eighteen years. Pedro Muguruza designed the site then following Muguruza’s death Diego Mendez took over. As mentioned, the most important aspect of the site is the style in which it was designed; the style is where the abstracted monumentality of the site exists and is conveyed.

The Largest defining visual characteristic of El Valle de los Caidos is the 500-foot cross—the largest upright cross in the world—visible from twenty miles away and is

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already at an elevation 500 feet above the site’s ground level. Obviously this feature as well as the presence of a basilica and abbey at the site immediately implies the close relationship that Franco and his regime had with the Catholic Church.

That relationship is significant and points to the intentions of heavy Catholic imagery within the Valley of the Fallen. The Spanish Golden Age is characterized by Spain’s global success under an absolute ruler, but also by the country’s very close relationship with the Catholic Church. The Church’s doctrine played a major role in most Spanish minds not only in the time of Phillip II but also during Franco’s lifetime as well. El Escorial also contained a monastery and basilica; it too architecturally represented the deep relationship that the Church and Spain had together.

What makes it so difficult for the Spanish government of today to address the monumentality of El Valle de Los Caídos? How does a democratized nation properly attempt to cope with its authoritarian past in a politically and socially sensible way? The post-Franco government, a democracy, is famous for its global strides in prosecuting and aiding in the prosecution of various offenders of human rights violations and war crimes. Spanish authorities famously arrested Augusto Pinochet in London in 1998 citing his various war crimes committed during his time as dictator of Chile. How can a country so willing to put other totalitarian heads of state on trial for human rights violations completely lack the ability to even remotely make an attempt at remembering the same sort of violations committed by a former totalitarian leader that once lead that same country? To answer these questions with a simple answer would be to say that it is

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complicated;' which it certainly is. But there remains a delicate answer in understanding this inability to remember within the site itself as well as Spain’s history during the twentieth century. It is through this understanding that one is able to most understand the contextual relationship that the architecture and history of the site share. Its architecture implies so much; Franco uses the site to rule his country.

The first half of the twentieth century in Spain was extremely chaotic and unstable. The First World War, the Spanish Civil War, the Second World War, and all the governments at the helm in Spain in between left the country extremely numb and susceptible to instability. The state of political affairs after Franco’s death was incredibly fragile. To understand this fragility and why it seemed so necessary to institute a pact of forgetting, one must first understand the nature of the Spanish government and economy during the first half of the twentieth century.

Developing industry in Catalan marked the onset of the 20th century while the rest of the country remained largely agricultural. Much of the agricultural areas remained unproductive (leaving Spain struggling to produce enough food) and prompted many of the rural regions’ poor to migrate to large urban areas like Barcelona and Madrid; yet unemployment, food shortages, and degrading quality of life in urban areas created a significant amount of social unrest—which added to the already heated tensions between the Catholic Church (which had regained much of its power lost during the wave of liberal policies enacted during the 19th century) and more liberal leaning actors and parties such as the socialists, republicans, and communists.

The disproportionate existence of industry in Spain’s northern regions, specifically Catalan, gave the region more economic and political influence. Between
1900 and 1910, the Catalanian Lliga Regionalista won enough seats in parliament to make the party’s support essential to any sort of national policy’s enactment, thus ending the previous Spanish tradition of “caciquism” in which political bosses ran what was essentially a political cartel. The Lliga was a right wing faction focused on pursuing pro-industry policies meant to further enhance the economic fortitude of the region and the party’s influence.

King Alfonso XIII came into power in 1902 and insisted on having a much larger hand in the politics of Spain, a notion that the past century’s worth of liberal policies had more or less checked. Alfonso dismissed, appointed, and gave into a number of ministers, dictators, and generals—decisions that ultimately lead to thirty-three different governments between 1902 and 1923.\(^8\) Alfonso was never a popular figure among the poor and working class citizens of Spain. A small but very much present Anarchist population would prove to be arguably the most in contention with Alfonso and his governments; contention that came to a fever pitch in 1906, which saw Anarchist activists throw a bomb at the King’s wedding procession killing a couple dozen people but left the King and his newlywed Queen unharmed.

Spain’s embarrassing loss to the United States during the Spanish American War left the Iberian country’s military weak and with a bad global reputation, thus Spain remained neutral during the First World War. Prime Minister Dato proclaimed neutrality immediately following the breakout of the war in 1914. Different interests, factions, and party’s favored and wanted to actively support either the central or allied powers. The

upper classes, the Catholic Church, Generals and other army officers typically supported the central powers while Spain’s Socialists, Communists, Republicans, professional classes, and intellectuals vastly supported the allied powers—in fact many belonging to the allied supporters joined brigades like the French Legion and fought for allied interests.

Economically, neutrality proved to be quite beneficial for Spain’s upper classes and industry sectors as demand for Spanish goods rose sharply among the belligerent countries. On the other hand, the increased inflow of capital lead to a decrease of imported goods thus creating the “crisis de subsistencias” which is described as a shortage of common imported commodities. Poverty intensified among the working urban classes and the rural poor. Wartime profiteers hoarded grain and created an extremely speculative market. A bitter class divide was clearly burgeoning more so in 1915 then at any point in the previous fifteen years. Food and commodity shortages brought tensions to a peak in 1915 as the food riots completely destabilized major cities. The conservative government under Dato resigned and was replaced by a liberal government lead by Francisco Figueroa.

The liberal government felt pressure from both left and right leaning groups. Two trade unions, the Unión General de Trabajadores and the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo merged and threatened the government with a general nationwide strike. This brought army officers to create their own union, Juntas de Defensa, which hoped to pressure the liberal government enough to do away with a bill aimed at reducing the size and budget of the military.
The public generally did not support the military union and were able to recognize the union’s desire to meddle in political arenas well beyond what the public thought was appropriate. The public disapproval proved to possibly be detrimental to the interests of the Juntas de Defensa, leading General Miguel Primo de Rivera to stage a successful coup in 1923 that overthrew the liberal government and put in place a military dictatorship approved and supported by Alonso XIII. Rivera did not entirely have the complete support of the Spanish Army. Various factions within the army saw no improvement in pay or power. An attempted but failed coup took place in 1926, the artillery branch of the army refused Rivera’s attempts to reorganize and integrate the Spanish army, and uneasiness was very common amongst the ranks. Faced with such a lack of support within the army, Rivera instituted martial law, thus indirectly developing a pro-republican stance amongst his political foes in the army.

The military dictatorship ultimately crumbled and out of its ashes raised the Second Spanish Republic in 1931. Alfonso had sacked Rivera and called for elections. This proved disadvantageous to Alfonso as voters turned against the monarchy and instead elected to office the parties that would form the Second Spanish Republic. Alfonso fled in exile to Italy and instability amongst factions such as Republicans, fascists, Catholics, Socialists, and more became more and more visible.

The military largely remained indifferent to the new government while there existed a minority of support for the republicans amongst members of the army. As the Republicans began to reform and shrink the military and how it operates, this indifference

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and support in the military soon turned to general frustration—amongst the army specifically—towards the Republican government. Feeling antagonized and insulted by Republican reform policies, multiple attempts at an army rebellion took place.

The first successful rebellion was lead by the command of General Francisco Franco in 1936 at his post in Spanish Morocco.\(^1\) Franco succeeded in fractioning the country (roughly half of the Spanish people still supported the Republican government after his rebellion) and so began the bloody Spanish Civil War. Franco’s war of attrition saw a more or less united Fascist or Falangist front fighting the fractured left consisting of Republicans, Socialists, and Communists who had trouble agreeing on many issues, policies, and strategies amongst themselves. With logistical support of Hitler and Mussolini, Franco succeeded in consolidating power and instituting a totalitarian government with himself at the helm in 1939.\(^1\) Thus began the twenty year construction of El Valle de los Caídos and the beginning of Franco’s brutally and fatally suppressive time in power.

The site is Franco’s megalomaniacal attempt to manifest a monument able to best communicate what he considered to be the Spanish Identity, an identity sculpted through the lens of the Catholic tradition. More accurately, it is Franco’s way of communicating his authority and power over Spain to the world and the Church as a legitimizing aspect of that authority—El Valle de los Caídos is an architectural manifestation meant to embody what Franco saw as Spain and its identity.
El Escorial and Philip II’s Spain as Franco’s Model for El Valle de los Caídos and the Greater Spanish State

It is by no mistake that Francisco Franco chose to emulate Philip II. Philip II is arguably one of the most successful Spanish monarchs in the country’s history—even though his armada was badly defeated by England’s Elizabeth I, Philip II led Spain through part of one of its most lucrative and excessive moments: the Spanish Golden Age. Philip II’s treasury was filled with tremendous amounts of money from new world gold, bullion, and more.

His Catholicism was a driving force in not only his decision-making but also in the way he conducted the powers of his office and with what purpose he chose to lead his life. Philip II had a very cozy relationship with not only his Catholic faith but the institutional aspect of the Church as well, his royal palace featuring a Catholic basilica above every other aspect; Philip II made himself a king characterized by wealth and power, but all under the veil of being a devout Catholic. Beyond sheer force and money, Philip II was able to project Catholicism as well as his authority into everyday Spanish life through architecture, specifically Herrerianism.

With the country’s excessive wealth to back him, Phillip II, a dedicated Catholic, wanted to combat the protestant reformation that was gaining steam all over the rest of Europe while simultaneously projecting his power; San Lorenzo el Real de El Escorial, his royal Spanish palace and monastery, was his solution. As mentioned previously, the Catholic Church has just as much of a presence at El Escorial as the royalty, maybe

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arguably even more of a presence, a notion that is just as prevalent at El Valle de los Caídos.

Construction began under the architect Juan Bautista de Toledo in 1563 and was completed under Juan de Herrera (Toledo died during construction) twenty-one years later in 1584. The massive structure is shaped as a giant quadrangle that is 224 meters by 153 meters. The grey granite and dark blue roofs offer the only outward color palate. The structure is characterized by an austere symmetry that wraps around every façade, plane, and wall. Even the floor plan is marked by this symmetry with few deviations. As one first approaches the main façade of the structure, he or she is met with three doors. The middle door leads to the Courtyard of the Kings: a grand plaza with symmetrically lined windows, columns and archways in all four directions.

Proceeding further into the structure brings the viewer to the basilica, the central building within the site of El Escorial. The Basilica’s placement is by no means an accident; its central location is a clear indicator of The Church’s prominent engagement with and position within Philip II’s royal government. A long knave and two transepts that together are of equal length to the nave, an architectural aspect markedly different from other Catholic basilicas, characterize the basilica’s interior. Typically a basilica will have two shorter transepts that render a shape similar to a catholic cross, but Herrera decided to make the knave and transepts proportional; arguably in the name of the Herrerian symmetry that defines the rest of the site. The key aspects of Herrerian architecture are simplicity, symmetry, austerity, and subtlety. From the royal palace to the

12Ibid.
monastery and basilica, this simplicity is everywhere. The basilica’s dome, which is about one hundred meters above the basilica floor, is supported by nothing more than four massive granite piers connected by modestly ornamented Romanesque arches—\textsuperscript{13} a deviation from the extravagancy of the dome and support system within St. Peter’s Basilica at the Vatican.

The only instances of extravagant ornamentation exist within the altar room. Multiple religious paintings commissioned by Philip II and gilded bronze statues surround the high altar. Sitting at the lowest level of the altarpiece is a communion repository made of jasper and bronze designed by Herrera—\textsuperscript{14}; the basilica’s extravagance comes to focus at the altarpiece.

Amongst the symmetrical simplicity and austerity of the basilica and overall site, the high altar’s excess signifies its prominence and importance. The altar is in fact the most important part of any Catholic Church or basilica; it is where those who have come to worship consume the wine and bread that is the blood and body of Christ, one of the most important traditions of worship in the Catholic faith—it is the moment in which a faithful catholic is able to ingest and have the divinity of Jesus enter into his or her body; the extravagant ornamentation of the altarpiece itself and the lack of such extravagance throughout the rest of the site makes that notion all the more powerful.

In comparison to the basilica and specifically the high altar, Philip II’s own palace is not nearly as extravagant or centrally located. A series of rooms for the King, his family, and his court sits next to the basilica, all marked by simplicity and

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid
\textsuperscript{14} Catherine Wilkinson Zerner. \textit{Juan De Herrera: Arquitecto de Felipe II} (Madrid: AKAL, 1996), 14.
austerity. His bedroom features a window from which Philip II was able to observe mass if incapacitated.\footnote{Mary Crawford Volk. 1987. Review of Building the Escorial. The Art Bulletin 69 (1). Taylor & Francis, Ltd., College Art Association. 150.} It is this aspect of the site that says so much about Philip II’s intentions. He himself will live some sort of austere life that is almost monastic in nature, just like any good catholic would.\footnote{It is important to consider that Philip II is royalty living with essentially unlimited wealth. He is clearly not living an “austere” or “monastic” lifestyle, but what matters is the fact that what depicts the most extravagancy is not his own living quarters, but it is in fact the basilica and the high altar within it.} When comparing his personal palace to the basilica, his living quarters lack the excess and awe that characterizes the high altar and dome. This arguably indicates Philip II’s desire to place his faith and the Catholic Church above him in the hierarchy of El Escorial and Spanish society. This places the state of Spain above him too, as one can argue that at that point in time Spain and the Catholic Church went hand in hand.

The Hall of Battles is a long hall with walls decorated by frescos depicting major Spanish military victories—of the most prominent being the expulsion of the Jews and Moors from the peninsula, making Iberia a Catholic realm. The prominence of this particular fresco implies the depth to which the Church is inserted into the Spanish state and Spanish life of Philip II’s reign. The Catholic identity of Spain and its history is everywhere in El Escorial, even if it not explicitly so, as is such in the frescos.

Although Philip II has a strong and devoted sense of Catholicism, he still could recognize the importance of various cultural texts. The Library, which was planned by Herrera, houses great Western literature, ancient texts, and texts in Greek, Latin, Arabic, and Aramaic. Since the library was under inquisitional guard,
many important Arabic texts that were thought to have been destroyed (including the many mathematical devices and tools stored in the library) during the Reconquista were safe and within the El Escorial library. In fact, the only existing copy of a twelfth century Syrian autobiography called *Kitab al-l’tibar* sits on the shelves.\(^{17}\) The library and its contents are important to mention because, based off of the evidence and known goals of Philip II’s reign, it would seem that projecting the power of the Catholic Church and Spain as its mighty partner in order to combat protestant reformation could be hindered by the existence of such texts and objects. There clearly had to exist texts within the library walls that would directly negate and contradict Catholic creed and doctrine, but it can be argued that Philip II valued the educational aspect of these texts, but, seeing as the library was under inquisitional guard, the texts were not at all accessible by the common man—this was a library for Philip II and those he deemed worthy and appropriate.

The last major aspect of the site is the Pantheon of Kings. This is an underground burial site housing the remains of a significant number prominent kings and queens from the Hapsburg and Bourbon dynasties. Royalty such as Charles I of Spain, Alfonso XII, Juan Carlos, and more are all interned in the site within twenty-six marble sepulchers. Philip II wanted to include this aspect of the site in order to give the remains of his parents a worthy place to rest. He himself would eventually be laid to rest in the Pantheon of Kings as well.

The entire site is done in the Herrerian style that, as mentioned, is marked by austere symmetry repeated over and over through a simple color palate. The style breaks down a structure into geometric planes and treats each individual plane with a geometric rhythm; it is a style that uses geometry and symmetry to create an architectural harmony. Not only do the individual planes themselves achieve this harmony, but so does the Herrerian structure as a whole. After the completion of El Escorial, Herrerianism came to define Spanish institutional architecture during Philip II’s reign—Juan de Herrera (where Herrerianism gets its name) was named Inspector of the Monuments of the Crown in 1579. The style even penetrated architecture in Spain’s territories in the new world. To this day, many South American, Mexican, and Caribbean institutional structures that have lasted over the past five hundred years or so still are defined by the Herrerian style. The style was meant to imply Spanish and Catholic power; its symmetry is meant to echo that power and echo the prominence of Philip II’s El Escorial as an institutional powerhouse.

Philip II is a leader who, in my opinion, is often times painted the villain by historians writing history through the lens of the white Anglo Saxon protestant when in fact he was no worse than any other monarch of his time or proceeding times. He was an autocrat; he did not tolerate the practice of any other religion other than Catholicism and ruled with complete control—this is why historians have casted him in a negative light, but the truth is, he is not any different than Elizabeth or George, he just happened to be catholic. The fervor with which he cracked down

on political and religious dissent was matched if not exceeded by plenty of other European monarchs from his time in power, before and after. He seems to in fact be a King wanting to promote his faith and his state above himself and clearly valued education.

No matter how one chooses to describe Philip II in the history books, all will agree that he had amassed an unfathomable amount of wealth and power; it is these two aspects that most define the king. These values are clearly inspired Francisco Franco; he wanted in every way to be the total and complete leader that Philip II was. Franco wanted to be known for his power and authority. Franco wanted to promote the idea of him as a strong catholic leader with an immense amount of power coming from a strong catholic state with far reach and influence. He had just declared victory over the unorganized and godless left, thus consolidating power over all of Spain; in Franco's mind he was kingly in a way, he was Spain's twentieth century Philip II and he wanted to project that image of himself to the world. Franco saw no better way to echo Philip II than to construct his very own mega site that would project power and influence; Franco had decided to construct his own El Escorial. The new Spanish dictator wanted to reshape Spain using Philip II's model; he did so with architecture.

Franco used Neo-Herrerianism for the same purposes that the United States' founding fathers employed Neo-Classicism; he wanted to project the characteristics of a past, prominent, and period and/or culture upon current times. Neo-Herrerianism is what projects Philip II's Spain onto Franco's twentieth century Spain. When comparing El Escorial's style and Philip II's intentions for his site with
El Valle de los Caídos’ style and Franco’s intentions, all the similarities become increasingly clear. Franco wanted to project his power and influence but at the same time make the prominence of the Catholic Church within Spain very clear. For instance, El Escorial’s basilica is the most centrally placed site within the greater plan. Franco’s planners placed a five hundred foot cross atop the already towering roof of the underground basilica—the cross too is the most centrally located aspect of the site. Both Franco and Philip II are even buried in their respective sites; El Valle de los Caídos and El Escorial are each some sort of force that came to define the lives of both individuals. Both succeed in portraying not only the strong catholic presence in their own personal lives, but the daily life of the state and its people as well.

It is important to note that I see these two individuals as extremely different people. Yes, both are characterized by power and how they wield it. They are both devout Catholics who want that aspect of their lives to be a major part of the common Spaniard’s life as well, but they are arguably different people with different motivations. While Philip II wanted to selflessly promote the Catholic faith and the Spanish state (which, yes, in turn makes him all the more powerful), Francisco Franco was much more megalomaniacal in his motivation for building El Valle de los Caídos and consolidating power over all of Spain.

The stylistic similarities between El Escorial and El Valle de los Caídos run rampant throughout each site. The biggest defining feature of both structures and architectural plans is the geometrical symmetry and austerity. One needs to look at each plan to understand the symmetry at the most basic level (images A and B).
Symmetry is the cornerstone of Herrerian architecture and is demonstrated to the utmost degree at each site.

The Herrerian style gets its name from the fourteenth century architect Juan de Herrera, who is responsible for the overall design of El Escorial. His style came to define an entire Spanish stately culture and helped shape the Spanish historical narrative that Francisco Franco would come to rely heavily upon when conceiving the plans for not only El Valle de los Caídos but also the entire country of Spain itself.

Stylistically, herrarianism both rejects and embraces the baroque. It draws upon the baroque’s play and tension between void and volume, but injects what would become a decidedly Spanish flavor after the herrian style had established itself in Philip II’s Spain; there are clear differences between the two. The Baroque style is defined by its ornamentation (color, sculpture, reliefs) and how that ornamentation plays out in the given space. Stylistically, so much ornamentation would imply a certain gaudy quality to be ascribed to such a structure, but what makes the baroque’s ornamentation so appealing is the symmetry that it is characterized by.

This is where Herrerianism draws upon baroque qualities but rejects them at the same time. Herrerianism eliminates the baroque’s ornamental fixation and replaces it with an overwhelming sense of austerity that seems to exaggerate the plan’s symmetry. Where baroque relies more upon placement of decoration and ornamentation within a plan to denote symmetry, the Herrerian style relies only upon the bare symmetry of the plan, implying austere values.
Austerity is an extremely important aspect of the Catholic-Spanish identity that both Philip the II and Francisco Franco wanted to project upon their respective Spain’s. That sobriety is part of Philip II’s rejection of Protestantism—he wanted to reassert the catholic notion of excess and ornamentation being reserved only to express the divinity and awesomeness of God as understood under the pretense of Catholicism. As discussed previously, El Escorial is markedly bare in almost every section of the plan. The only elaborate ornamentation and decoration that exists in the entire site is within the altar of the basilica. With this choice, Herrera and Philip II are clearly indicating that only the divine (i.e. the Catholic Church) deserve to exist in excessive ornamentation while mortal humanity must live in a self-prescribed austerity—a Catholic notion with a basis in the idea of original sin. Even Philip II’s living quarters lacked the elaborateness of the altarpiece. This rejects protestant notions that intend the check the institutional authority, power, and privilege of the Catholic Church before and immediately during the reformation.

The same can be said about El Valle de los Caídos, in fact it can be argued that that notion of austerity is taken to even more of an extreme. As will be discussed, the plan of El Valle de los Caídos is a clear indicator of what will be ultimately constructed, seeing as ornamentation has no place. The plan indicates walls, arches, roofs, and plots. Being analyzed after completion, an observer will observe exactly and almost only that: walls, arches, roofs, and plots. The basilica, like at El Escorial, is the only aspect that communicates any ornamentation, but a reserved ornamentation at that.
The religious Fresco atop the dome ceiling designates some of the only
decoration within the site. The abbey in which monks reside is bare and predictably
generic, designating a sense of monastic austerity. Even the five-hundred foot
cross that sits atop the basilica is marked by the same sort of austerity yet still
commands such power and prominence. That is what Pedro Muguruza and Diego
Mendés hoped to evoke with such austerity, power and prominence perpetually
existing.

El Valle de los Caídos is defined by its cross, basilica, Benedictine Abbey,
esplanade. These features come together in such a harmonious way that allows for an
inhabitant to subconsciously ease his or her way around the site. What is most impressive
about the Herrerian style is the extreme dedication to symmetry. Regularity and
proportion offer a sense of calm and comfort. Symmetry is able to imply something more
than just balance in a physical site. When it is taken to such an extreme like it is in the
Herrerian style, it implies continuity beyond the structural confines of the tangible site
and that is very much reflected at El Valle de los Caídos. It enters into the implied realm
of infinite, Euclidean geometry.

The site’s greater symmetry and symmetry within specific areas of the plan imply
that continuity. The geometric planes and lines that make up El Valle de los Caídos can
be forever extended. The conceptual infinite aspects of the geometrical makeup of the site
imply an infinite continuity in what the site is supposed to represent. Both El Valle de los
Caídos and El Escorial were intended to essentially represent an absolute Spanish leader
being advised by his own Catholic faith. These representations become infinite through
the geometric implications; the buildings are to imply a strong—if not infinite—
continuity of Spanish and Catholic power and influence. The inhabitant, because of the simple and dedicated symmetry defining every aspect of the structure, is able to imagine those planes and lines (or, rather, power and influence) extending forever.

That effect brought on by the symmetry is felt immediately as one begins his or her procession throughout the site. As one approaches the esplanade (image c), the extreme symmetry is already inescapable; even the natural rock mass behind the esplanade appears symmetrical, most likely due to the precise placement of the esplanade and unfurling arches in front of the mass. The white stone reflects the daylight in a way that better defines the grassy plots that come in intervals as one approaches the entrance to the basilica. Identical navy blue roofs top the arches parallel to the entrance, defined by their horizontal length. They are stretched out across the arches and maintain a low center of gravity (it is important to remember that the Herrerian style is defined by a horizontal symmetry and not a vertical one). These roofed arches are perpendicularly bisected by two identical and symmetrical sets of columns that extend from the geometric plane of the path’s initial stone into the roofed columns.

The long and straight path of white stone conjures a religious sense of silent, monastic solitude and remembrance—a feeling essential to Catholic mourning. The religious tones become explicit with and are reinforced by the towering cross sitting at the rock mass’ highest peak, directly above the basilica. The cross only becomes more and more prominent as one immerses his or her self into the exterior of the site.

Once one has reached the esplanade, stairs slowly rise from the walkway at a low degree and lead the spectator into a semi-circle structure that is amplified by the series of columns extending from the sides of the entrance. Upon the central arch of the esplanade
sits a sculpture of the Virgin Mary holding Jesus’ dead body (very prominent catholic imagery). The entrance leads one into the basilica.

The Basilica of the Holy Cross of the Valley of the Fallen is one of the largest in the world and is actually larger than St. Peter’s Basilica. It was merely an underground crypt until Pope John XXIII designated it a basilica in 1960. It features a dome (image D) depicting catholic images of Jesus, angels, the Virgin Mary, and a choir of angels below them. The fresco that decorates the dome is elaborate and detailed, but still maintains a stoic simplicity through the images’ one-dimensionality. As with the rest of the site, simplicity and ornamentation exist in equilibrium.

The central nave of the basilica extends directly underneath the cross and, like the nave and transepts of El Escorial, is symmetrically bisected by the two extending transepts—a deviation from a typical basilica plan, but an invited deviation when approaching the site’s greater implications. The nave extends from the esplanade entrance through the rock mass. The mass’s opposite side opens up into The Benedictine Abbey of the Holy Cross of the Valley of the Fallen.

The Abbey houses priests who are perpetually delivering a mass that is intended to mourn the Spanish Civil War’s fallen. It is in the abbey that the monastic ritual, modesty, and solitude implied by the walk up to the esplanade becomes explicit. The monks’ perpetual mass offers a very clear example of the continuity that the style is meant to imply. The most stunning feature of the Abbey is the very visible symmetry that

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19 This event can imply a lot about the Catholic Church’s relationship with Spain during Franco’s time in power. It is also interesting politically due to the more or less favorable view of Pope John XXII many Catholics, politicians, and people outside of Spain had. How can the Church avoid human rights offenses and maintain a more than cordial relationship with Franco and his Spain?
is intensified by the bisecting lines dissecting the square-shaped grass plots that are bordered by the stone walkways (image E). It is in these symmetrical plots that the implications of continuity through extending geometrical lines and planes are most prevalent.

The Abbey is by far the most blatant revival of Herrerian architecture; it is where symmetry is most visible, explicitly and implicitly. The repeating and symmetrical windows and arches lining the horizontal structures give the site a certain muted and understated grandiose. A grandiose championed during the Spanish Golden Age, which is exactly what Franco was trying to project upon himself.

The structure, plan, and overall manipulation of the site are all clearly defined by deliberate decisions to feature symmetry first and foremost. El Valle de los Caídos is able to convey and imply so much about Spain, the nature of Franco, and the nature of his government through not only the historical context within which Herrerianism exists but also through the implications brought on by the symmetry that defines Herrerian style. The style’s symmetry creates stylistic principles that imply the aforementioned continuity.

Franco’s use of Neo-Herrrianism to define El Valle de los Caídos and the whole of Spain does not differ in message or, to a certain extent, in style from other architectural styles employed by other major European fascist regimes, specifically Nazi Germany and Mussolini’s Italy. Neo-Herrrianism is rooted in a certain type of international classicism that implies authority. This type of classicism is a tool used by Albert Speer and Hitler in Germany and by Mussolini in Italy. Repetitive and symmetrical austerity implies an
undeniable and inescapable authority rooted in everyday institutional life—these fascist regimes employ architecture as an institutional attempt to control their citizens.

The Nazi Party Rally Grounds indicate the same austere symmetry as denoted at El Valle de los Caídos. The massive plot of land where the Nuremberg Rallies took place implies a continuous plan on a massive scale. While observing images of Hitler speaking at the Nuremberg Rallies, it is impossible to ignore an overwhelming sense of authority emanating (image E) from him at his podium, but clearly not solely because of Hitler the man. The image is broken up into a series of multi-tiered planes slowly rising out of one another.

Atop the highest plane stands Hitler behind his podium. He is framed by a massive marble structure. The edifice’s only ornamentation is a series of squared columns that extend out from the building’s vertical reliefs. Atop that structure sits the Nazi symbol gilded in gold and surrounded by a roman olive branch crown. Hitler is framed by these commanding structures in such a way that he somehow becomes more than just a singular man but into Germany itself, into an institution with absolute authority.

The architectural styles employed by these fascist structures separates the power and authority of the single man that is Hitler from the anonymous masses that make up his loyal followers. Hitler and Speer are employing classicism to demonstrate the relationship between the sole, total leader and the followers that make up the faceless masses. The same relationship is demonstrated at El Valle de los Caídos. The cross—the central point of the site and a blatant expression of authority and power—alone towers over the site and, figuratively speaking, towers over Spain. That aspect arguable reflects
the image of Franco as the face and authority of the Spanish masses. That notion is taken further through Franco being the most recognizable individual interned amongst thousands of anonymous dead bodies.

After Mussolini took power in Italy, he employed architecture just as much as any other tool to consolidate and maintain power. One of the most notable works of fascist Italian architecture is the Square Colosseum in Rome (image F). Just like the work of architects operating in Franco’s Spain or Nazi Germany, the structure’s style is rooted in an austere sense of international classicism. Mario Romano, the site’s designer, even embraced certain aspects of modernism to further the austere definition of the site (early twentieth century modernism completely rejects ornamentation and prefers a more sterile and sober plan). Romano created a space that plays with void and volume just like the baroque and classical styles do. He offers a white cube that appears hollowed out; it is reminiscent of the sculptor’s process of starting with a blank white cube.

Classicism and classical imagery emerges in the repetition and symmetry of the arches as well as the figure statues at the structure’s base. Modernism emerges at the edges of each plane of the cube. The ends of the planes do just that: end. They are not marked by any defining finishing point and do not draw attention to their finite qualities. Both the classical and modern aspects come together in a harmonious sense of austerity.

The Square Colosseum is monumental and implies power, just as the structures at the Nazi Rally Grounds did. Its order is meant to reflect upon the order of Italy and of fascism as an ideology: a top to bottom structure where authority operates with impunity and in the best interests of the state, not necessarily individuals within said state.
It is in images like this that one is able to assume the legitimizing effect that architecture can have. Hitler is just merely a man, yes powerful, but still just a man. Hitler coupled with propagandistic architecture makes him into something more than a man; he becomes mythical. The austerity that characterizes this architecture is what allows for that assumption to exist. Grand austerity implies a sense of grand monumentality that implies power and authority.

Totalitarian leaders throughout history, whether monarchs like Philip II or fascists like Franco, Hitler, and Mussolini, rely heavily upon architectural means to communicate power and authority. What makes the architecture of Spanish totalitarian leaders stand out is the intense and explicit connotations of Catholicism and the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. Both Philip II and Francisco Franco conceived of sites that suggest the intimate relationship that their governments’ had with the Catholic Church.
Image A, El Escorial
Image B, El Valle de los Caídos

Image C, Esplanade
Image D, dome

Image D, Abbey
Image E, Nazi Party Rally Grounds

Image F, Square Colosseum (Palazo)
Chapter II: Catholicism, Burial, Construction

Well before the site was completed in 1959, Franco saw what would become El Valle de los Caídos as a structure that would embody what he understood the Spanish identity to be. He conceptualized a structure that would embody Spanish architecture, style, and ultimately culture—all falling under the charismatic guidance of his totalitarian, catholic regime.

Through understanding El Valle de los Caídos as a government-sanctioned religious burial memorial in conversation with the construction of the site itself, the Franco regime’s true colors become apparent. This understanding and analysis of the site paints a gross picture that casts Franco’s Spain in a dark, dark shadow. The outward premise of the site as a memorial to the fallen of both sides of the Spanish Civil war is made into a cruel joke when one is informed of the thousands of political prisoners who died as a result of horrendous and inhumane working conditions at the site, let alone the tens of thousands more who were killed in mass executions and placed anonymously in mass graves throughout Spain.

This site that was to be publically understood as a religious monument and burial site meant to commemorate all of civil war’s fallen blatantly did and does not do so at all; in fact it has made a mockery of the dead republican dissenters who fell during the war or during the ensuing years of the Franco regime. The human toll that went into constructing El Valle de los Caídos gives the site a very different voice and message.
Understanding El Valle de los Caídos as a religious and burial site means one must understand the relationship that Franco and his government had with the Catholic Church and the Pope in Rome. The immense Catholic presence at the site itself accurately indicates the extent to which the institution of the Catholic Church itself had infiltrated Francoist mandate and policy.

Francisco Franco relied heavily upon the Catholic Church and the traditions of Catholicism already such a part of the Spanish narrative as a tool to legitimize his regime’s authority; Catholicism was an essential aspect of the Spanish identity, an identity that Franco wanted to communicate to the rest of the world. Franco’s close relationship with the Church began in the years soon preceding the Spanish Civil war. The Second Republic of Spain, which came into power in 1931, took steps to limit the excessive religious power that had up to that point been exerted by the Church over the state of Spain.

As discussed previously, a vast majority of military officers of various ranks felt threatened by the proposed policies put forth by the leaders of the Second Republic. As they wanted to do with the influence enjoyed by the Church within Spanish government, the officials leading the Second Republic wanted to curb the tremendous influence that the military had in innumerable aspects of the Spanish state. These policies made the leaders and policies of the Second Republic the mutual enemies of the Church and certain camps within the Spanish military. After Franco assumed power in 1939, he gave a great deal of influence to the Catholic Church, an influence that it wielded over both public and private spheres of Spanish
life.\textsuperscript{20} The Church had a religious monopoly over all of Spain; Catholicism was, as a result, Spain's state religion. Justin Crumbaugh, a Spanish historian and culturalist, called it National Catholicism.

The relationship between the Church and the Franco regime was one characterized by mutual benefit and power. The blatant and established presence of the Church within Spanish life in Franco’s Spain legitimizes his authority while at the same time recognizes the institution as a viable and important political component of a major European country; thus designating it as a viable, political player of the world’s geo-political landscape. Beyond the political usefulness that his relationship with the Church had offered to Franco, he truly believed in the legitimacy and divinity of the Catholic Church; Franco arguably saw his relationship with the pope (whom in the Catholic faith is considered to be the sole vicar of Jesus Christ) as a sign that even god supported his authority. This cozy relationship between the two makes it no surprise that the Catholic faith and tradition is an essential and undeniable aspect of experiencing El Valle de los Caídos, and moreover, experiencing Francoist Spain.

Franco recognized El Valle de los Caídos’s communicable capability and employed every possible architectural aspect to reinforce the legitimizing effect that his regime and the Church had upon one another. The five-hundred foot cross that sits atop the most central point of the site can not only been seen from miles and miles away while on the ground, but even from space—there is no denying the prominence of the church within the site and moreover within Spain. Even from

\textsuperscript{20} Requena, Stanek. 2014. “Religiosity and politics in Spain and Poland: A Period effect Analysis” Social Compass 61, no 3: 353.
hundreds of miles away, Catholic influence is a felt and an undeniable aspect of the site. Every religious aspect of the site has clear intentions of imposing a strong sense of Catholic authority.

The basilica of El Valle de los Caídos is a truly deafening structure that is of the largest catholic basilicas in the world. Its barrel-vaulted ceilings shape the large cavernous nave. The long and broad nave is lined with various frescos depicting catholic themes and imagery. This path eventually opens up into an ornate altarpiece room that prominently features a marble sculpture of Jesus dead on the crucifix amongst other statues and objects all made in the Catholic tradition. The dome’s peak opens up into a track that leads to the bottom of the colossal granite cross. A functioning funicular that at one point was open to the public brings one from the base of the basilica through a trapped door and up into the cross. It is interesting to note that the funicular’s track extends straight up from the altar and crucifix room (the room in which all of the catholic imagery comes to a focal point) as if on a divine ascent; its path begins in an underground crypt and ascends upwards past colossal frescos and sculptures and into the largest and tallest granite cross in the world, placing whomever in a position to experience the architectural power as communicated by the site. Is this ascension meant to represent the power that Franco had wanted to project through the site? For a brief point in time, the funicular system was in fact open to the public, and visitors could ascend from the basilica’s base. Would public visitors have been able to elicit these feelings of divine authority and power just as Franco would have wanted? Is his or her familiarity with that powerful experience meant to place the visitor in awe of Spain’s,
moreover, Franco’s power? It is in these moments and instances that the Catholic and Spanish identity that Franco wanted to project come together.

Before one even enters the nave and basilica, just above the esplanade’s entrance to the underground site, rests arguably one of the most dramatic and impactful examples in Catholic imagery and of the entire site: the pieta. The pieta, a statue of the dead body of Jesus Christ lying lifeless in the arms and lap of his grieving mother, sits atop the main entrance of the esplanade. Its presence commands such power and authority; it and the towering cross, leave one no room to initially approach the site with any semblance of secularity.

Its physical placement, architecturally speaking, says volumes about how Franco wanted to utilize the site as a means of suggesting authority. Looking at the pieta scene head on in conjunction with the echoing succession of arches cascading laterally from the statue (image g), it is easy to see the pieta’s position as one similar to the pediment statues of classical Roman Architecture. Likewise in the pieta, symmetry is undeniable, but it is not the typical physical symmetry as suggested by the parallel and perpendicular bisecting lines of the architectural plan or the reverberating arches and windows of the architectural structures, but it is a theoretical symmetry and harmony of religious imagery and authority as suggested by the pieta and cross.

Looking at images g and h, the cross, an object commanding power and authority, sit in conversation with the virgin Mary holding the lifeless body of her son. If a straight line were drawn from the central point of the cross’s base to the base of the esplanade’s entrance, the pieta would be perfectly bisected. It appears as
if the imposing structure that is the cross extends directly out of the dead body of Jesus as his mother holds him. It is as if the deafening cross summons all of its strength, power and authority from the image of Mary and Jesus—it is from the death of Jesus that the power was born out of. If the cross is a tool that Franco utilizes to convey power and authority, is its position in conversation with the pieta meant suggest both Franco and the Church’s power as ordained by God himself?

The Pieta is a scene that has deeply permeated Catholic imagery. Michelangelo’s rendition of the scene of a dying Jesus is a prominent aspect of St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome. Its themes are meant to suggest notions of original. It is an image that suggests a mortal unworthiness. It suggests that Jesus died for the sins of humanity and that humanity is forever in debt to God (but in actuality, the debt is owed to the Catholic Church) because of Jesus’s sacrifice. The imagery brings an observer to wade deeper into a religious and moral obsession with death, as propagated by Franco and his regime.

One of the main themes within the state narrative that Franco wanted to project was an obsession with the “fallen” or the “caídos”. Franco’s regime was essentially a cult of death that sought glory and honor in a moral fight to the death—thus perpetuating acts of violence against dissenters and opponents of the regime; death was an undeniable fate for both the nationalists friendly to him and his Republican enemies. The glorification of death pervaded so many aspects of Franco’s regime, but it was architecture that the regime’s propagandists settled on as the ultimate tool to propagate a remembrance of Spanish nationalists who had died for God and for Spain. Even during the Spanish Civil War, the nationalists in
power would erect structures at a staggering rate. In a 1937 speech entitled "Unificación", Franco states:

“In the places of battle where the fire of weapons shine and the blood of the heroes flowed, we shall raise monuments upon which we shall engrave the names of those who, with their death, one day after another, are forging the temple of the New Spain.”

In every single major Spanish city, Franco wanted to erect some sort of monument that would draw attention to the death of prominent Nationalist martyrs.

Dead nationalist heroes are praised while dead Republicans are scorned in Spain’s public sphere under Franco, but all the while, the fallen of both nationalist and Republican sides are supposedly remembered in the same honorable and mournful way at El Valle de los Caídos.

While Franco publicly states that the site is meant to remember and commemorate the fallen on both sides of the civil war in an honorable way, his brutal and often times fatal suppression of dissent throughout the course of his period in power makes that public statement of intent seem like a cruel joke made at the expense of dead Republican fighters and idealists that made up the leftist factions unfriendly to Franco’s forces. It comes as no surprise that the architectural site that Franco wanted to embody his authority and Spanish identity explicitly (on the surface level at least) is meant to remember those who died as a result of the Spanish Civil War; at the same time that he is projecting his power over Spain he is projecting his victory over the Republican factions through interning anonymous Republican remains at the monument. Franco was able to implicitly suggest power

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21 Crumbaugh, Justin. 2011. “Afterlife and Bare Life: The Valley of the Fallen as a Paradigm of Government.” *Journal of Spanish cultural Studies* 12, no. 4: 419-430.
and victory while maintaining some semblance of humanity from a global perspective through stating that “honoring” and “mourning” both sides is the intent of the site. Furthermore, the inclusion of the dead who did not sympathize with Franco's nationalist cause was a means of hiding mass murder and other atrocities committed by the Franco regime. In 1959, massive unmarked graves filled with dead republican bodies were destroyed and transferred to El Valle de los Caídos. El Valle de los Caídos utilizes themes of mortality throughout the site; it is a monument that glorifies death.

This glorification of death could not be any more clear than at the Benedictine abbey or El Abadía Benedictina de la Santa Cruz del Valle de los Caídos (The Benedictine Abbey of the Holy Cross of the Valley of the Fallen). The abbey, which is positioned on the opposite side of the esplanade through the basilica, houses priests who are delivering a perpetual mass meant to honor the lives lost during not only the Spanish Civil War but also the lives lost as a result of any proceeding Spanish military operation. These are priests that will most likely remain at the abbey until their own deaths; it is as if the priests’ mortality is an inseparable aspect of the architectural site itself. This fascinating notion of actual living people becoming part of the site’s architectural integrity is made all that more intriguing by the mortal themes that characterize the priests’ perpetual mass. In theory, priests are eternally performing a mass that highlights the eternal properties of death, further echoing the infinite aspects of the geometrical plan.

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Franco’s body too is interned at El Valle de los Caídos and is without a doubt the most contentious body at the site. Following his death in 1975, the body of Franco was placed at El Valle de los Caídos, as Franco had so designated. The anniversary of his death fell on the same day, November 20th, as that of José Antonio Primo de Rivera, the founder of the Spanish Falange movement and what would later turn into the Falange Party—the sole legal political party in Franco’s Spain. Primo de Rivera, who is also buried at El Valle de los Caídos, was considered a national hero in Franco’s nationalist Spanish narrative.

The fact that Franco wanted to be and was buried at El Valle de los Caídos indicates just how much he saw the site as a reflection of him and his authority. He believed that after his death, Spain would continue his totalitarian style of rule. If El Valle de los Caídos was meant to be a manifestation of his and Spain’s power, his body being laid to rest at the site in a prominently featured tomb arguably shapes him as the father of what he believed would be contemporary Spain. To a lesser extent, the same can be said of Primo de Rivera’s body as well. Had the totalitarian government that Franco wanted to succeed him actually controlled Spanish politics following Franco’s death, the religious nature of the site combined with the interment of these two significant twentieth century Spanish figures would put them in a position to be venerated and hallowed. Had that totalitarian government endured, Franco’s interment would be the final piece in completing the site’s projection of authority and power—he wanted his body and death to become a part of the site itself in a physical and theoretical sense and forever become a part of the Spanish narrative he wanted to shape.
If El Valle de los Caídos is analyzed as a tool to control (as is the ultimate goal of much of classical, fascist architecture) then the themes suggested by the imagery of the pieta are essential to communicating that control. It suggests that humanity (sinners) owe their faithfulness to the Catholic Church, that humanity is guilty for Jesus’s death and that the only way to repent is to be faithful and good to the Church. At El Valle de los Caídos the Pieta goes a step further and suggests that the in order to repent, a Spaniard must be true and faithful to not only the Church but to Franco’s Catholic Nationalist regime as well.

Franco wanted to propagate a Spanish Identity that would place him and the Church in a strong position of authority that would allow for their influence to control every aspect of Spanish life, whether it is moral, social, cultural, or political. With the Church in place as Spain’s state sanctioned religion, its values were able to permeate Spanish life and turn its doctrine into actual legislation and law. This in turn gave Franco the tool through which to wield his power while at the same time legitimized the Catholic institution as a real political player with tremendous influence. Franco recognized the political usefulness in making the Church and the Spanish state on more or less equal footing. Furthermore, he was in fact a staunch Catholic and clearly felt his relationship with the Church was his moral and religious duty. The identity he wanted to communicate presented the Spanish state as a Catholic state. At El Valle de los Caídos, that inseparability is quite obvious. The towering cross’s overwhelming size and centrality indicate just how deeply rooted religiosity would be in Francoist Spain.

Where Philip II was more subdued in his communication of Catholic influence at El Escorial, Franco wants to establish blatantly and with impunity that the Catholic faith
is what guides the Spanish identity. He does so, and quite successfully at that, by the prominent placement of these images that have permeated Catholic doctrine and art for centuries. When read in conversation, El Escorial and El Valle de los Caídos both draw heavily from Herrerian sensibilities, but Franco incorporates further notions of authority and power through pointedly classical architectural aspects like the cascading series of arches emanating from the main esplanade entrance. Just as other major European fascists like Hitler and Speer did with the Nazi Party Rally Grounds in Nuremberg and Mussolini with El Palazzo della Civilta in Rome, Franco utilized classicism to project himself as the total and only leader of Spain. In these moments, the Franco’s power is able to speak.

While the site’s voice commands a strong and loud authority throughout the plan, it is the forced silence of the dead anonymously interned by the thousands within the crypts of El Valle de los Caídos that resonates the loudest with those wanting to analyze and remember the site today. Thousands of political prisoners were forced to work essentially as slaves at the site; it is their lack of voice that may in fact scream the loudest. The construction of the site took the lives of thousands, but the identities of those dead will most likely never be known, as their dead bodies lay anonymously in piles behind the walls of the crypts.

In the years immediately following the end of the Spanish Civil War, Francisco Franco’s regime began construction on what would become El Valle de los Caídos as it stands today. In total, the construction lasted eighteen years and carried a total cost of approximately $284,140,000 at today’s exchange rates.
Franco and other officials within his government recognized just how important and essential architecture would be in giving the regime a structural voice of authority and power. To many of the regime’s officials, and especially to Franco himself, architecture and politics went hand in hand: “If politics takes shape through architecture, then the politician is an architect”\textsuperscript{23}. El Valle de los Caídos was meant communicate the Spanish identity through an architectural voice, but in reality, the massive structure and the nearly two decade long brutal and at times fatal construction effort that became Franco’s largest obsession as Spain’s head of state, has come to represent Spain’s collective inability as a country to properly and respectful remember the atrocities committed by Franco’s regime.

As was a common desire amongst the three main European fascist leaders of the twentieth century, Franco wanted to completely rebuild parts of his capitol city from the ground up. Just as Hitler wanted to do with Berlin and Mussolini in Rome, Franco wanted to rebuild Madrid and erect structures and monuments that would have commemorated and reminded the city’s citizens of fallen falange heroes and catholic figures.

El Puerta Del Sol, for instance, an iconic site in Madrid in which the central radial roads of the old city convene, was to be destroyed and to be erected in its place were structures done in the Herrerian and Baroque styles made famous during Spain’s Golden Age under Philip II.\textsuperscript{24} This structure was to stretch from the center of Madrid and enter into the mountain range where El Valle de los Caídos sits, stretching a length of over

\textsuperscript{23} Crumbaugh, “Afterlife and Bare Life”
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid
one-hundred miles. Justin Crumbaugh sees this unrealized ambition as a “colossal corridor of death, a passage way from the center of political power to the largest funerary shrine and burial ground on earth”25, a notion that pointedly indicates the cult of death surrounding Francoism and Francoist architecture. In hindsight, such massive structural projects such as the complete reconstruction of entire city sections is extremely ambitious and often times unachievable by most means, let alone the construction of a site such as El Valle de los Caídos. It took eighteen years of what was essentially slave labor to construct the site.

After the end of the civil war, the thousands of republican ideologues and soldiers who were able to escape mass execution became political prisoners of the state and were to do as Franco pleased. These political prisoners were contracted out by the state as if cattle to various large construction corporations working on the completion of innumerable state and industrial sites, which was the case during the constriction of El Valle de los Caídos.

It is important to understand that it was not only this type of forced labor that went into the construction of the site. Political prisoners worked alongside contractors and waged laborers, but still, the use of political prisoners in the construction of the site remains highly controversial. While the state considered the use of forced labor as justified and humane, the conditions and hours within which these prisoners had to work were absolutely deplorable: the political prisoners of the state turned into slaves belonging to the state.

25Ibid
At the end of the war, Spanish prisons were severely over populated with republican prisoners and dissenters; it was a logistical problem that the regime had up until then been trying to quell with firing squads and mass executions. That solution soon led to the problem of what to do with thousands upon thousands of executed bodies. The massive construction effort as well as El Valle de los Caídos itself became a timely solution. The contractors and facilitators of the construction of the site recognized the utility in creating new barracks to house political prisoners at the construction site, using the prisoners as free labor in the construction of the site, and ultimately interning tens of thousands of executed republican bodies at the site, all in the name of commemorating Spain’s “fallen”. Furthermore, Franco’s regime publically stated that republican prisoners working at the site were in the process of “redeeming” themselves from the sins of fighting against Franco’s Spain.\(^{26}\)

Unfortunately for many of those forced to work on the site, that sentence was in and of itself a sentence to death when taking into consideration the working conditions. Thousands of not only republican prisoners died during the construction, but many of the waged workers and contractors as well. Yet ultimately it was the republican prisoner laborers who suffered the most. To make matters worse, as the state contracted prisoners out to private interests involved in the construction of the site, those prisoners essentially became nothing more than capital belonging to these companies; political prisoners were reduced to anonymous bodies whose sole purpose was to construct the site and they have since been lost through the lack of record accurate and deliberate record keeping. In the eyes of the state and vested interests, the prisoners were no longer human.

\(^{26}\)Ibid
Nutrition within the prisoner barracks at El Valle de los Caídos was extremely unsettling and inhumane. The typical prison laborer diet consisted of a miniscule daily ration of bread, potatoes, and legumes. That diet already lacking in so much nutrition is compounded further by the fact that rations were further reduced as many of the truck drivers delivering food to the barracks always kept a portion of their freight to sell on the highly profitable black market in Madrid; an open secret that neither the state nor their industrial counterparts actually cared to correct. Without a significant source of proper sustenance, prisoners would often fall ill or perish while working; conditions were truly unrelenting.

Illness amongst all of the laborers, weather waged or forced, was rampant. Environmental conditions took a severe toll on workers, both immediate and long lasting. Besides the mass casualties from falls, etc., respiratory ailments and diseases plagued the site’s workers years after the construction was completed. The site’s central foundation, the colossal granite mass that encompasses the basilica and crypts within its voided volume, was hollowed out by a series of intentional explosions. Each explosion released concentrated amounts of granite dust that eventually found itself lodged in workers’ lungs, specifically those workers directly responsible for the rock’s excavation and ensuing construction. These hazards led many to both immediately or eventually develop a form of lung fibrosis and ultimately perish as a result. What makes these realities all the more troubling is the fact that there exists no accurate or detailed record to point to any information regarding the number of political prisoners forced to work nor how many

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27 Ibid
28 Ibid
sustained and died from physical injuries like falling or more internal ailments like fibrosis of the lungs.

In Justin Crumbaugh’s *Afterlife and Bare Life: The Valley of the Fallen as a paradigm of government*, he discusses in detail the extent to which the disorganized nature of record keeping during the site’s construction reached. The State’s disregard towards and disdain for the republican political prisoners used in construction is clearly reflected in how state officials accounted for said prisoners. Crumbaugh discusses the fact that state record’s of prisoners going in and out of the labor site are nothing more than simple head counts that themselves cannot be entirely numerically accurate; thus eliminating the possibility to observe and record any prisoner turnover at the site.²⁹

Furthermore, Franco’s regime gave the private industrial interests involved in the site’s construction essentially unlimited access to the ample supply of political prisoners to be used at the site. It can be assumed that if these private interests did in fact keep a record of prisoners used, they would certainly leave out specific unscrupulous details, and these records would certainly not be for public eyes, thus adding to the sheer confusion and frustration in attempting to document and remember those who worked at the site, let alone those who were injured or fell ill at the site.

Those prisoners who did not immediately die at the site were taken away to another prison or labor camp to die, thus negating any possibility of linking any illness, injury, or indirect fatality to the construction of El Valle de los Caídos its self. Those who did die at the site were most likely anonymously interned beside fellow republicans who

²⁹Ibid
died in the war, who were the victims of mass executions, or who too perished while working on the site—anonymity magnified by loose record keeping and a general disregard of humanity made it impossible for the nameless dead to ever properly be mourned and remembered.

Historians to this day are still incapable of accurately representing these numbers. When estimating the number of prisoners sent to work at the site, numbers range from 2,000 to 20,000\(^{30}\); this wide gap between estimates make it all the more clear the extent to which historians do not know about the human toll taken by the construction of the site and Franco’s government. These discrepancies compounding upon one another disallow for any accurate collection of data, and, moreover, disallow the possibility of a proper and informed memory of the site and ultimately the war and Franco’s regime in its entirety.

This marked inability to accurately depict numerically what happened to these political prisoners points to the larger issue at hand when it comes to discussing and analyzing El Valle de los Caídos as the embodiment of Franco’s Spain: historical memory. Within the crypts of El Valle de los Caídos rests thousands upon thousands of anonymous bodies that will most likely never be matched to a real, once breathing person who had a name, family, and identity. These mass, anonymous graves exist everywhere throughout Spain, even though Franco made considerable effort to move and destroy most of them (through interning the dead bodies at El Valle de los Caídos under the guise of mournful memorialization). One could argue that within these graves and crypts exist

\(^{30}\)Ibid
hundreds of thousands of nameless bodies whose families and friends know nothing of their fates, thus indicating the gargantuan emotional scar left by Franco’s regime upon Spain.
Chapter III: The Spanish Inability to Remember

Decades of violent and fatal political suppression left so many not only dead at the hands of the Franco regime, but also left so many families reeling and unable to properly mourn a lost son, sister, wife, or husband. Without possession of a body, let alone any semblance of knowledge as to what happened to said body of the family member, families are left to violently and colorfully imagine just how exactly their loved one had died—Franco’s brutal policies left the Spanish people with a massive and gushing emotional wound that had been perpetually torn more and more open for decades.

In the years following (and still today) the death of Franco and his internment at El Valle de los Caídos in 1975, the various Spanish governments in power have all struggled with how exactly to approach the memory of Franco, the Spanish Civil War, and El Valle de los Caídos. The different governments, ranging from socialist factions unsympathetic to any Francoist ideals, images and notions to governments characterized by streaks of social conservatism that aim to quietly celebrate Franco in some way, all have tried to efficiently and seamlessly offer the Spanish people a way to properly face their twentieth century history. But by no means has this been a simple task.

During the 1970’s, as Franco’s health began to subside, he dictated what was to be his succession plan to a series of close advisors—Franco did not want the Catholic and totalitarian vision he had for Spain to cease. He believed that the only possible way to maintain this path for Spain and to maintain the Spanish narrative he aimed to shape that harkened back to Philip II and the Spanish Golden Age was to restore the Spanish monarchy. It is easy to see why Franco saw the restoration of the monarchy as a means of
perpetuating what he saw as Spain’s true path; the monarchy has a long history of strong, catholic, and totalitarian power stretching back hundreds of years. Furthermore, a monarchy would place the entirety of executive power in the hands of a single individual, just as it was under Franco. He handpicked King Juan Carlos I and the previously ousted Spanish monarchy to be the central aspect of the “continuismo” strategy that Franco hoped would uphold Falangist ideals.  

Following the death of Franco, King Juan Carlos I reversed the path of francoism and facilitated the transition back to democracy. Although he had betrayed Franco, Juan Carlos I would claim the transition would be perpetuated in a way that would not violate “the spirit of francoismo” . A political move clearly born out of a motivation to appease various Francoist groups throughout Spain’s political power structure; it paved way to what historians call the Pact of Forgetting.

The couple of years following Franco’s death in 1975 were a marked time of uneasiness and tension in Spain; there existed a power vacuum of sorts. Juan Carlos I’s interim government found it self precariously and meticulously wading the Spanish political waters hoping to put a strong yet democratic government in place and avoid any more blood shed, especially on the scale of the Civil War.

In 1977, the Spanish government instituted the Pact of Forgetting, which essentially was a collective agreement among the leaders on both the left and right that proclaimed it was in the best interest of Spain to forget Franco’s regime and instead focus

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32 Ibid
on the future of Spain. Those responsible for the pact were under the understanding that such an agreement would be useful in avoiding another civil war. This sort of policy goes well beyond just putting something out of one’s head; it places perpetrators of political atrocities above law and above justice. Article I of the 1977 Amnesty Law clears anyone who committed any political atrocities before December 15, 1975 of possible prosecution. This is a Spanish law passed by the 1977 democratically elected Spanish parliament (the first democratically elected body in Spain since the Second Spanish Republic of 1931) that essentially forgave criminals for mass murder. The 1977 Amnesty Law acts as evidence pointing to the extreme precariousness that characterized the Spanish political landscape in the few years following Franco’s death. Clearly, the left-leaning powers elected to office in 1977 wanted to do whatever was needed to ensure a peaceful and seamless transition to democracy.

This extremely careful process through which the Spanish political system went through following Franco’s death was a result of careful deliberation and negotiation amongst the various authoritarian, socialist, and communist groups attempting for form a coalition government. Of those most responsible for the peaceful transition was Adolfo Suárez, an official within the Francoist regime who was appointed by King Juan Carlos I to lead the transitional efforts. Suárez’s familiarity with the institutional and bureaucratic makeup of the Franco regime as well as his masterful abilities as a diplomat made him the perfect candidate to facilitate a speedy and peaceful transition. On November 18, 1976, Suárez used the already existing Francoist institutional legal

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34 Ibid
framework to put the Law of Political Reform to a national referendum, a policy that called for the legalization of unions, political parties, the right to strike, and the dissolution of regime’s parliament. With ninety-four percent of the vote, Suárez’s policy was passed, thus ending nearly four decades of the Franco regime’s authoritarian rule. Within Suárez’s much celebrated legislation was no mention of any prosecution against Franco’s atrocities or reparations for his regime’s victims, as such was the central tenant of the overall transition to democracy within Spain.

While in the immediate moment the legislation effectively maintained Spain’s burgeoning democracy, it had painful and long lasting effects on the Spanish people. In the proceeding decades and still to this day, what historian Antonio Cazorla-Sanchez calls a Little Memory War persisted between conservative and left-leaning groups and factions. In the first few years of the 1980’s, victims of Francoist suppression began speaking up and demanding some sort of recognition or help in discovering what had happened to murdered family members.

The Socialist party in power between 1982 and 1996 instituted various policies that aimed to compensate the victims of Franco’s regime in some way. But once a more conservative government came into power, notions of memory, compensation, and general sympathy for Franco’s victims dwindled and essentially ceased to exist. Thus, the various non-governmental groups within Spain were formed with the sole intention of approaching Spain’s historical memory in a meaningful and healthy of way. The associations for Historical Memory, as they are known, made up a strong movement within 1990’s Spain. The left-leaning groups sought a conversation about memory; these

36 Ibid
37 Cazorla-Sanchez. Revisiting the Legacy of the Spanish Civil War.
groups wanted an open and unadulterated dialogue, a dialogue that a party like José Maria Aznar’s neo-nationalist group that came to power in December ’96 would want to suppress. These groups felt that inadequate attention had been paid to their cause and that Spain was not doing nearly enough to properly remember and mourn its dark twentieth century. The implementation of these groups brought about the phenomenon of “the War of the Death Notices”, a political battle between the left and right, but at its core, a battle between the families of victims of violence at the hands of either Republican factions during the Civil War and construction of El Valle de los Caídos or Nationalist groups and Franco’s regime throughout his time in power—a battle that many of the liberal and conservative politicians who were responsible for instituting the Pact of Forgetting thought could clearly bring about the severe political repercussions that the 1977 interim government was hoping to avoid.

As the conservative government that came to power in 1996 was losing political traction as the 2000’s began, various associations for Historical Memory began to publish death notices that expressed what knowledge they had of loved ones killed by Franco’s regime and demanded further information as well as the return of any remains.\(^{38}\) The language within these notifications is decidedly neutral in the desire for remembrance; it was as if the families of Franco’s victims had emotionally transcended anger and hatred towards those responsible the atrocities and had become desperate for nothing more than answers, not justice, just answers. The notifications are a manifestation of that desperation to heal such a painful emotional wound.

\(^{38}\)Ibid.
Conservatives within Spain combatted these notices by publishing their own death notices highlighting the fate of family members who had died at the hands of Republicans. The conservative notices did not ask for any explanation and did not ask for the return of remains seeing as those sympathetic to Franco who died were already given an honorable and proper burial. The language within those notices sympathetic to Franco was pejorative toward the victims and families of Republicans, calling them “red criminals” and “red hoards”. Furthermore, the Francoist families could also rely on *causa general*, a document drawn up by the Franco regime that supposedly documented the nationalist fighters and sympathizers that died at the hands of the Republicans. Unsurprisingly, the *causa general* does not even accept let alone mention the existence of any Republican victims.

It seems as if organizations and parties outside of the Spanish state system make the most explicit efforts in approaching the historical memory of El Valle de los Caídos and the greater historical memory of Spain’s twentieth century that the site has come to embody and represent. The Association for Historical Memory, an NGO, attempted to inject the conversation into Spain’s public social discussion. Various news media outlets not associated with the state have made efforts to do exactly that: bring the historical dialogue to the light and initiate a proper discussion.

Spanish media have taken the issue of memory into their own hands through various means such as periodicals and visual productions. Specifically, in 2009 (the fiftieth anniversary of the inauguration of El Valle de los Caídos) the journalist Fernando Gonzales along with the Spanish production company Mediapro, created a two

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39 Ibid.
documentaries that focused on the construction of the site, the interned, and discusses the historical context of the site within which the discussion of memory exists in modern Spain. The documentaries brought in over a million viewers each and became two of the most viewed television programs in Spanish broadcasting history.40

The documentaries represent a real and conscious attempt to insert the issue of memory associated with El Valle de los Caídos into the social conversation that was happening in Spain during 2009. They highlight the painful and atrocious history of the site by presenting viewers with a blatant documentation of a traumatic memory. Through interviews of former inmates forced to work on the site and other avenues of insight, Gonzales offered a look at El Valle de los Caídos that deviated from Francoist narrative memory.41 It is no surprise that the most blatant and deliberate attempt to approach El Valle de los Caídos and its memory was made not by the state government but rather by a independent journalist and production company.

Spain’s struggle to remember permeates every single aspect of Spanish life and culture. It is no surprise that El Valle de los Caídos, the site it self, is the focal point of these memorial struggles. If there can exist such a thing in today’s Spain, it is the physical embodiment of that struggle to remember and mourn. Beginning in the late 90’s and early 2000’s, the progressive political push that resonated throughout Spain lead to discussions of striking down the Pact of Forgetting; a dialogue about the past atrocities under Franco left the shadows but was still just as controversial in the light.42 Left wing groups began pushing for Spain to officially recognize the many human rights abuses

40 Rueda, Jose Carlos. El Valle de los Caídos as a Plural Space of Memory. Madrid: Complutense University, 2014.
41 Ibid
committed by Franco while conservatives groups unsurprisingly objected to such policies.\footnote{Interestingly enough, this push was around the same time that Spanish prosecutors built a case against Pinochet for human rights atrocities committed against Spanish Citizens.}

How the site should be remembered, as well as the memory of Franco’s regime, is an argument that pits left versus right. After the 2008 election of a socialist government in Spain, a special commission was created: The Commission of Experts on the Future of the Valley of the Fallen. Its sole purpose is exactly what the name suggests, to deliberate on how to remember the site in context with Franco’s time in power.

The commission was born out of the 2008 Law of Historical Memory, which attempted to rehabilitate the memory of Franco’s victims and exhume what mass graves remained uncovered.\footnote{Rueda. \textit{El Valle de los Caidos as a Plural Space of Memory.}} Furthermore, the law included bans on all public displays of Francoist symbols.\footnote{León, Pablo. “The Valley of the Fallen – the problem that won’t go away.” \textit{El Pais}, January 23, 2015.} The group eventually concluded that the remains of Franco and the body of Jose Antonio Primo de Rivera (the founder of the Falange fascist movement) should be removed from the site as well as a full conversion of the site to one focused on historical memory in order to perpetuate memory over fascism and francoism. The commission also echoed the language in the 2007 Law of Historical Memory that commemoration of Franco specifically at the site should cease to exist.\footnote{Herero. \textit{Comision De Expertos Para El Futuro Del Valle De Los Caidos.}} The commission suggested that the Spanish state invest 13 million euros into renovating the site and ridding it of any political and ideological connotations that would make it anything other than a site dedicated to historical memory. Carlos García de Andoin, the secretary of the commission, wanted to specifically transform the site into a memory museum, otherwise it would simply be nothing more than a mausoleum to a brutal dictator.
The decision shows this specific government’s (a socialist government) attempt, albeit a failed one, to recognize Franco as the face of a dark past that must be remembered in order to avoid something like it again in the future. But is this just an empty political gesture meant to appease a political base? Can a commission with no real legislative power actually make any real progress in helping Spain digest its dark past? Regardless of such a commission’s effectiveness or lack there of in approaching this issue, the fact remains that this attempt to initiate a discussion on the site’s historical memory arguably represents the strongest effort by any Spanish government to do so. Furthermore, such a feeble attempt being the strongest is indicative of the greater Spanish inability to remember.

Political tension within democratic Spain since 1977 has always been marked by a back and forth battle within the political arena. As mentioned previously, a socialist government came into power following the 70’s and Franco’s death, but that was soon replaced with a neo-nationalist movement in the 90’s. Throughout the 2000’s and still today, the political pendulum sways back and forth.

In 2012, a much more conservative government came to power after Zapatera’s socialist government lost reelection. The government headed by Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy, quickly rejected the commission’s suggestions and ordered that the bodies of both Franco and Antonio were to remain interned at the site.47 The reasons the government gave came just short of expressing sympathy for Franco; they offered logistical reasons as well as a desire to not be considered “zapaterista”, alluding to José Zapatera, the leader of the 2008 socialist government.

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The conservative government saw the Law of Historical memory and the decisions made by The Commission of Experts on the Future of the Valley of the Fallen as extremely biased, pro-republican, and nothing more than a leftist attempt to re-open old wounds with a political motivation. That sentiment is echoed in the response to the commission’s report given by the non-state affiliated Association for the Defense of El Valle de los Caídos. The 2011 head of the association, Pablo Linares, suggested to, “create a [memory museum] would do nothing but stoke the flames in what is already a breeding ground for controversy.”

This conservative understanding of the Law of Historical Memory and the Commission’s suggestions regarding the future of El Valle de los Caídos further illustrates the unavoidable and ever present controversy regarding memory in Spain. While more left leaning groups want to put forth a deliberate effort to remember and heal Spain’s wounds, more conservatives groups like the one elected to power in 2012 consider those same wounds as already closed and healed and any attempt—such as the Law of Historical Memory and The Commission of Experts on the Future of the Valley of the Fallen—as deliberate and political attempts to cause upheaval, unrest, and tarnish conservatism and its tradition within Spain.

No matter how many times liberal members of Parliament attempt to introduce legislation that would force the Spanish state to approach and digest the site’s context and history, political road block after road block stops any effort. For instance, Socialist Deputy Odón Elorza urged to parliament through legislation in December 2014 that the

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48 Rueda. *El Valle de los Caídos as a Plural Space of Memory.*
49 Bujarrabal, Diana García. “¿Qué Hacer Con El Valle de los Caídos?” *Qué!* April 4, 2016.
site be converted to a “place of concord and reconciliation”\textsuperscript{50} and even the UN suggested that Spain move the bodies as well as other measures regarding historical memory\textsuperscript{51}; both suggestions were rejected by the Popular Party’s majority in congress.

Does this conservative understanding of the memory law and El Valle de los Caídos merely secure the political support of ultra right-wingers who would have supported a Franco-like figure? Is it a way to consolidate political support across the right side of the ideological spectrum? Yet in the mainstream government, there must not exist an explicit sympathy for Franco, as his human rights violations were no secret to either side; a lasting stigma is associated with the former dictator. But the decisions to reject attempts to initiate a dialogue still imply that groups sympathetic to Franco and his regime have prominently existed since his death, thus a nationalistic and traditionalistic fervor has continuously existed within Spain, and El Valle de los Caídos is the focal point of that enduring support.

Francoists, as they are often called, are ultraconservatives who actively identify themselves politically through the remembrance of Franco and his ideals. The Francisco Franco Foundation, a group made up of proud Francoists, would commemorate the date of Franco’s death every year at El Valle de los Caídos. It was not until the group succumbed to political pressure in early 2012 and announced that it would no longer commemorate only Franco but all of the fallen—still, it would do so on the date of Franco’s death. It is not hard to argue that the group cherished the site as a proud monument to Franco, his power, and the traditions and ideals that he has come to represent in Spain. Just as Franco sadistically masked his atrocities through declaring El

\textsuperscript{50}Pablo. \textit{The Valley of the Fallen – the problem that won’t go away}
\textsuperscript{51}Hedgecoe, Guy. “Controversy over the Monument to Fascism’s Fallen.” \textit{The Irish Times}, April 1, 215.
Valle de los Caídos as a site commemorating all of the fallen\textsuperscript{52}, the Francoists claim to celebrate the totality of the dead, but the day they choose to do so, the anniversary of Franco’s death, implies so much about this group of Francoists’ true intentions.

Within Spain, El Valle de los Caídos and how it is remembered is an ever-changing notion that is constantly open to new meaning, as is the case with any site associated with historical memory. At the same time the site is representing the official memory of the Franco dictatorship, it is also representative of the uncomfortable memory of Franco’s atrocities\textsuperscript{53}—different groups and factions can ascribe to it whatever meaning they see fit.

It seems as if that within the Spanish cultural and social makeup, there exists the means to continuously shroud a celebration of Francoist ideals and disdain for his opposition in a false and contrived sense of memorialization for all, including that opposition. As is common in many governments, there can exist an outward and public statement of benevolence, yet carry completely ulterior political motives, as is the case with the Francisco Franco Foundation and Mariano Rajoy’s conservative Popular Party.

As previously mentioned, this type of not-so-secret political secret echoes how Franco used the site to hide his regime’s carnage through the guise of an ironic and callous memorialization of slaughtered republican dissidents, the only difference being that the Francisco Franco Group is operating within a European democracy. Does this suggest a strong and vocal support for the type of conservatism a Francoist style of governing would perpetuate? How much does their existence reflect the lasting effects of

\textsuperscript{52} Hepworth. \textit{Site of Memory and dismemory: the Valley of the Fallen in Spain.}

\textsuperscript{53} Rueda, El Valle de los Caídos as a Plural Space of Memory.
the pact of forgetting? These sorts of groups will linger on explicitly in contemporary Spanish politics for the foreseeable future as long as there is a democratic system in place that will facilitate their existence; such is the irony of a democracy.

When approaching the Spanish state’s decision to institute the pact of forgetting, the question of how this can truly be achieved when the Franco regime injected itself into so many aspects of Spain that go beyond state government becomes evident. Franco’s conscious decisions to pervade his government’s ideals throughout Spain infiltrated institutions, infrastructure, and much more. The regime’s deliberate effort to utilize architecture as a means of penetrating Spanish life and culture makes it especially difficult to effortlessly put Franco and his government out of mind. It comes as no surprise that El Valle de los Caídos has evolved from Franco’s megalomaniacal projection of himself upon the world to what it is today in modern Spain: a blunt reminder of past atrocities. In context with the Pact of Forgetting, the site becomes a symbol for the underlying inability of Spain to remember and heal.
Conclusion

Spain’s history over the past two hundred years has been marked by bloodshed and political unrest. Following the collapse of Napoleonic Empire and the restoration of King Ferdinand VII to the throne, Spain embarked on a long and tumultuous political trajectory that still to this day is characterized by unrest, disagreement, and political deception. As the infighting amongst various political groups came to a peak in 1936 and civil war broke out, so began a new era of Spanish history that seems to have followed suit with the many conservative, traditional, and staunchly catholic despotic regimes that had come before Franco. Modern Spain had succumbed to the waves of fascism engulfing parts of Europe and set it on a path quite different from most other Western European Countries in the post war period. Spain acts as a clear counterpart to other post-totalitarian countries within Europe.

El Valle de los Caídos is a modern symbol for the fact that in today’s Spain, Franco’s victims, their families, and Spain as a whole are left with no answers and no justice. Spain cannot properly move on without justice being served to the perpetrators of Franco’s heinous and murderous policies, let alone properly initiate a dialogue that approaches historical memory. The fact that the 1977 Pact of Forgetting explicitly states that members of the Franco regime who are guilty of human rights violations have legal amnesty compounds Spain’s inability to move on and genuinely memorialize the past. Was it the right to institute the Pact of Forgetting or does it merely reflect a sense of false pragmatism? Yes, Spain’s transition to democracy was peaceful and seamless, but it left so many still reeling in its path. There now are multiple generations of Spanish families who still are desperately yearning for any semblance of an answer as to what was the fate
of their victimized relatives; the willful effort by the state to avoid a digestion of that dark memory that has now lasted for decades has left what are now grandchildren and great grandchildren with the same questions that their mothers and fathers had before them.

The political landscape of Spain is and will likely remain extremely eclectic and wide-ranging; thus prolonging the struggle to remember a dark past. Since Rajoy’s Popular Party took power in 2011, all of the efforts made by the Socialist Party in the preceding four years were reversed and any semblance of a proper memorialization of the past seems like an unattainable feat, at least for now. In fact, Rajoy went so far as to introduce legislation that would restrict the right of Spanish Citizens to stage public protest\textsuperscript{54}—something that could arguably be seen as a small but eerie step towards a Francoist regime. This is especially true since the election of December of 2015 that produced no clear winner and instead left the conservative Mariano Rajoy refusing to step down as acting prime minister as well as refuses to coordinate at all with the newly elected and left-leaning parliament, for he claims that only the parliament that elected him to office has the ability to legitimately govern with Rajoy. This in turn has brought left-oriented institutions to scrap intentions of implementing various already agreed upon proposals made by Rajoy’s office\textsuperscript{55}. Furthermore, the Catalonian push for independence is growing stronger and stronger with a regional vote set for the near future. Spain is in political shambles.

It is important to understand that it is not only just members within Rajoy’s conservative Popular Party that act with much prudence when approaching the memory and national digestion of El Valle de los Caídos, that removed style approach is prevalent

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
within leftist factions like the Socialist Party as well. Even Odón Elorza admits that many within his Socialist Party still feel the lingering influence of the Pact of Forgetting and do not want to inject the past’s atrocities into modern day as a means of political weaponry. This can only suggest the still ever present and lingering precariousness that characterizes the Spanish political landscape and the struggle to approach and digest El Valle de los Caídos.

In fact, some of the family members of Franco’s victims see anything other than a complete demolition and destruction of the site as immoral and disrespectful towards said victims and their families. Emilio Silva, whose grandfather was murdered during the Civil War, is perplexed by its existence and feels, “It is difficult to understand in a democratic country that there is a big monument funded by public money dedicated to a dicator” and goes on to add, “My father died two years ago. During 38 years of democracy he had to fund with his taxes a monument glorifying the dictatorship which destroyed his life”. Silva’s words are highly representative of the sheer frustration that the Spanish people feel with their government not only regarding the issues of El Valle de los Caídos and historical memory as a whole, but with the greater social and political Spanish context as well.

In the face of so much infrastructure and architecture that resonates Francoist values throughout present day Spain, the Pact of Forgetting has made it extremely difficult for the Spanish state to officially approach historical memory and the rehabilitation of Franco’s victims. This is no clearer than at El Valle de los Caídos. In the

56 Ibid.

57 Hedgecoe. “Controversy over the Monument to Fascism’s Fallen.”
face of political gridlock and indecisiveness, this massive site sticks out like a sore on the face of Spain. As different conservative and liberal governments cycle in and out of power, conflicting policies on what is to be done with the site, with the bodies of Franco and Rivera, and how the state should approach the notion of El Valle de los Caídos’s contextual historical memory are constantly in flux, leaving so without any real answers or support.

Elorza, the secretary of the commission tasked with deciding the fate of El Valle de los Caídos, suggest that as the generations of politicians become more and more removed from Franco’s regime and The Pact of Forgetting, the cautious approach that so many politicians on both sides of the spectrum take towards both Spain’s and El Valle de los Caídos’s historical memory will become more and more direct—the political stigma and baggage that the Pact of Forgetting carries will become merely a fact of the past and have no influence upon legislation and historical memory.

Regardless of what one politician foresees, many in Spain today are left frustrated and overwhelmed with a feeling of indifference on the part of the government, especially since Spain has been plagued with the lack of a government following the inclusive December 2015 elections—there is a general sense that politicians are no longer concerned with the wellbeing of the Spanish state, but instead are obsessed with a successful and long lasting political career. Obviously this is not indicative of every politician who aspires to work within Spanish politics, but this gridlock is indicative of the Spanish state’s inability to approach historical memory and heal wounds that have been oozing for over half of a century.
Bibliography


