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### Fear and Silence Meet Ignorance

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## Fear and Silence Meet Ignorance

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### Abstract

*When I studied in Spain in 1969 and 1970, I knew about the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939), briefly mentioned in my Spanish history books; Generalísimo Francisco Franco declared victory. I knew Spain through my graduate studies in Spanish literature and through Michener’s book Iberia (1968). In 2000, I met Jordi Calvera, a Catalán whose post-war stories conflicted with that idyllic Spain. I returned to Spain in 2013, still with no idea of the impact of the totalitarian dictatorship based on fear and silence through which Franco ruled until his death in 1975, leaving a legacy of fear and silence. In Barcelona, I met a group of adults in their eighties who shared Jordi’s experience. My intrigue with these stories led me to learn more about the war, the dictatorship and the aftermath by interviewing people whose lives had been touched by those years. Through a layered account, I present some of the stories and examine my oblivion.*

### Keywords

Critical autoethnography; autoethnography; ethnography; Spanish Civil War; Franco’s totalitarian dictatorship

[W]riting for me is a way of understanding what is happening to me,  
of thinking hard things out.  
I have never written [anything] that was not born  
out of a question I needed to answer for myself.  
...For art is order, but it is made out of the chaos of life.  
May Sarton, 1984

### Finding the beginning

This story has no end and a choice of beginnings, kind of like a loose thread you keep pulling, trying to find the end so you can tie it off before it creates a hole in the garment. Each time you find what you thought was the end, it’s really another beginning, and you realise it goes a little further. When you reach what finally seems like the end, you realise that the thread is part of the whole garment and is woven into the fabric forever; a thread with no beginning and no ending. And so it is with memory. We can free float and allow cascading memory to invade until it becomes clear how events are woven into the fabric of our lives. We also realise that memory can be faulty, as I also learned through writing this piece. What started as an attempt to understand how I studied in Spain during a totalitarian dictatorship without being aware of the political environment gradually morphed into a bigger story about the way we see the world as we are schooled to see it. In this narrative I interrogate how my views of Spain in



1969 and 1970 were shaped by the literature I read and how I only became aware of the story that lay beneath the surface when I began talking to people many years later. With autoethnography we situate our own personal narratives within the political and cultural world in which we live (Bochner and Ellis 2016), and critical autoethnography allows us to interweave our own narratives within the narratives of others (Tilley-Lubbs, forthcoming, 2017).

When I first began writing, I thought the story started in 2013 when I visited the Escola d'Adults La Verneda-Sant Marti in a working-class neighbourhood in Barcelona, Spain. In the class I visited, most students were 80- and 90-year-olds whose education was interrupted when they had to start working in 1939 as primary or middle school children whose fathers had been killed in the Spanish Civil War. To survive, they had to find ways to help keep food on the family table and a roof over their heads.

After I wrote that story, I realised there was an even earlier part of the story that started in 1998 in Blacksburg, Virginia, when my colleague Libby told me about her husband Jordi, who was one of those children who began working as a child, and who thus had no formal education. I heard his story, and I remember saying, "I had no idea!" I attributed my lack of knowledge to the fact that at that time, I had never visited Barcelona. I thought his story might be unique.

### Studying the Spain they wanted us to know: 1964–1970

The real beginning of the story started when I was an undergraduate Spanish major and then a Spanish literature master's student at the University of Illinois from 1964 to 1970. I lived Spanish for the entire six years, reading authors who took me to geographic and emotional places and spaces I had never imagined, all the while deepening my love of Spanish language, literature and culture. When my friend, who was fascinated by my love of all things Spanish, gave me a copy of James Michener's (1968) *Iberia* for my 22nd birthday, my lifelong obsession with Spain spread its roots. I read about Andalucía, the soulful Spanish guitar and flamenco, the pageantry of Spanish kings, and the sweeping history. Michener presented a compendium of Spain. When he talked about his favourite authors, I nodded my head as he named my own favourite authors: Unamuno, Ortega y Gasset, García Lorca, Matute, Azorín, Jiménez, Machado. In his narrative, I heard the music of my favourite Spanish composers, Albéniz and de Falla. When he described the people and places that he loved most, I was right there at his side, envisioning everything through his vivid word pictures coupled with Robert Vavra's black and white photographs.

In 1969 I had the opportunity to study in Spain through a summer study abroad programme with the University of Virginia (UVA). I spent the entire summer studying in Salamanca and travelling throughout the country to see all the places I had already seen in my mind's eye through Michener's book. The history, geography and culture came to life, and right along with Michener, I fell more in love with everything Spanish. He had first visited Spain in 1932, four years before the Spanish Civil War began. My first visit in 1969 was 30 years after the end of the war, but I had a sense of time standing still. Michener wrote the book in the late 1960s during Franco's 36-year rule from 1939 to 1975. I had just spent six years studying the literature and culture of Spain, so I concentrated on those aspects of the book, not on the political commentary. Looking back, I realise that I regarded *Iberia* as a tourist guidebook, and my focus remained on the festivals, customs and traditions of a country that captivated me as exotic, mysterious and romantic.

Many of my professors at the University of Illinois were from Spain, probably in their forties and fifties, but they never spoke of the Spanish Civil War or the Franco dictatorship. I looked back in the Spanish history books I studied during both degrees, from 1964 to 1970, and I found a paragraph in each book that said there had been a Civil War in Spain between 1936 and 1939. A timeline in the back of my textbook stated: "1939 Nationalist victory and authoritarian regime of General Franco. Great Republican emigration" (Marín 1961, 244) [my translation]. I didn't understand that the title he gave himself, Generalísimo Franco implied 'Supreme Commander' over the armed forces and the country. I didn't know that his other title *El Caudillo por la gracia de Dios*, gave him sovereign dignity, and implied acceptance of the authoritarian rule he had established. I really didn't understand the meaning of an authoritarian government. I later learned the meaning of this information as I interviewed people about the war. I had never experienced living in a society in which a general in the army had total control over

the personal and public life and space of its inhabitants. Since I received my master's degree in 1970, my history books didn't include the information his government ended with his death in 1975.

During the summer I studied in Spain, the United States (US) was still immersed in the Cold War. It was also a time of political chaos that lingered from the late 1960s. In the six years I spent at the university, I had become politically active, but more on the periphery of political action than in the midst of it. I participated in protests against the Vietnam War, and I wore a bracelet in memory of one of the POW/MIAs we were asked to remember. Every night, following the evening news on CBS, we watched the roll call of dead and missing soldiers, sometimes lists that seemed endless. I always read the names, looking for the names of any of the young men I knew from high school or university or of the man whose name lived on my wrist. I did watch for the name of only draftee I personally knew: a young man who had worked with me at my summer job as a reservations clerk for the Burlington Railroad at Union Station in Chicago. We had watched those lists for so many years that they had become surreal, kind of like watching the lottery numbers. We grieved for those young men (at least my memory only remembers men), and we protested the war with signs and marches until the National Guard came to turn their hoses on us and to send us back home. At the same time, an atmosphere of political unrest permeated all the media; and the Vietnam détente that would be declared later in the year was still pending. Since the end of World War II, the media had constantly warned us about the dangers of Communism, and in my hometown, bunkers still existed to protect us against a nuclear attack. We read *The Diary of Anne Frank*, and we saw photos of Mussolini's body hanging upside down in the town square, so the horrors of Nazism and Fascism were vivid. I don't remember studying totalitarianism except as a vague ideology in my world history text. I don't remember ever hearing the term *Falangista* until I had conversations with people whose lives had been affected by the Spanish Civil War or the dictatorship that followed, and they talked about the authoritarian and hierarchical nature of the *Falangistas* who followed Franco.

When I went to Spain at age 23, I only saw sunny Spain, the idyllic vacation spot on the Costa Brava or the Costa del Sol. My reading of *Iberia* enchanted me with James Michener's accounts of flamenco dancers, guitarists, bullfights and beautiful parades related to Holy Week in Sevilla. Neither Michener nor my history books nor my professors alerted me to the oppressive dictatorship that lay beneath the smiling surface of a country that was developing tourism at a rapid rate. I realised that most women of a certain age still wore only black to mourn husbands, sons, brothers, uncles or other family members who had been killed in the Civil War. I saw men without the legs they lost in battle paddling around on low-wheeled carts selling lottery tickets, but I saw them through a tourist gaze. I was able to other them as interesting cultural phenomena on the same level as the bathrooms that consisted of a drain in a concrete floor—just as unusual, different and interesting cultural experiences. I never had political conversations with people; I simply navigated as a foreign exchange student who wanted to experience a romanticised foreign country, unaware of a dictatorship whose presence permeated society much as smog permeates the air.

In that magical summer of 1969 when I studied at the University of Salamanca, I moved in a bubble mainly populated by other graduate students from the US. I found out about the programme through my cousin, who was also a Spanish major at UVA. He had participated the year before and spoke in glowing terms about the experience, so my University of Illinois roommate Jane and I decided to go with the group. During the summer, we studied grammar, literature and culture in courses designed specifically for our group, so we mingled very seldom with local people. We had our own US world in the midst of a beautiful, romantic country. In graduate school, I had studied *Don Quijote*, and I had seen the musical *Man of La Mancha* at the Shubert Theater in Chicago. I had sung all the songs as a music major, and I found the Spain I expected to find—the romantic country whose literature and music I loved. As a voice major, I had prepared a mini recital for one of my classes at the University of Illinois based on six centuries of Spanish songs, and I found the Spain of the Moorish laments I had sung. Jane, as a piano major, gave a recital of Spanish music at the University of Salamanca, and we found that Spain as well. At the end of the summer course, we did a tour of Spain that included many of the places Michener described. I was able to talk to locals from time to time in hotels, restaurants and stores, but we never discussed politics. I had no understanding of what living in a dictatorship might involve. I met the contented Spaniards I expected to meet, always proud of the culture of their country. I saw the charming

Andalusian countryside I had envisioned in Lorca's poetry and plays. I saw the relics of St. James in Santiago de Compostela where a guide brought the story of his return from the dead to defend the Galicians against the attack of the Moors during the conquest of Spain. I saw and experienced what I was prepared to see and experience.

All my knowledge of repressive governments had come from studying ideologies, but I had no personal experiences that helped me to understand the reality of living in a country that operated under such a system. I had no idea of the implications of living under a government that had absolute control of private and public life.

Although Picasso had painted *Guernica*, a depiction of the bombing of the town of the same name in the northeastern Basque area in Spain in 1937 as an anti-war statement, the painting had not formed an important part of the canon of my cultural education in Spanish. I didn't realise that the bombing of Guernica resulted from an agreement Franco made with Hitler until I taught about the artists of Spain, and *Guernica* was one of the paintings included in my textbook. This terse explanation sums up my knowledge of the painting at that time: "Painted in protest of the bombing of a defenseless village by the Fascist air force during the Spanish Civil War, [Guernica] is an image of not to be believed horror...." (Marín 1961, 232) [my translation]. There was no mention of Franco's collaboration with Hitler or Mussolini, nor of the civilians killed as they went about their daily lives. Only later, as a teacher, I learned about Guernica as a proving ground for the German Luftwaffe in the 1940s. In 1969, I had no lens to examine the world I floated through that summer.

I returned to Madrid in the autumn of 1970 to work on my Ph.D. in contemporary Spanish drama with Carlos Muñoz, a playwright whose work the Franco dictatorship censored. I knew that Spain was a Catholic country, but I didn't understand how Franco aligned his government to use the conservative traditions of the Church to exercise total control over the private lives of the population to determine what people should read, see or experience. I only knew I had studied Muñoz as a contemporary playwright, and that my professor had spoken at length about his being censored by the government. His plays focused on social protest as he used expressionism to speak out against the unjust and intolerable conditions created by the Franco government, and I wanted to talk to him about how censorship had affected his writing.

At the time, I had little idea of the true meaning of censorship. I knew that in the early sixties, we considered our high school English teacher daring because she had us read *The Catcher in the Rye* (Salinger 1951); we knew it had been banned at some point. We also felt sophisticated and all-knowing when we sneaked copies of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (Lawrence 1928), among the others that had been banned for inappropriate sexual content or obscenity by school boards, libraries or parents. I knew nothing at all about censorship enacted by totalitarian governments as a means of controlling public and private thought in all the arts and humanities.

Although I didn't understand the strong ties between Franco and the Church, I accepted the absolute Catholicism of Spain as a matter of fact. During graduate school, I had spent one and a half years as a graduate research assistant to a professor who was preparing an annotated version (Lott 1970) of *Pepita Jiménez* (Valera 1874). In this nineteenth century Spanish classic, a young man is preparing to be a priest, but on the eve of his ordination falls in love with a strong-minded widow. My task was to conduct the research for the footnotes for the book, so I spent hours in the library searching through the mystical writings of San Juan de la Cruz and Santa Teresa, and the hermeneutical texts used by the Catholic Church during that period. I had become so immersed in the work that I accepted the all-controlling Catholicism I observed while we visited cathedrals and read the literature. I didn't question anything concerned with the Church. Even after reading Michener, I didn't see the control of the Church as a negative aspect of the culture.

I had been hired to be a live-in English teacher for a professor's friends in Madrid, and I didn't put together the incongruity of living with a family whose father worked in one of Franco's government cabinets, while I studied the themes of a dramatist whose work was censored by that same government. I did not even realise the nature of the dictatorship when I witnessed a group of Iranian workers and students in a protest march in front of the Iranian Embassy, and the Guardia Civil appeared immediately and carted them off in a paddy wagon. Within moments, everything was back to its pre-protest state,

and I doubted I had really witnessed the scene. It was as if it was a dream or a trick of the eye, and nothing had happened. I had seen the movie *The Diary of Anne Frank*, and I recalled the terror of the scene where the Gestapo arrested her and her family. I didn't make a connection between *la Guardia Civil*, those dapper men in their patent leather hats making a group of protestors disappear as being similar to the disappearance of the Frank family and the multitude of other people who disappeared during the Nazi regime. Although I was surrounded by the expressions of a totalitarian dictatorship, I didn't understand the lives that people were living in that time. I doubt the fate of the Iranian protestors was the same horrific end as that of Anne Frank's family, but it still differed from what had happened to us on the University of Illinois campus when we protested the Vietnam War. I had no point of reference because all I had ever known was the United States and the way of life I experienced there, which, although not perfect, was not a totalitarian dictatorship.

### The Little Prince changes lives: Barcelona 2013

My ignorance meets me as five of us sit in a circle with the participants in the culture circle, all in a line and ready to listen. My Mexican friends/colleagues Sandra, Luis, Marina, Sofia, and I had travelled 45 minutes on the metro to visit the Escola d'Adults La Verneda-Sant Marti. We had been visiting a group of scholars who are part of the Community of Research on Excellence for All (CREA) at the University of Barcelona. They had told us about this school for adults of the municipal building in La Verneda, a working class neighbourhood in southwest Barcelona. They thought we might be interested in seeing one of the classes since we were all interested in Freirean culture circles (1970). Until the late 1970s, Franco's dictatorial administration used the building for administrative offices, but with the end of his regime, it became vacant. In 1978 a community group took over the building to "set up a cultural center with all the services [they] demanded: the childcare center, the school for adults, the youth club, etc". They based their school on the premise that "education is a basic right throughout life", and they focused on providing "compensatory education for those who had not been able to attend school earlier in their lives" (Sánchez Aroca 1999, 323). The students call themselves participants, and their level of involvement is present in the democratic process by which decisions are made through egalitarian dialogue, which also forms the pedagogical foundation of emancipatory education (Sánchez-Aroca 1999; Freire 1970).

Voices echo in the large high-ceilinged room with a wooden floor on the fifth floor, where the School for Adults is located. The weak October sun shines its autumnal light through the large windows, creating a golden light filled with dust motes that cast a dreamlike quality on the room and its inhabitants. I look around the circle at a group of some 20 older adults discussing their reading assignment in this adult literacy class on *The Little Prince*. Each participant holds a well-worn notebook, open to a page towards the middle of the lined book. The students take turns reading the notes they took about the assigned chapters. This week's guiding question was, "How does reading this book relate to your own life?" The answers vary, many similar to this reply made by a man with a shock of white hair: "It helps me to understand my grandchildren. When I read this, I was able to understand some of their attitudes that seem so strange to me."

Before the class began, Bernat, the facilitator, had told us,

These participants were children when the Spanish Civil War ended in 1939. Franco established his totalitarian dictatorship, and it became illegal to speak any language but Castellano (Spanish), part of the nationalism that underscored his regime. Of course, people kept speaking Catalán in their homes, but the official language was Castellano. When Franco died in 1975, reverting back to the old familiar language was one way to free themselves from those years of repression. We usually hold the class in Catalán, which is the language many people speak at home here in Cataluña. I asked them to be sure to speak in Castellano since their visitors are all from Mexico.

I am not Mexican, but I only speak Spanish and English. During the years I taught Spanish, in the 1990s and 2000s, the textbooks always included information about the four languages spoken in Spain: Castilian, Galician, Catalán and Basque, or Castellano, Gallego, Catalán and Vasco. There was always

a sentence stating that Castellano was the official language. For many years, I didn't realise that it had been a punishable offence to speak or write in any language but Castellano under Franco's dictatorship. When Dan and I were in Montserrat in 2013, we visited the Benedictine abbey in the mountains north of Barcelona. The guide informed us that the monks had hidden many of the texts written in Catalán during the dictatorship in order to preserve their language. Now I had a chance to see the results of their preservation in person.

Unlike many classes I have observed over the years, there is no expert teacher lecturing or tossing out questions. Bernat keeps things moving fluidly, perhaps asking a general question and always waiting patiently until someone feels moved to answer. Each person holds a well-worn notebook, open to a page towards the middle of the lined book. Bernat's eyes move around the circle as he indicates with a nod the next volunteer to speak. When called on, a robust man, perhaps in his early eighties, picks up the notebook and reads the notes he had taken about the assigned reading. The participants painstakingly remember to speak Spanish, sometimes speaking in Catalán before correcting themselves. As they read from certain passages, grey, bald and dyed-black heads around the circle nod. Some of the participants seem to be translating their words from Catalán to Spanish. The intent gaze of the other participants never leaves the face of the reader who is sharing his or her thoughts and insights.

My thoughts drift back to those past conversations at Virginia Tech with Libby and Jordi, and all they had told me about his growing up in Barcelona in the years after the end of the Spanish Civil War. In 1939, at the end of the war, he was 11 years old and, like millions of other children, he had to start working to help keep food on the family table and a roof over their heads. Formal education was an unattainable luxury for the children in his family and for many families in those years when education was not available to many children. In a video interview, he described how every morning between 1939 and 1956, busses passed through Barcelona, full of people who were taken to the beach to be shot.

I bring my thoughts back to the present as the last participant shares, and Bernat invites us to ask questions. The five of us have listened with rapt attention during the entire class, and it takes a moment for us to assume the role of speaker rather than listener. I speak first, saying, "They told us that you have all been in classes here at La Verneda for about seven years, and that you didn't have a chance to learn to read and write as children. Is that the case for everyone?" Several people begin to speak at once, and then one person takes the floor, sharing a story similar to the one I had heard years ago and again last December. The participants describe lives of hard work and scarcity as they moved through those same difficult times.

I think of Jordi. I think of my grandparents who didn't learn to read and write until their later years, not because of a civil war or a totalitarian dictatorship, but because of the poverty that accompanied the lives of coal miners and farmers in the late 1800s in West Virginia. As I listen, I realise these folks are not that much older than I am, but our lives have been quite different. After the class disperses, I talk to one woman at length. She shows me her calloused hands and talks about the hard work that was her life before retirement. "But we made it, and now we've learned to read and write!" she states with a triumphant voice.

Later that evening, I tell Dan about the group. "I really want to come back to interview these people, to hear and document their stories. I want to talk to Jordi too—after all, he is the one who started me thinking about the children who survived the war and went on to experience a hard life without having the opportunity to have a formal education. I want to understand how I spent so much time studying about Spain and then studying in Spain over so many years, and I remained so unaware of how things really were."

### Thinking through the haze: 2013–2017

We return to the United States and I become consumed by the busyness that underscores university and personal life. In 2015, Libby invites Dan and me to a reception at The Inn at Virginia Tech to open an exhibition of Jordi's art in Blacksburg. Unfortunately, the reception takes place on a night when I teach, so we set up an alternate date to go see the exhibit. When we arrive at the Inn, Libby and Jordi are waiting for us with the sad news that the university decided to close the exhibit early to make way to

decorate the hall for Christmas. We decide to go to a local French bistro for an early dinner. As we eat our quiche and salad, Jordi and I spend a couple of hours talking about his growing up years in Barcelona before he left to seek his fortune in Venezuela, where he met and married Libby and continued on his path to being an artist.

“I plan to go back to Barcelona to interview people I met at the adult school at La Verneda,” I say. “I want to start by interviewing you if you would be willing, since hearing your story made me think about this for the first time.”

Jordi listens intently, and then solemnly declares, “It would be a privilege to share my story with you.”

Life becomes busy again, and before I can set up the interview, Jordi unexpectedly dies of a heart problem. I feel sad, both because of his death and because I can only imagine Libby’s loneliness at losing her life partner of many years. I also feel sad that I allowed life’s busyness to keep me from hearing and recording his story in first person. I am grateful that I heard his story while we ate at the French restaurant, and that I have access to a newspaper article about an interview with Jordi ([https://www.roanoke.com/lifestyles/artist-follows-colorful-path-to-blacksburg/article\\_5f0c7038-0bfb-5469-a8c4-3f6d680dfda0.html](https://www.roanoke.com/lifestyles/artist-follows-colorful-path-to-blacksburg/article_5f0c7038-0bfb-5469-a8c4-3f6d680dfda0.html)) and a video interview that the students of one of our colleagues conducted.

### Going back and forth: Barcelona 2017

In March 2017, we return to Barcelona for a month while I am on research leave from my university. I have been in contact with my colleagues in the Community for Research for Excellence for All (CREA) at the University of Barcelona, the group that arranged that first visit to La Verneda-Sant Marti. As we communicate, I learn that the class for adults no longer exists since all the students have either died or gone into homes for the elderly. Again, I feel sad that I missed the opportunity to hear their stories. Both of these lost opportunities urge me to start working intensely to collect stories regarding the years of the Spanish Civil War and of the years of Franco’s dictatorship. However, CREA does arrange for me to visit another class, and I gratefully accept.

Dan and I follow the same route on the metro that my Mexican colleagues and I took in 2013. This time Marta<sup>1</sup>, another former participant in the adult literacy programme, leads the group. Before class starts, I briefly explain to her why I am here. “When I visited a class with some friends several years ago, I heard the stories the people in the adult literacy class told about growing up in the years after the war ended. I wanted to hear more of their stories from that time, but Rosa, my friend at CREA, told me that class no longer exists. She thought you might be willing to let me visit your class to see if anyone would be willing to talk about life during those years.”

Marta, a tiny, energetic woman, peers at me over her glasses. “The people in this group are probably in their seventies, but some of them might be willing to talk to you. I don’t know for sure. Those were hard times.”

Before they start the literary circle about the Spanish translation of the Jane Austen reading they are discussing, Marta introduces me to the group and asks me to explain what I want to do. One woman, Montse, volunteers to talk to me, and we agree to set up a time after class.

As Montse and I agree to a time, Marta joins us. “I’ll be there too. I grew up in those years in Barcelona.”

On the following Thursday, Dan and I go to the café and set up to record and video the interviews. Montse arrives first, and we start talking immediately. She has come prepared to give me a full lecture on the Spanish Civil War. She takes her phone out of her purse and pulls up a map of Spain with large areas marked in red and others in blue. “The red shows where the Reds were—mostly Republicanos. The blue shows the Falangistas who were led by Franco after he came north from Morocco.” From my

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<sup>1</sup> The names of all participants at La Verneda are pseudonyms, as is the name of the neighbour whose conversation I include at the end of the article. The participants in Galicia were so proud of their work and their stories that they asked me to use their names.

courses in Spanish history, I understood that the term ‘Republicans’ referred to the group that supported the Spanish Second Republic, 1931–1939. My interpretation of the term operates from a false understanding that Spanish Republicans bore a resemblance to United States Republicans. During the course of interviews for this project, I often heard people talk about the Republicanos. I soon learned that the Republicans were those fighting for democratic ideals such as ‘education for all people, freedom of speech, women’s right to vote, freedom to divorce, and land reform, as the antithesis of the oppressive dictatorship and that in Barcelona the ever-changing political landscape sometimes partnered Republicanos with Anarquistas or Leninistas or Stalinistas. While I listen to Montse, however, I have not yet come to this realisation; I am still thinking of Republicans as the political party I know in the US, and I have trouble following her lecture on the Republicanos who fought for democracy against Franco’s oppressive nationalist forces. She suggests numerous movies that I need to watch, and books I need to read, to enhance my knowledge about the civil war. “The best book ever written about the Spanish Civil War was written by an Englishman and another by one of your countrymen.” She goes on to talk about the accuracy of those years as portrayed by George Orwell’s (1938) *Homage to Cataluña* and Ernest Hemingway’s (1940) *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.

Not long after, Marta arrives and joins Montse in a detailed explanation of the logistics of the war. She adds, “My father was a peasant working in the fields when Franco swept through Andalucía and took all the young men he could find to fight in his army. Those young men were simple workers without an ideology. If they didn’t go with Franco, his men shot them. Those peasants in Andalucía were his first ‘recruits’,”

Montse says, “My father joined the efforts also. He was working in Madrid at the time.”

“Were both of your fathers fighting on Franco’s side?” I ask, a bit overwhelmed with trying to keep everything straight. None of this has anything at all to do with what I learned about the war in my history textbooks.

Suddenly, both women look down, and Montse’s voice drops so low that I can barely hear her above the clanking of porcelain cups and saucers and the hiss of the espresso machine.

“There was a great silence. Silence. Nobody could discuss the topic. Even inside their homes. My mother said that whatever we heard at home, we could not repeat at school,” she whispers.

“Was it like that for you, Marta?”

Marta whispers back. “Yes. Our mother always warned us not to say anything about what side our father fought on.”

I look between them, baffled and curious. “Do you still feel that way?” I ask. “Even though Franco died 37 years ago?”

Still whispering, Montse says, “We still never know who might be listening.”

I lower my voice and ask her, “Do you mean there are still Falangistas who listen and report people today?”

She gravely studies me. “The old order isn’t dead.”

### **Galicia, Northwest Spain: March 2017**

During that same research leave, some colleagues/friends invite me to the Universidad de La Coruña to conduct a seminar. When Cata meets Dan and me at the airport, she says, “How would you like to go to a birthday party? Our friend and colleague Xosé Manuel invited us to come to a party in his hometown.”

I quickly reply, “That sounds great! What an opportunity.” I had no idea that trip would completely change the direction of the project I had begun to examine the civil war and the years that followed.

Soon Dan and I are sitting in the back seat of Cata’s car, chatting with her and Concha as we make our way along the Atlantic coast to the Portuguese border. Camposancos sits right on the border, on the Spanish side. Xosé Manuel meets us down by the docking area that looks over the water to Portugal.

We park the car, and he walks up the hill with us to the small restaurant where the party is taking place. On the way, he points to a large neglected-looking building to the left. “That’s the old Jesuit school that the Falangistas made into the concentration camp Camposancos in 1937.”

I look at him in confusion. “Concentration camp? In Spain?”

Xosé Manuel smiles at my expression. “Yes, there were about 190 concentration camps between 1936 and 1947. Over a million people passed through them, and many of those died. There were also about 250,000 disappeared people taken by the soldiers. There is no record of them. They were never heard from again. Most likely they were shot and tossed into common graves.”

As we near the restaurant where Xosé Manuel’s friends wait, he promises, “You have to come back so I can tell you all about this.”

I am speechless, then I finally say, “I didn’t even know about Guernica until I started teaching high school Spanish in the mid-1990s. Our textbooks showed Picasso’s painting. That was the first time I realised that Hitler and Mussolini had collaborated with Franco during the Spanish Civil War.”

Xosé Manuel continues to tell me about the civil war and the dictatorship that followed. As we walk and talk, I try to remember what I studied about both topics while I was a Spanish major at the university. I knew that the war happened, and that Franco established a government that lasted until his death, but that is the extent of my knowledge and my memory. I feel lost and obsessed with a desire to return to learn more.

### **Galicia, Northwest Spain: June 2017**

We return in June. Xosé Manuel takes us to meet Darina, a woman in her eighties who was a child when her parents were taken to a concentration camp. Darina has spent the last years working with a group to collect money to build a memorial to Republicans who were disappeared and whose remains were excavated when a common grave was uncovered. We stand in silence as we read the names of the many young men who lost their lives for being Republicans after Franco established a Nationalist presence in Galicia. The only official memorial of the civil war is the Valley of the Fallen, a tribute to Franco, supposedly built to honour the fallen in the civil war. Although it contains the remains of both Nationalists and Republicans, Republican prisoners were forced to construct it between the 1940s and 1958. Franco’s remains are still entombed in the basilica in the side of the hill, despite numerous court battles to move them; the family continues to win that battle, yet another piece of evidence that the old order isn’t dead. The intent of the official monument is quite different from this monument that honours those who were killed and left in a common grave with no indication of their identities.

Next Xosé Manuel takes us to visit Mario Rodríguez, Galicia’s artist treasure. We enter his centuries-old studio. Dark and intimate, a floor-to-ceiling panorama of his paintings covers all the walls, each reflecting the style of the artist who influenced that particular work. A big open fireplace fills one wall, emanating a faint smell of years of smoke. A spider web gleams in the hazy light that enters through a small, dust-covered window near the low ceiling. In his late eighties, Mario stands in front of the paintings that formed part of the retrospective of his work at an exhibition. He tells us about his father being executed by Franco as he and his troops made their way across Galicia. A vivid storyteller, he brings to life those years of intrigue and disruption. I go away with more stories to digest.

When we return in January 2018, Xosé Manuel meets us with the sad news that Mario died recently. He takes us to the same cemetery where Darina spearheaded a community effort to erect a memorial to the Republican fallen. As we stand before his large family tomb, still covered in flowers of homage, Xosé Manuel tells us that we did the last interview that Mario ever gave. That generation is rapidly disappearing, taking with them their vivid personal memories of a war that divided a country.

The interviews continue, and the thread continues to unravel.

## Memory or reality or time of life

In my memory of *Iberia*, Michener (1968) wrote objectively about Franco, focusing on the facts concerning his victory and the government he established. When I pull out the book to check on my memory, I see that on the back cover of the book, Michener includes a schematic of the ‘Rulers of Spain’. He names Generalísimo Francisco Franco under the category of the ‘Second Dictatorship’. The back cover includes a timeline of ‘The Rulers of Spain’, and the next-to-last section has this description: “In 1931 a popular revolution ended monarchical rule and Alfonso XIII went voluntarily into exile.” Michener states that he was glad he hadn’t joined up during the Spanish Civil War because the Communists had taken over the Republicans who were fighting against Franco’s Falangists, a statement I later came to question.

He talks about how newspapers avoided politics, but he also includes anecdotes in which the people in the street ridicule Franco, or they comment that things were better under Franco even though it was impossible to earn enough. He refers to pro-Franco and anti-Franco. He refers to the silence people kept when discussing what would happen after Franco was gone. In the many interviews that shaped the book, he discusses the “three legs of the oligarchic stool” (Michener 1968, 391): the Church, the army, and the landed families. He includes a number of interviews with people, both clergy and lay, who talk about the control the Church had over people.

He also talks about the growth of tourism, which increased exponentially between 1951 and 1966. Michener never refers to a time of repression, other than by presenting the contradictions that exist between what was created for public consumption and the informal conversation that occurred among people in the privacy of their own homes or gathering places. At one point he says, in reference to a conversation he had with some students who were involved in student riots in Cataluña, “I suppose that if in Franco’s Spain I were to betray the individuals who talked with me, they would also be in some kind of trouble, but of a much lesser degree.” He also speaks of other situations in which people are beginning to radicalise in recognition of the coming end of the Franco reign. All of this causes me to question the conversation I had with Marta and Montse at the adult school in 2013, and the many other conversations I had in both Cataluña and Galicia regarding the number of Franco supporters who still hold high offices in what they refer to as the ‘Madrid government’. There seems to be no clear answer; it all depends on the speaker’s perspective.

As I go back and re-read Michener’s text and compare it with the stories I have heard, I realise there is not as much discrepancy as I first believed. I think about my growing up in the US, and the way all my family and my national history shaped my thinking. Granted, we criticised the government, and even protested against it, but no one would take us to prison or shoot us. No one was disappeared. I have come to terms with the policies that shaped my perspectives and lifestyle and contrasted them with those I encountered in Spain. We could protest physically or verbally. We could write radical missives, all without fear of repercussions from the government. In other words, I had no personal knowledge of living under a totalitarian government that controlled my public and private lives. I had no idea of what totalitarianism even was beyond what I read in my history books that presented the official story. When I read about the complexities that shaped modern-day Spain, the Spain of the late sixties, I read the book as I wanted to read it, or as I only could have read it at the time—as a tourist guide for my upcoming trip to Spain. The political history came alive for me only after I experienced it vicariously, hearing other people’s stories about those years and how they affected their families and their own lives.

## Franco and my neighbourhood

In our neighbourhood at home in the US, we decide to attend a summer get-together with our neighbours at the common clubhouse. As I make my way through the French doors that lead out to the pool and the tables set up around the perimeter, I concentrate on balancing my paper plate and my glass of wine. I look around for an empty spot at a table, and before I find one, my neighbour Jenny comes up and says, “Come over here. There’s someone I want you to meet.”

She leads me to a table at the far edge of the pool and introduces me to Pilar. “Pilar,” she says, “this is Kris, the one I told you about who is doing research in Spain. Kris, Pilar is moving into the Townes as soon as her house is finished. She’s from Spain.”

“Encantada,” I say. A small slender fair-skinned woman, about my age, with dark hair and dark eyes, looks up at me. Ignoring my greeting in Spanish, she offers a hand and says, “Pleased to meet you”.

Pointing to two chairs by Pilar, Jenny says, “Let’s sit here. Then you two can talk.”

We chat briefly about our neighbourhood and the Townes, a small community of about 75 patio homes, some still under construction. Then I ask, “Where are you from in Spain?”

“Madrid,” she answers. “What is your work in Spain?”

I explain that I studied in Spain in 1969 and 1970 as a graduate student. I talk about having no idea that a dictatorship existed, that I just saw it as a beautiful country with lots of sunshine, flamenco dancers, guitar music and *sangría*.

“I’m writing a book about my realisation that a totalitarian dictatorship was in place at the time. I’m thinking how easy it is to believe what media want us to believe. At the time I was there, Spain was trying very hard to portray a vision of the perfect vacation place for sun-seekers. I’m interviewing people who lived through those years in Spain and who also had parents who lived during the Civil War.”

She straightens in her chair, no longer slouching with that relaxed European posture that I envy. “Whom are you interviewing?” she asks.

“I’ve focused my work in Cataluña and Galicia,” I answer. “I have colleagues and friends in both places who’ve led me to people who want to talk about those years. I’m not writing about the war or the dictatorship per se, but rather about people who experienced those years.”

“You need to find other people in other places to talk to. All those people in Cataluña and Galicia are crazy. They’re bad people who don’t know anything. Those Republicanos executed priests.”

As her face contorts in anger, she continues, “Franco was a good man and a good leader. Anyone who says anything different just doesn’t know.”

I let my mind wander back to the concentration camp Xosé Manuel took us to tour and the monument Darina had built in the cemetery to commemorate the bodies finally identified in the mass grave in Galicia in the small town bordering Portugal. I think about the half million plus people who passed through the concentration camps throughout Spain, with more than half of the people dying. I remember Xosé Manuel telling us about the 250,000 disappeared people during the Civil War and the years of the dictatorship and who have never been found in the 43 years following Franco’s death. I think of the legacy of this ‘good man’ and ‘good leader’ and question what shapes our perspectives. Pilar does cause me to wonder whether the senseless executions and disappearances also included any Falangistas.

As soon as there is a break in the conversation, I excuse myself to go find dessert. I do not go back outside. I will look for the next thread in Spain when I talk with Montse, a woman about my age who lives north of Barcelona in a small town close to the Pyrenees. When we last talked, she made a comment I want to pursue: “I grew up in those years, and I just never thought about it. It was just how life was. After talking to you, I realise there was a lot of depravation going on, and I didn’t realise it.” Maybe I wasn’t just clueless. Maybe I was just living life as it presented itself to me.

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