
Enforcing the Transition: The Demobilization of Collective Memory in Spain, 1979–1982

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Abstract

This article analyses the efforts of grassroots actors in Spain to counter the persistent institutional biases and state-sponsored messages of the Francoist dictatorship following the democratization of municipal governments in 1979. By following struggles over appropriate democratic symbols, narratives and behaviours, the article demonstrates, first, that collective memory was vibrant as grassroots actors brought attention to the living legacies of the dictatorship. Continuing their long struggle for democracy, they pressured political elites to go beyond the modest reforms negotiated at the Transition's outset. Second, it explains how the social networks where collective memories were articulated were progressively demobilized as elites legitimized and enforced the democratic settlement reached. This article counters the widely held view that the decision not to confront the past during the Transition, was the result of broad consensus.

Resumen

El artículo analiza los esfuerzos de grupos populares en España que trataron de ir en contra de prejuicios institucionales y mensajes patrocinados por el estado franquista después de la democratización los gobiernos municipales en 1979. Al estudiar las luchas sobre símbolos, narrativas y comportamientos apropiados democráticos, el artículo demuestra, primero, que la memoria colectiva estaba viva cuando grupos populares llamaron atención a la continuación del legado franquista. Siguiendo la larga lucha por la democracia, ellos presionaron a la élite política por ir más allá de reformas modestas que fueron negociadas al principio de la Transición. Segundo, explica cómo los grupos sociales en donde se articulaba la memoria colectiva fueron progresivamente desmovilizados, ya que la elite legitimaba y hacía cumplir la democratización que se adoptó. El artículo va en contra de la asunción que la Transición, particularmente su decisión de no confrontar el pasado, fue el resultado de un consenso general.

Thirty-nine years after the conclusion of the Spanish Civil War, the inhabitants of Villarobledo, a town in the province of Albacete, led the first collective homage to their executed Republican comrades on 1 November. This sad history came to public light six hundred kilometres from its point of origin. In Santa Coloma de Gramenet, Barcelona, Rosario Padilla Camacho presented a petition to the Civil Registrar asking for a death certificate for her husband, Francisco Rubio Herreros, who died on 15 April 1939 in the town of Villarobledo, Albacete. The objective of the petition was to gain the legal status of widow, as Rosario Padilla's civil status is married, despite the fact that her husband died 40 years ago. A great number of women in Villarobledo between the ages of 7 and 75 find themselves in this situation. (*El País* 1978)¹

Though much of the scholarly literature on the Spanish transition to democracy (1975–1982) characterizes the period as an era dominated by ‘silence’, ‘forgetting’, and even ‘collective amnesia’, the above caption from the major newspaper *El País* of 11 November 1978 suggests the contrary.² The story of Rosario Padilla Camacho's petition, in fact, reveals that collective and trans-peninsular processes of remembering were powerfully reactivated during the Transition.

Like many from the impoverished and highly repressed southern regions of the country, Rosario had migrated to the industrial north during the 1960s.³ Her emotional and personal economy, as she rhetorically signalled during a December 1978 interview, had been greatly hindered by her husband's phantom death certificate. ‘The former husband of the mother of today's mayor in Villarobledo was killed by the reds, and she married again and became a marquis. Why was she given a death certificate – and the ability to become a widow – and I was not?’ (*Gramma* December 1978). Before migrating, Rosario had attempted to procure a death certificate. The local priest, the official guardian of the town's undocumented past, refused to offer his assistance. In 1978, however, when widows of Republican soldiers and wounded Republican veterans were given a one-year window to petition the state for pensions, Rosario was inspired to renew her quest.⁴ Thanks

1 Unless otherwise noted, all translations to English are my own.

2 The trend was initiated by Aguilar Fernández's immensely influential 1996 monograph, which was published in English in 2002. Since publication the concept of a ‘pact of silence’ or a ‘pact of forgetting’ – Aguilar's description of the informal yet consensual agreement to not address the past – has been adopted by much of the historiography.

3 For the most recent historical analysis of internal migration to Catalunya during the Francoist dictatorship see Marín 2009. Following Francisco Candel's 1964 bestseller *Els Altres Catalans*, the significance of ‘Spanish immigrants’ in Catalunya became the object of sustained public debate. With an overwhelmingly non-native working class, the debate initially revolved around the strategic relationship between the Catalan national and working class movements as they re-emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. As both movements were institutionalized during the course of the Transition, focus shifted to concerns regarding territorial organization (specifically Catalunya's autonomy statute), national identity, and, later, language planning policy. Manuel Vázquez Montalbán's 1987 novel *Los alegres muchachos de Atzavara* captures the relationship between these debates and the evolving socio-political dynamics of the region. For an analysis of the diverse cultural texts produced about and by Spanish immigrants in Catalunya, especially in relation to ideologies of assimilation in the ‘post-national’ moment, see Vilarós 2003.

4 For a discussion of the pension decrees, see Aguilar Fernández 2001.

to the changing socio-political context of the time, her until then solitary pursuit became an astoundingly collective endeavour.

Though no comprehensive research has been conducted regarding petitions filed by widows of Republican troops or crippled Republican veterans, a summary analysis of the 430 petitions filed in Santa Coloma de Gramenet – a new industrial city of 140,000 in the Barcelona metropolitan area – reveals that the preparation of petitions was an overwhelmingly collective experience. As required documentation was commonly missing or non-existent, witness testimonies were used as substitutes. In the process, memories seldom mentioned were brought directly into the public sphere. What is more, because these petitions were filed before the 1979 democratization of municipal governments, networks of solidarity were often engaged to pressure otherwise hostile administrations.

In both regards, the case of Rosario is highly revealing. After Rosario received no notice regarding her request for a death certificate, Santa Coloma's local branch of the recently legalized labour union, the Confederación Sindical de Comisiones Obreras (CCOO), sent letters of inquiry to the courts of Albacete. When these letters remained unanswered, Rosario, her lawyer, and representatives from the union travelled to Villarobledo to speak directly with the mayor. Though the mayor refused to receive his guests, their presence reactivated the collective process of remembering. The mass grave at the outskirts of the town – estimated to hold 300 bodies – became the centre of public conversation as Rosario collected witness testimonies to attest to her husband's execution. Following the visit, the people of Villarobledo formed a commission to erect a monument at the site of the mass grave to 'officially recognize the deaths' and 'bring an end to the history of disappearances'. The commission collected 70,000 pesetas by popular donation, and in the words of *El País* 'all of the town marched to the grave in an act of authentic reconciliation', proving that 'collective memory has not been erased' and 'fear has begun to be left behind' (11 November 1978). Though Rosario's request for an official death certificate was again denied, she was able to successfully cite the 'knowledge of all of the town' – publicly reactivated by her original request and substantiated by the article published on 24 May 1979 in *El País* – as additional support for her petition to receive a pension (ASC 1979a).

Far from being an isolated event, the call for an 'authentic reconciliation' sounded throughout Spain during the Transition. In Extremadura, Navarra and Burgos, for example, similar processes were initiated and mass graves dating back to the Civil War began to be exhumed (Humblebæk 2010).⁵ Meanwhile, in some of the country's industrial capitals, there were concerted attempts to confront the legacy of the dictatorship by removing Francoist symbols from the

5 Following these exhumations in 1979 and 1980, which received scant media or political attention, Spain's numerous mass graves remained untouched until the 2000s. See Silva 2003 for a first-hand account of how the process was resumed. For a discussion of the legal and socio-political tensions surrounding contemporary exhumations see Jerez Farrán and Amago 2010. For a discussion of the evolving positions of the major political parties in respect of the 'authoritarian past' since the Transition see Humlebæk 2010.

public sphere. However, despite the abundance of these and similar examples scholars continue to characterize the Transition as an era marked by silence.⁶

To understand this perplexing state, it is worth considering a number of issues. First, because the grassroots initiatives described tended to be local in scope, they have often been overlooked by the historiography. What is more, as the extant scholarship has focused overwhelmingly on high politics, it has generally been assumed that the decision not to confront the past was the result of broad consensus. In Paloma Aguilar's words, for instance,

A new form of politics made its debut in Spain, a crucial change that was welcomed by all. Something was brought into play and repeated time and again which is of considerable significance in understanding the importance of historical memory in this process: finally, Spaniards had proved capable of avoiding a kind of historical curse which prevented us from reaching consensus-based solutions [...]. Due to the economic, social and administrative transformations of recent years and the harsh lessons of the past, it was possible to break the spell. (Aguilar Fernández 2002: 151)

While there is no question that the virtues of consensus were 'repeated time and again', the analysis of grassroots processes suggests that repetition served a normative rather than descriptive end.⁷

Take, for instance, the above-mentioned legislation that granted pensions to widows of Republican soldiers and wounded Republican veterans. Though grassroots actors used the legislation to demand an 'authentic reconciliation' grounded in a 'just account of our history', the piecemeal decrees offered petitioners no compensation for the decades when they had been ineligible to 'integrate into the Distinguished Corpus of Veterans [and Widows] of the National War' and made no mention of historic wrongdoing (*País* 1978; ASC 1977). A far

6 This is less the case among literary scholars, who have long noted the contrast between the vibrant production of historically themed cultural texts during the 1970s and early 1980s and the rapid shift to a more modern focus following the end of the Transition in 1982. For a discussion of historically themed films, as well as an analysis of why they fell out of fashion in the early 1980s, see Vilarós 1998: 54–59. See Resina 2009 for a discussion of Holocaust literature in Catalunya, particularly the context surrounding Montserrat Roig's 1977 *Els catalans als camps nazis*. Among historians, a welcome exception to the trend can be found in Graham 2012. In line with the argument advanced here, Graham recounts the story of a personal exchange in 1977 that allows us to 'glimpse the openness and possibility, which also permitted the first few tentative exhumations in the late 1970s and early 1980s of other victims of Francoist extrajudicial murder' (2012: 138). While Graham concludes that that possibility was 'rapidly brought to an abrupt halt by the brute force explosion of the past in the form of the attempted military coup of February 1981', the research presented here suggests that the 'halt' was neither so abrupt nor mono-causal.

7 A diverse and growing literature increasingly supports this conclusion. For an analysis of the role that the scholarly literature played in legitimating the Transition, as well as an explanation of why the impact of social movements was spectacularly underestimated, see Domènech Sampere 2002. Subsequent research has confirmed that the country's major political parties did not represent the interests of social movements, particularly the era's vibrant labour unions and neighbourhood associations. See Sánchez León 2011 and Molinero and Ysàs 2010. Even among scholars who focus primarily on elite politics, the scope of inter-party consensus is currently under revision. In this regard, Bonnie Field's 2011 analysis of the role of intra-party discipline during the Transition is particularly noteworthy.

call from reparations, the legislation merely allowed Republicans to receive the same social benefits long enjoyed by Franco's Nationals without disrupting the former regime's narrative of its own legitimacy.

The manoeuvre, of course, was not without precedence. One of the Transition's foundational pacts, the still in force Amnesty Law of 1977, essentially performed the same function. Imprisoned members of the resistance were released in exchange for the perpetrators of the Francoist regime receiving impunity. With impunity guaranteed, former Francoists maintained their positions in state institutions and the opposition's imprisonment was not officially recognized as wrongful. Consequently, criminal charges were not annulled and ex-political prisoners received no monetary compensation for the time spent behind bars or the often-deleterious effects of imprisonment on employment. Taken together with the pension laws, the Amnesty Law promoted an eminently fragile, if not superficial, equality. That is to say, the former regime and its opposition could be treated as democratic equals so long as the deeply rooted historic and socio-economic inequalities that distinguished them remained officially unacknowledged by the state.

Though this foundational legislation was ratified by the country's major political elites, many grassroots actors stood firm by the opposition's long-standing demand for *ruptura* (a complete break with the Francoist regime). Under the leadership of the Spanish Communist party (PCE), the diverse socio-political forces of the opposition came together to demand *ruptura* throughout the late 1960s and 1970s.⁸ Despite the strategy's broad appeal among the mobilized, PCE leaders altered party strategy after the Law of Political Reform was ratified in 1976, shortly after Franco's death. Following the lead of the rising Socialist party (PSOE), PCE leaders unilaterally abandoned the call for *ruptura* to participate in the *reforma pactada* (the reform negotiated between the forces of the opposition and the former regime).⁹ Thus, when members of Villarobledo's popular commission described themselves as 'Communists from before', they publicly

8 In 1956, the clandestine Communist party (PCE) abandoned insurgency for a 'more peaceful solution to the Spanish dilemma'. The new strategy, formally called 'National Reconciliation', posited that the Civil War division between the victors and the defeated no longer represented the social reality of the country. What is more, given that the Francoist regime constantly reinforced the division, the PCE formulated the strategy that exposing the fallacy would erode the legitimacy of the dictatorship and bring greater sectors of the population into the democratic opposition. National Reconciliation was immensely successful, particularly during the height of the labour, citizen and student movements of the late 1960s and 1970s; its final objective was to bring about a complete 'rupture' with the Francoist regime and publicly recognize that the defeated had 'defended a just cause' (PCE 1956). For a discussion of the component forces of the Francoist opposition, see Molinero and Ysàs 2004.

9 For a recent historical account of the PCE under the leadership of Santiago Carrillo see Paul Preston 2013. For a discussion of the ideological evolution of the party during the Transition, see Andrade Blanco 2012. For more on the cultural dynamics of the debate between *ruptura* and *reforma pactada* see Teresa Vilarós 1998. For a discussion of Manuel Vázquez Montalbán's intellectual trajectory and, by extension, the evolution of the Spanish left between 1963 and 1998, see María Paz Balibrea's monograph *En la tierra baldía* (1999).

identified with the widespread sentiment of betrayal among the party's base and allies (*País* 11 November 1978). While this disenchantment ultimately culminated in the crisis of the Communist party, many left-wing activists and newly elected municipal officials continued their long struggle for *ruptura* in the hope of pressuring the country's political elites to go beyond the modest reforms negotiated at the Transition's outset.¹⁰

Though scholars have begun to question whether silence is favourable or detrimental to the process and quality of democratization, there has been no serious attempt to reassess how silence was achieved.¹¹ In this article I reassess the process by building on the growing literature on the bottom-up history of the Transition. While this literature has recovered the extensive role that socio-political movements and associational culture played in democratization, the spectacular demobilization that accompanied the final years of the Transition has yet to be explained.¹² Though this article does not purport to explain demobilization in all of its complexities, it does offer an important contribution. By analysing a network of grassroots actors between the democratization of municipal governments in 1979 and the Transition's end in 1982, I show that the process

10 In other words, it was only after it became clear that the pacts negotiated at the outset of the Transition marked the end rather than the beginning of reform that disenchantment was converted into a political crisis for the Communist party. The subsequent political crisis consisted of the internal purge and electoral downfall of the PCE, and the purge and subsequent division of the party's regional affiliates in Catalunya (the PSUC) and the Basque Country (the Communist Party of Euskadi, the EPK). The rupture of the PSUC between 1981 and 1982 merits a brief explanation, as it sets the context for subsequent discussions in this article. After organizing the region's democratic opposition in a uniquely unitary manner, the PSUC achieved notable electoral success during the initial stages of the Transition. However, as the Transition came to a close, the party's working-class base expressed its disenchantment with the slow process of reform and the steady decline of the Communist party within and beyond the region. This disenchantment was clearly expressed at the PSUC's Fifth Congress (1981), when the party's base criticized PCE leadership during the Transition and voted to define the PSUC as Leninist rather than Eurocommunist. The Eurocommunist minority rejected the results of the congress and an intense power struggle ensued. In the end, the PCE leadership stepped in to back the Eurocommunist faction and the Leninist faction was charged with engaging in 'fractional' activities and was purged from the party. The purge had diverse socio-political effects, not least because it effectively divided the party down sociolinguistic lines. For the most recent historical treatment of the PSUC see Molinero 2010 and Pala 2011.

11 The relationship between historical memory and democratization has been debated in both popular and scholarly circles since the 2000s. For an overview of these debates as Spain's Historical Memory Law was prepared, see the 2005 and 2006 review articles by Faber. For an analysis of the debates that immediately followed the ratification of the 2007 law see Boyd 2008. For a critical analysis of the relationship between historical memory and justice, see Martín-Cabrera 2011.

12 Though Sebastian Balfour initiated the trend in 1989, it is only in recent years that scholars have successfully brought the issue of popular participation to the heart of debates regarding the Transition. For a recent example of the trend, and an introductory discussion of the trend's broader significance, see Pamela Radcliff's 2011 monograph on the citizen movement. Also note how recent conference publications reflect the shifting focus of the field from elite to popular politics. See, for example, Molinero and Ysàs 2006; Quirosa-Cheyrouze y Muñoz 2007; and González 2008.

was intimately linked to the silencing of collective memory. Once it became clear that the state would neither acknowledge nor support their historic struggles, many grassroots actors gave up defending Spanish democracy as their own.

As it is easiest to analyse the relationship between collective memory and collective action in areas where extensive networks of solidarity and resistance had been formed during the dictatorship, I focus on Santa Coloma de Gramenet, a highly organized working class city in Barcelona's 'red belt'.¹³ The modest dimension of the case helps us uncover the extent of grassroots efforts while allowing us to disarticulate the crosscutting tensions that hindered these and similar efforts all over the country. Specifically, the case demonstrates that local initiatives were thwarted by small groups of Falangist militants and civil authorities working within unreformed state institutions.¹⁴ Though local activists and leaders drew attention to the fact that these hindrances resulted from the legacy of the dictatorship – thus continuing their long, albeit internally contentious, struggle for *ruptura* – their voices were increasingly muted as the mainstream media promoted consensus along with the country's political elites. What is more, in a concerted effort to weaken the influence of popular politics, conservative elites and civil authorities colluded to delegitimize the narrative of antifascism, which grassroots activists marshalled to signal their popular 'conquest of democracy' (Sartorius 2007). As an elite narrative legitimizing Spanish democracy was consolidated, grassroots actors were left disenchanting and divided, and the social networks where collective memories could be articulated were demobilized. Silence, then, was not at the root of the Transition but a consequence that resulted from its elite negotiation and enforcement.

The Blue March: Competing Visions of Citizen Peace

On 25 May 1979 the newly constituted democratic city council of Santa Coloma de Gramenet voted to remove the city's Monumento a los Caídos, the monument commemorating the Francoist troops that had fallen during the Spanish Civil

13 Andrea Davis' (2014) PhD dissertation, 'Santa Coloma de Gramenet, The Transformation of Leftwing Popular Politics in Spain, 1968–1986', draws on the case study of Santa Coloma to analyse the transformation of left-wing popular political culture at the local level. For general accounts of democratization at the local level see Fernández Amador and Quiros-Cheyrouze y Muñoz 2010; and González Martínez 2010.

14 To date, there are no institutional or prosopographical studies of the police force or the Guardia Civil during this period. While more comprehensive research on the judiciary remains to be done, Francisco Espinosa Maestre's 2013 monograph examines thirteen high-profile legal cases to demonstrate that the judiciary has granted perpetrators the right to honour, effectively enforcing a politics of amnesia. The most comprehensive research that helps to situate this case study is Baby's 2013 monograph on political violence between 1975 and 1982, which demonstrates that the state was implicated in perpetrating or tolerating right-wing violence, effectively radicalizing the forces of the extreme left, namely the Basque nationalist and separatist organization, ETA, and the Maoist Grupos de Resistencia Antifascista Primero de Octubre, GRAPO. For a complementary account of political violence, see Sanchez-Soler 2010. By focusing on a single community, this article sheds light on how this violent context affected left-wing political culture at the grass roots.

War.¹⁵ The left-wing city councillors unanimously decided that the ‘political significance’ of the monument was no longer ‘in accord with the current circumstances’ (ASC 1979b). Hoping to definitively replace the symbolic repertoire of the previous regime, the city councillors simultaneously ratified a motion to change the city’s street names. They solicited the collaboration of the various civic groups in the city so that the general population could weigh in on the symbolic contours of their new democracy.

Following announcement of these initiatives, the Communist mayor of Santa Coloma, Lluís Hernández, a practising priest and former neighbourhood activist, received his first death threat. ‘We are the Black Falange Exterminators, we know where you live and we are coming for you’ (*Gramma* 9–16 June 1979). Though this group had recently bombed Communist headquarters in the neighbouring city of Rubí, the civil governor saw no reason to offer Mayor Hernández special protection. Later in the week, municipal workers sent to survey the monument received similar threats. To avoid continued tensions, Santa Coloma’s city councillors attempted to negotiate directly with leaders of the extreme right Falangist group, Fuerza Nueva. Because the results of these negotiations were fruitless, local leaders took it upon themselves to stand watch when municipal workers returned the following week to take down the monument. While the presence of the national police had been requested, the urban police patrolled alone and Mayor Hernández received a steady stream of death threats throughout the day.¹⁶

In response to these events the Moviment Comunista de Catalunya (MCC), a new left extra-parliamentary group that was particularly active within the urban social movements of Barcelona’s metropolitan area, presented a motion that called for the prohibition of extreme right groups. ‘These groups, which have an antidemocratic ideology’, they wrote, ‘often act with impunity while using weapons to defend a cause that they have lost. We believe that the central government should act with efficiency to disarticulate and disarm these groups, which are a cancer to democracy’ (ASC 1979c, 27 July). The Communist led city council of Santa Coloma rapidly approved the motion and thus made the request to the central government official.

The central government’s response only became clear a few months later when the civil governor authorized the Falange to hold a so-called Blue March. Slated to visit each of the eight Catalan municipalities where monuments had been removed and the dead allegedly ‘profaned’, the march would conclude with a final demonstration in Barcelona to ‘defend the unity of Spain’. As the authorization signalled, not only would extreme right groups remain intact but they would also be given free reign to paint both the ‘red’ and ‘peripheral nationalist’

15 There were no party directives regarding the matter, as is evidenced by the facts that the eight Catalan municipalities that took down their local monuments were not under the same political leadership; and that national monuments, such as the Valle de los Caídos, remained untouched and unquestioned during the course of the Transition.

16 For more on Fuerza Nueva, specifically how the party pursued both electoral and paramilitary strategies during this era, see Casals i Meseguer 1998.

areas of the country 'blue'. Following the announcement of the march, the city councillors of Santa Coloma energetically appealed to the civil governor. They asked that the march, which they described as a 'provocation' and an 'attack against the democratic order advocated by left-wing municipal governments', be disallowed (*Diario de Barcelona* 3 October 1979). With no clear response from the civil authorities, the institutional and social left movement debated how best to prepare for the Falange's arrival.

When Fuerza Nueva militants arrived at Santa Coloma on the fifth consecutive Sunday of their march, they came visibly armed, wearing paramilitary uniforms, and carrying the Spanish and Falange flags intertwined. The square where local activists awaited the Falangists was adorned with the political graffiti of the left and activists held their ground symbolically by waving Republican flags. As the Falangists sang the Francoist anthem, 'Cara al Sol', and laid flowers on the former site of the monolith, booing from the crowd quickly escalated to violence. Rocks and Molotov cocktails were hurled back and forth before six gunshots sounded, leaving three left-wing activists wounded. When the national police finally arrived, local observers noted that it was the armed Falangists who received police protection. Scuffles continued through the afternoon resulting finally, in the words of the major newspaper, *El Periódico*, on 9 October 1979, in 'four wounded, four detained, a Spanish flag semi-burnt, and various vehicles ignited and stoned'.

The mainstream media responded to the incident by describing it as 'an example of what should not be allowed in a democracy' and criticizing the civil governor for his 'incomprehensible tolerance' of the Falange (*Mundo Diario* 10 October 1979). In response to calls for his resignation, the civil governor prohibited the remainder of the Blue March, which he called an 'evident and proven disturbance to the public order'. Appropriating the discourse of the Catalan Socialist party (PSC) he publicly affirmed the 'absolute need to avoid all acts of violence that might alter the citizen peace and serenity needed for the celebration of the upcoming referendum on Catalunya's autonomy statute' (*TeleXpres* 8 October 1979).

There was no agreement, however, regarding how best to ensure the citizen peace desired. The city councillors of Santa Coloma argued that simply avoiding violence would not suffice. Rather, what was needed was the active 'adaptation of the forces of public order to the new democratic situation'. Emphasizing the need for the 'police and judiciary to intervene and hold the leaders of the major Fascist organizations accountable to penal laws', they announced that they would open a lawsuit against the Falange while also seeking permission to realize an 'orderly, civic and responsible mobilization of the citizens and local government of Santa Coloma in rejection of Fascism' (ASC 1979d, 9 October). Social movement activists, however, refused to wait for the civil governor's authorization. Citizen peace, they argued, would only be assured through the continued and immediate mobilization of the working class. The following day 400 activists returned 'to demand yet again the dissolution of these possessed

attackers whose only goal is to create a climate of terror and threaten the LIBERTIES conquered through the struggle of the working class' (BCSC n. d.).

This conflict provoked the first 'formal political rupture between the city council and the political groups without representation in the city'. The MCC and its social movement allies accused the Catalan Communist party (PSUC) of 'not having done anything so that the population organized against the problem of fascist groups', a position they viewed as contradictory 'given the firm posture of the city council regarding the removal of the Monumento a los Caídos in the first place' (*Gramma* 15–20 October 1979a). In this manner, the MCC emphasized its commitment to a participatory workers' democracy where anti-democratic symbols and groups would be excluded from the public sphere.¹⁷ The leaders of the Communist and Socialist parties had a different understanding. Not only would due process precede popular mobilizations but also, after negotiating with and granting amnesty to the perpetrators of the former regime, they recognized former Francoists as democratic actors. While the recently reorganized Socialist party had no problem defending this vision of democracy, the Communist party found itself in an exceedingly difficult position. As the major force of organized resistance to the dictatorship, the party had only abandoned its commitment to *ruptura* following the unilateral decision of its leaders to participate in the Transition's elite negotiations. This meant that new municipal officials – the majority of whom had won elections thanks to their grassroots credentials – were forced to mediate between the new rationale of their party leaders and the often-consistent views of the party's base and allies.¹⁸ Take for instance, Mayor Hernández's response to the MCC:

In response to these fascist attempts, which don't mask their intention to drown democracy, we, as citizens of Santa Coloma, have to reaffirm our democratic will so that nobody toys with the idea of turning back [...]. Many of the difficulties we have today are due to the impossibility we faced in realizing a *ruptura* with the past; a past that continues to condition us all today. And let it be clear, we cannot get rid of this conditioning merely through the voluntarism of the left. It requires daily work that takes into account the current correlation of forces while taking advantage of the spaces of liberty that we continue to conquer little by little. (*Gramma* 20–27 October 1979)

Imploring the population to continue conquering 'spaces of liberty', Mayor Hernández suggested that the struggle for democracy was far from complete.

By 1979, however, the Communist party was no longer in a position to lead the struggle. With tensions rapidly mounting within the party, those to the party's left had little cause for sympathy and aggressively held Communist officials accountable for their inability to govern in a situation that they believed the party had helped to create in the first place. *Ruptura*, from this perspective, had

17 For more on the radical left during the Transition, see Pérez Serrano 2013 and Laiz 1995.

18 The PSUC's slogan for the first municipal elections in 1979 was 'you already know us'. The slogan referenced the fact that most of the candidates were well known as local leaders of the citizen and labour movements.

only become impossible after the Communist party had decided to participate in the *reforma pactada*. These domestic tensions were only further compounded by a series of international pressures. First, with diminished faith in ‘actually existing socialism’ and great debate regarding the new model of Eurocommunism, it was hard to situate the Spanish and Catalan Communist parties as they transitioned to institutional politics. Second, the once powerful narrative of antifascism, historically employed to unify and mobilize the country’s democratic forces, was already weakened on the international stage. Its purchase was diminishing in the Communist East at the same time that the myth of resistance was progressively undermined in the West. Finally, the Socialist party, funded and supported by an international community with clearly defined geopolitical interests, often behaved as if it were equally as interested in wiping out the Communist option to its left as confronting those to its right.¹⁹

As the Communist party attempted to navigate these tensions, it rapidly became clear that they could no longer hold the left together behind a common vision of democracy. Pouncing upon the weakness, the extreme right outlined its own vision. In the days that followed the Blue March, extreme right militants argued, ‘We will have neither citizen harmony nor national reconciliation so long as Marxist groups try to impose their law through terror, picket lines and coercion’ (*Diario de Barcelona* 9 October 1979; *TeleXpres* 10 October 1979). Enraged by the city council’s lawsuit and irked by Mayor Hernández’s social position as priest and Communist, the extreme right began to vigorously target Santa Coloma.²⁰ Public centres, including the city hall and Communist headquarters, began to receive periodic bomb threats. Hundreds, for instance, had to be evacuated from a local clinic just as social security employees affiliated with the union CCOO demanded higher wages. In a public statement, the workers from the clinic argued, ‘the attack has to be interpreted as an attempt to boycott the strike’ (*Correo Catalan* 7 February 1980). As the twin ‘psychoses of fear and insecurity’ developed within the city, Mayor Hernández’s car was torched and he was again refused special police protection (*Correo Catalan* 13 February 1980).

Though the extreme right did not have an extensive presence in the Barcelona area, these acts of terror had a significant impact as the region’s civil authorities openly tolerated the behaviour. With state institutions like the police, judiciary and civil governorship unreformed during the course of the Transition, many personnel continued to treat ‘Marxists’ as the internal enemy.²¹ Some, it even

19 For a discussion of the geopolitical context see Garcés 2008. Also consult Sánchez Muñoz 2012 for a discussion of how the German Socialist Party (SPD) and the German Friedrich Ebert Foundation gave funding and guidance to the Spanish Socialist party (PSOE) during the Transition.

20 Constructed upon the ideology of ‘National Catholicism’, the Francoist dictatorship treated ‘Marxists’ as the ‘anti-Spain’. As such, progressive Catholics, particularly working-class priests, were treated as a double threat to the regime and its legitimacy. As the case of Lluís Hernández reveals, many of these individuals continued to be targeted by the extreme right well into the democratic period. For more on church–state relations, see Callahan 2000.

21 For a discussion of Francoist ideology, especially in regard to its definition and treatment

seems, were eager to reassert their authority as former clandestine leaders assumed positions as elected municipal officials.²²

The institutional bias of the police, for example, was clearly demonstrated when they refused to protect Mayor Hernández or social movement activists at the same time that they offered special protection to the extreme right. For instance, the Fuerza Nueva militants who had been taken into custody after the Blue March were not detained during the march but only after they had freely entered the police station to denounce the ‘aggression’ (*Correo Catalan* 10 October 1979). While the work of local photojournalists later confirmed the identities of the Falangists and proved that they had indeed carried illegal firearms, the police released the unnamed detainees before the official report was filed alleging that no weapons were found (*Gramma* 15–20 October 1979b). (In addition, the police actively prohibited the family of one of the injured left-wing activists from filing a formal complaint at the station (*TeleXpres* 10 October 1979)).

Judges also used their authority to create an uneven balance of hindrances and protections. In a criminal case against a Falangist charged with holding a left-wing activist at gunpoint, trial was continually suspended due to filing errors and the defendant’s refusal to attend the hearings. After one of the testifying witnesses, a union leader and new Communist city councillor, suggested with exasperation that the suspensions were politically motivated, the judge called for the witnesses’ expulsion. With right-wing and left-wing militants looking on and tensions in the courtroom escalating, the judge allowed two additional city councillors to mediate. While the councillors successfully mitigated the explosive situation, a few weeks later each received notice that they were being charged with acts of public disorder. Though the charges were eventually dropped and the judge was subsequently transferred to a post outside Santa Coloma, it was never publicly confirmed that the transfer was realized in accordance with a petition filed by the city council. The judge’s behaviour was not officially recognized as wrongful.

The civil governor, for his part, made it abundantly clear that not all historic narratives were welcome in the public sphere. Immediately before authorizing the Blue March, he had refused to authorize an exhibit on Francoist repression organized by Santa Coloma’s anarchist collective, the Ateneo Popular Valldivina. With labour lawyers, ex-political prisoners and anti-Francoist militants slated to speak at the event, the Ateneu attempted to proceed and the police forcibly enforced the prohibition. Two days later the police detained three members of the collective, who responded by denouncing the ‘arbitrariness of the governor’ while publicly reaffirming their rights to associate (*Gramma* 16–23 June 1979). With memories of the Blue March still fresh, when celebrations commemorating the 49th anniversary of the Second Republic were prohibited in Santa Coloma and

of internal dissent, see Richards 1998.

22 Oral testimonies persistently confirm this conclusion. See, for instance, AHCONC 2002. In the 2002 interview, Bellete Donay recounts receiving visits from Santa Coloma’s Francoist police chief immediately after entering the municipal government as a PSUC official.

all over Spain, there was little reason to continue maintaining that the *modus operandi* of the country's civil governors was merely arbitrary.²³

Thus assured of their protected status, extreme right militants began to diversify their activities as they continued to target 'red' Santa Coloma. Following an increase in municipal taxes as the city's new democratic leaders attempted to account for previous debts and invest in much-needed infrastructure, *Fuerza Nueva* became the vigorous defenders of 'the interests of business owners against the "Marxist city council"' (*Periódico* 15 February 1980). Mobilizing within the area's regional business association, they organized a boycott of municipal taxes. While the mainstream media noted that the conflict presented the city council with its 'gravest crisis faced to date' – one that could lead to the paralysis of the municipal government – only Josep Tordera, a local journalist, fleshed out the political significance of the conflict:

What is happening here and now is a political campaign against a left-wing city government, promoted and encouraged by those who say nothing when taxes are collected by Madrid [...]. They want to drown the city government in order to criticize its ineffectiveness [...]. And let's not forget that the Catalan parliamentary elections are approaching, they also look to better the poor image of the right by dumping on communists and socialists. (*Grana* 27 February 1980)

Continuing the pattern whereby the extreme right was offered institutional protections, three of the boycott's organizers, all *Fuerza Nueva* militants who had been detained after the Blue March, ran as candidates for the 1980 Catalan parliamentary elections. Much to the distress of local observers, their candidacy was allowed despite the open criminal charges that had been filed against them by the city council. What is more, just as the court delayed the announcement as to whether the original case would go to trial, a separate case regarding the legality of the boycott was not heard until after the Catalan parliamentary elections had been held. By that time, of course, the right had gained the maximum political benefit from the tax boycott.

The Flower Bomb Affair: The Dynamics of Demobilization

Though the Blue March was initially hailed as 'an example of what should not be allowed in a democracy', there was no systematic attempt to address the tensions that had underlined the conflict or the inequalities at play during the handling of the affair. As the leaders of the institutional left did not offer guidance, left-wing municipalities were left to confront Falangist symbols, authorities and militants without national support or protections. Meanwhile, the mainstream media increasingly overlooked conflicts that resulted when local actors decided to directly address these legacies. Following the lead of the country's political

23 José María Belloch Puig, Civil Governor of the province of Barcelona, 1977–1980, was the first Catalan-speaking civil governor in Catalunya since the end of the Civil War. He maintained close relations with the conservative leaders of the Catalan Generalitat and his tolerance of Catalan nationalism was a high-profile matter.

elites, the mainstream media promoted consensus by presenting these conflicts as matters of mere local concern.²⁴

It is thus no coincidence that Lluís Hernández most coherently described the global significance of local tensions to the foreign press. A feature report on Catalan politics, published by *Le Monde Diplomatique* in September 1980, opened with this interview:

It is good and simple we don't have anything. Nothing more than cracked constructions where thousands of men, who are often sick, wait for problematic employment [...]. When we entered the municipal government last year we found a debt of 400 million pesetas [...] the help offered by the State does not represent more than 7% of our budget [...] meanwhile official banks refuse to give us loans while private banks don't trust left-wing municipalities [...] the Civil Guard sabotages the majority of our initiatives, actively or passively, and the police don't guarantee public order [...]. PSUC headquarters have been looted and my car burnt: those responsible have not been identified. Neither have those who tore down the new street signs where the names of the heroes of the Catalan Resistance were placed; when we took down the monument to the dead, erected in memory of the fascists, I received death threats; the police abstained from protecting me. Even graver, anarchists and members of the extreme left suspected of terrorist activities, have been detained without proof [...] The parties of the left don't protest [...] they fear breaking the consensus put in place by the Moncloa pacts of 1977. (*Gramma* 18 September 1980)²⁵

At the same time that the leaders of the institutional left feared breaking 'consensus', conservatives colluded with the mainstream media and the country's civil authorities to discredit the grassroots narrative that the left had popularly conquered democracy. As an elite narrative legitimizing Spanish democracy was consolidated, collective memory was demobilized.

Another scandal in Santa Coloma illustrates the process. On the morning of 18 October 1980 Mayor Hernández reported having received a package that he feared might contain a bomb. The national police sent their explosive experts to investigate later that day and 'deactivated' the package by exploding it in the central sports centre as the city came to life with the return of students and workers in the evening. Reporting back to the city councillors, the experts explained that had the package been opened in a city council meeting, none would have survived the force of the explosion.

To avoid the organizational missteps of the Blue March, the city councillors organized a unitary antifascist demonstration for 20 October to signal that

24 For more on the role of the press during the Transition, see Castro Torres 2010 and Quirosa-Cheyrouze y Muñoz, 2009. In 1981 Campo Vidal argued that the mainstream media became increasingly conservative, particularly in response to the internal conflicts that consumed the Catalan Communist party (PSUC). By 1982 many progressive and local media outlets were shut down as the press was modernized around newspaper giants like *El País*.

25 Excerpts from the 18 September 1980 interview with Hernández were later translated into Spanish and published in Santa Coloma's local newspaper. While the original report featured interviews of major leaders of the right and the left, as well as important public intellectuals, the interview with Hernández was heavily cited and placed at the forefront of the article.

the popular forces of the left had conquered democracy and would continue to mobilize in its defence. On that day close to five thousand people attended, including six left-wing mayors from Barcelona's industrial belt, who stood in solidarity with Santa Coloma's city councillors at the head of the demonstration. Speakers described fascist groups as threats to democracy and left-wing municipal governments as an announcement was made that the major political elites of the region, including Jordi Pujol (the conservative nationalist president of the Generalitat) extended their official support to the anti-fascist proceedings. With demonstrators chanting, 'It is the fascists who are the terrorists', the oft-repeated notion that the extreme left posed the sole threat to democratization was publicly countered (*Vanguardia* 21 October 1980).

Two days later, to the surprise of all in Santa Coloma, the major newspaper *El Periódico* announced that the package had never contained a bomb, but artificial flowers. According to the article, a former parishioner, from when the mayor had served as a missionary in Ecuador, had sent the package to express her condolences following the recent passing of Hernández's mother. 'This information, facilitated to *El Periódico* by police and judicial sources', the article confirmed, 'is supported by the urgent police report, made by specialists after exploding the package'. Suggesting that municipal officials had organized the demonstration in bad faith, the article concluded by noting a 'strong discomfort in the Generalitat', especially President Pujol's distress regarding the public announcement that he had 'adhered to the demonstration and condemned the threat'. After negating the alleged adherence, President Pujol set the tone for the scandal that followed. He denounced the demonstration for 'irresponsibly generating a psychosis of terrorism' (*Periódico* 22 October 1980).

Though the mainstream media argued that the 'explosive experts were confused' and 'Lluís Hernández did not believe the police', there was no further discussion of either the 'confused' or incredulous behaviour (*Periódico* 8 November 1980). Rather, attention was focused on the significance of the antifascist demonstration. Even the most generous of editorials, which recognized that Mayor Hernández had received constant threats thanks to his 'double social position as priest and communist, not to mention his popular charisma in a working class municipality with infinite problems', concluded that the demonstration was no more than a 'political manipulation of solidarity' (*Mundo Diario* 23 October 1980). More critical accounts directly attacked Hernández's 'double social position'. Though it had been popularly acknowledged that the collaboration between Christians and Communists had helped Spanish society overcome one of its most deeply rooted obstacles to democratization, with democratization almost complete and transformative politics out of fashion internationally, conservative commentators took the opportunity to openly ridicule the alliance. In the words of one such commentator, 'Due to the fervent plurality of his [Mayor Hernández's] profession, the case resonated, touching communist congregants on the one hand and Catholic militants on the other so that in little time five or six-thousand people gathered to demonstrate against terrorism', in what the editorialist went on to

describe as an ‘ecclesiastical–Marxist–municipal–floral’ debacle (*Avui* 24 October 1980).²⁶ Though few editorialists directly mocked protestors in this manner, most agreed that their participation at the event only provided evidence for the scope of Communist manipulation.

As embarrassment grew in the city, the MCC demanded an explanation from the Communists, while the Socialists alleged that the whole event had been ‘staged to improve the image of the municipal government with Lluís Hernández at its head’ (*TeleXpres* 23 October 1980). As the minority group in the municipal coalition, the Socialists had much to gain from the scandal. They thus echoed the mainstream media and argued that the demonstration was an ‘indignant manipulation of public opinion’ (*Gramma* 6 November 1980a).

With criticism of the Communists mounting on all sides, no efforts were made to contextualize the officials’ behaviour. Little emphasis, for example, was placed on the fact that the police had never presented an official report to the city’s officials. Rather, they had only returned in the hours immediately preceding the demonstration to suggest that the package might not have contained a bomb. As it was common for the police to create confusion in order to disrupt popular demonstrations, it is no surprise that Mayor Hernández and Enrique Belleste, the two officials contacted, ignored the unofficial report. What is more, we know from oral testimonies that relations between these officials and the police were already tense. This was particularly so in the case of Belleste who, as the city’s Lieutenant Governor, had modestly reformed the urban force by demoting twenty policemen who were known Falangists and former Blue Division Volunteers to positions without firearms (AHCONC 2002).

Just as this additional context helps put the behaviour of the Communist officials into perspective, drawing attention to the sequence of events casts doubt on the civil authorities’ alleged ‘confusion’. Though Mayor Hernández did not alert the public to his initial suspicion, the police explicitly made a public spectacle of the package. While research remains to be done, it is worth seriously considering a critique that was only voiced in the local Communist press. As one official wrote, ‘If the citizens of this country have a psychosis of terrorism it is in part thanks to the dozens of shoe boxes, backpacks and packages that the police explode in full public view that later turn out to have been inoffensive’ (*PSUC Informa Sta. Coloma* November 1980).

The timing and distribution of the police report warrant similar suspicions. Only after the media had covered the resounding success of the antifascist demonstration did the civil governor distribute the ‘urgent report’ directly to *El Periódico* and the conservative leaders of the Generalitat for comment. With the

26 The editorialist here mocks Alfonso Comín’s renowned *Cristianos en el partido, Comunistas en la Iglesia* (1977). Comín, a leader of PSUC and member of the PCE’s central committee, published the 1977 collection of texts to explain the internal reform of the Spanish and Catalan Communist parties vis-à-vis the ‘Christian question’. In an interview conducted by the author with Lluís Hernández on 20 October 2011, Hernández confirmed that he had sought personal guidance from Comín, who convinced him that Christians could help rejuvenate and democratize the Communist party from within.

mainstream media itself complicit, it is no surprise that the relay of information was not questioned. What is more, as the Communist party was consumed by internal struggle, it is no surprise that there was no partisan voice willing to draw the public's attention to the obvious conclusion that the Communist officials had been set up.

More concerning than the political embarrassment, however, was the fact that the media scandal deflected attention away from the truly scandalous aspect of the affair. Left-wing officials had no reason to trust civil authorities and, as local journalists from Santa Coloma reiterated, 'fascist terrorism' was no 'joke' (*Gramma* 6 November 1980b). As recent research on political violence reveals, there was no 'psychosis of terrorism' in Spain (see Baby 2012 and Sánchez Soler 2010). Equally as significant, the media deflection undermined the objectives of protestors who marshalled the discourse of anti-fascism. With seven left-wing mayors in one of the 'reddest' areas of the country personally implicated, it was all but assured that the scandal's message would be effectively communicated: the left's popular conquest and defence of democracy against its extreme right detractors was not an appropriate founding narrative for Spain's new democracy.

The Attempted Coup: Accommodating to the Democratic Settlement Negotiated

With anti-fascism discredited, an elite narrative of democratization was effortlessly consolidated following the attempted coup of 23 February 1981. On that day Lieutenant Colonel Tejero held the Congress of Deputies hostage in Madrid and sectors of the army rolled tanks down the boulevards of Valencia. As these coup plots were realized in unison, King Juan Carlos appeared on television to calmly express his support for elected officials. While the king's commitment to democracy had not yet been tested, following the coup's failure the mainstream media hailed the monarchy as democracy's true guarantor, thus completing the narrative of a model Transition crafted by prudent political elites.

In Santa Coloma, local journalists immediately expressed their concerns regarding the civic implications of this new narrative.

We live in a country in which the maintenance of democracy depends as much on an institution such as the monarchy, as the capacity of workers and citizens to respond and defend a political system that they consider their own. It is clear today more than ever that we have to work to defend democratic institutions. The figure of the king should be considered important given the context of the current situation. But maybe we should also reflect on the limits of the democratic culture and habits that he alone is able to generate with his actions. (*Gramma* 2 March 1981)

These concerns were especially poignant given the particular experience of the attempted coup in Santa Coloma.

During the attempted coup, Santa Coloma's city councillors congregated to make preparations as extreme right militants returned to the city to create terror.

Armed with machine guns they targeted the lit conference room where they assumed the city councillors had gathered. According to local journalists, the shooting 'could have resulted in a slaughterhouse' (*Periódico* 25 February 1981). While it was unclear whether the event was part of a plot or a mere act of opportunism, the mainstream media immediately passed over the incident in Santa Coloma as 'isolated and without consequence' (*Vanguardia* 25 February 1981). Enraged, the city councillors responded by expressing their 'indignation that little attention had been paid to reports made by those who – with both time and conviction – had warned of the dangers of a political regression' (ASC 1981, 24 February). The city councillors thus countered the elite narrative of democracy as it took hold. Rather than view the failure of the coup as a testament to the fortitude of democratic institutions and personnel, they suggested that its realization reflected the structural inequalities of the democratic settlement negotiated.

The left, however, no longer had the mobilizing capacity to pressure for a renegotiation. Though PSUC leaders proposed a demonstration to 'energetically denounce the aggression against our city hall', which they interpreted as an 'attack against the city's symbol of democracy and pluralism', the city's population rejected the proposal following the disenchanting experience of the flower bomb affair (*El Correo Catalan* 4 March 1981).²⁷ What is more, though there were unitary demonstrations against the attempted coup in other parts of the country, in Catalunya the presidents of the Generalitat and the Catalan Parliament explicitly discouraged mobilizations. Instead people protested individually by not going to work and local leaders and activists spent the month of March formulating a series of futile petitions and motions.

As the civil governor had nothing to report almost a full month after the shooting, local journalists pursued their own investigations and interviewed *Fuerza Nueva* militants. Two parliamentarians from Santa Coloma brought the discussion to the Catalan Parliament. They asked what the autonomous government had done to clarify the events and what measures it planned to adopt to assure that such 'terrorist acts, which threaten both citizen security and democratic institutions, do not continue to occur' (*Gramma* 17 March 1981). A week later a letter was sent to the central government. Signed by citizens and the major political parties and unions active within Santa Coloma, the letter confirmed the city's 'support for democracy and its institutions', while demanding that the 'full weight of the law fall upon those responsible for the threats' (*Gramma* 24 March 1981).

The authorities, however, never definitively identified the individuals responsible for the shooting in Santa Coloma. What is more, in the months that followed the attempted coup, a bus with waving Spanish and Falangist flags made weekly trips to the city and uniformed militants shouted 'long live Tejero, get out

27 The attempted coup coincided with the early stages of the PSUC's internal division. While the division created a great deal of activity and *mobilization* in the Barcelona metropolitan area, these mobilizations pitted the various sectors of the Communist party against each other rather than against the right.

Communists' from its windows (*Gramma* 27 April 1981). Though the attempted coup had been officially denounced and there was a constitutional ban on paramilitary association, the authorities never intervened. The mainstream media, for its part, gave Fuerza Nueva militants ample opportunity to represent themselves to the larger public. 'We do not provoke, rather we promote our agenda like other recognized political parties [...] it is not true that Fuerza Nueva or any of its militants machine-gunned the city hall' (*Correo Catalan* 12 May 1981).

Whether or not Fuerza Nueva was responsible for the events or comparable to other political parties, they were able to open an office in Santa Coloma in April 1982 and Francisco Villora, 'the only right wing militant to openly show his face' in the city, founded a radio station and a magazine (*Gramma* 9 October 1980). Frustrated by this 'intolerable ascent of the local right', a reduced number of left-wing activists responded by painting Santa Coloma with graffiti messages calling for the illegalization of Fuerza Nueva and its expulsion from the city (*Gramma* 9–16 April 1982). The extreme right, in turn, responded by painting the façade of the city hall, the local offices of the union CCOO, and the homes of several journalists blue. As another battle over public space ensued, one journalist analysed the situation while explicitly comparing the 'graffiti war' to the 1979 Blue March (*Gramma* 2–9 April 1982).

It is possible that the only objective behind the increasing presence of the extreme right, which nourishes its rank and file with morally dubious elements in the working class outskirts, is to create an atmosphere of discomfort. In this manner the candidate they propose, who offers 'order and an iron fist', will seem necessary given the state that they previously dedicated themselves to creating in the first place. It is possible that in the coming months the central square of the city will again have Sunday confrontations, dialectic or more 'expressive'. (*Gramma* 9–16 April 1982)

In response to this palpable increase in tensions, the civil governor finally intervened. He sent three of the national police to personally protect Francisco Villora despite the fact that the graffiti war 'affected the establishments of the right no more than it affected the entities of the left'. While local journalists noted the contrast between 'the perfect protection given to the local leader of the right' and the 'utter lack of protection offered to other people and entities that have been threatened', their observations only merited a summary notice on page thirteen of the local newspaper (*Gramma* 23–30 April 1982). Local journalists, it seems, had been disabused of the hope that an outraged front-page exposition might draw the attention of the mainstream media. Similarly discouraged, activists and officials did not respond by organizing a demonstration or calling for the civil governor's resignation. As this spectacular decrease in popular outrage and protest demonstrates, grassroots actors were coerced into dropping the memory and legacy of the dictatorship from the popular agenda.

Conclusion

In this article I have argued that the ‘pact of silence’ interpretation overestimates the consensual nature of the Transition. As much of the cultural studies literature and recent contributions to the historical literature have established, the interpretation fails to recognize that there was an atmosphere of ‘openness and possibility’ that allowed ‘a range of fragmented and contradictory stories’ to ‘burst forth as democracy flowered’ (Graham 2012: 138 and Richards 2013: 281). Moving beyond the recent explanation that this atmosphere was broken ‘by the brute force explosion of the past in the form of the attempted military coup of February 1981’, this article has demonstrated that small groups of Falangist militants and like-minded civil authorities thwarted organized attempts to remember and confront the legacy of the dictatorship at the local level (Graham 2012: 138). Though activists and municipal officials called for the illegalization of extreme right groups and the adaptation of the forces of public order, media and political elites muted their voices, ultimately delegitimizing the grassroots narrative of the popular conquest and defence of democracy. As an elite narrative, legitimizing Spanish democracy was consolidated, grassroots activists were left disenchanted and divided, and the local networks where collective memories were articulated were demobilized. Silence was not at the root of the Transition, but a consequence that resulted from its elite negotiation and enforcement.

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