

Asociación para la recuperación de la memoria histórica





Constelación
de los Comunes

Date
7 de diciembre, 2023

Location
Madrid

Person interviewed
Emilio Silva Barreras

Interviewer
Palmar Álvarez-Blanco

Translated by
Loren Friedman

Website
memoriahistorica.org.es/



Who are you and from where are you talking to us?

I am Emilio Silva Barrera, grandson of a victim of the dictatorship's repression in a village in the Northeast of Spain, in the region of Bierzo. I'm part of an association called Association for the Recuperation of Historical Memory, which for years has been dedicated to looking for unbound victims of this same repression. We are in Madrid, where I live.

How are you involved with the Asociación por la Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica (ARMH)?

I am the president, founder, and a family member of one of the disappeared, which is really why I'm here.

When and where was the ARMH born?

The idea was really born 23 years ago in an exhumation on the 21st of October of the year 2000 and was registered in the Ministry of the Interior in Madrid in the beginning of December 2000.

Who founded the ARMH?

Santiago Macías, Palma Granados, and Jorge Franco.

What Links the founders of the ARMH?

The exhumation of the unmarked grave in Priaranza del Bierzo.

How was the association legally incorporated during its founding?

It's an association established at a state level in the National Register of Associations, something slightly paradoxical in Spain, because when you do this, you do so via the police as if you were suspected of something for wanting to organize yourself in a collective way, and we are an association. Initially, the law required us to have four people. The first, which we signed in the first document, to have our normal meetings and members.

Do you have hired staff?

We have four people on staff and occasionally more when we are doing exhumations, which is when we do all sorts of things.

I recently, just before this interview started, was whatsapping with a man who the other day informed me at a book talk that he has a friend in Argentina that wants to apply for Spanish citizenship as the descendent of



an exile. So, she needs to prove the exile, she needs to prove the political persecution. The government has created a law that allows for this but it has not created any institution that helps people to find this documentation. These are things we do.

Economically speaking, how do you sustain all of your activity?

It is sustained by its members of which we have some 3000. The minimum fee is 36 €, and then we have some donors, for example, a Norwegian electricians' union, that for ten years has been giving us an annual donation of 12-14,000 €. Then people show up, let's see, who donate 1,000 €, and we don't know who they are because they became a member through the website and then you get to know them that way. The majority aren't family members of disappeared people, they're not the families we have helped. I think that this defines situations like fear very well. We have helped, over 23 years, thousands and thousands of people. Someone's family member was disappeared. Economically speaking, it won't cost them a thing this search, and normally, it's like they leave their private lives, resolve this problem, and return to their private lives. So most of them are people who sympathize with us from all over the state, some expats as well. There are some Spaniards who live abroad and seem to me like very humanitarian people. Then I get to know them in an assembly or traveling and they present themselves just like members. This is the profile, people who sympathize with us.

Why was the name ARMH chosen?

We were in a bar next to the Ministry of the Interior. We had 20 or 30 names, crossed a few off and we ended up with this. We liked the recuperation aspect and the term "historical memory" because we defend it with tooth and nail.

In your book, *Agujeros en el silencio. Renglones de memoria contra la impunidad del franquismo (2000-2020)* [Shortcomings in Silence. Line of memory against the impunity of Francoism] you highlight and denounce the strategies of power for hiding, justifying, and consolidating political, legal, and social impunity for the crimes committed during the Spanish dictatorship. What does this impunity refer to and how was it constructed?

The term "impunity" usually is usually involved in the legal, so it's someone who has committed a serious offense and is protected by a law or member of the elite or aspect of the state and who is not going to have to comply or take any responsibility for having committed it. The first impunity won by the dictatorship's elite after the death of Franco is the judiciary and with this almost politics as well. In 1977 the first elections were held. The only parties allowed to participate were those that had accepted the amnesty and the monarchy. Parties like Izquierda Republicana [Republican Left], which had government president in 1936, which my grandmother voted for, which my grandfather had been actively involved in, so in 1977 my grandmother couldn't find the Izquierda Republicana ballot because someone made sure that those who carried this scarlet letter in their identity couldn't continue to debate the structure of the state. Martín Villa said in his official statements not to include them, they were contrary to the form of the state. This parliament, in which there is a left that has accepted the amnesty and that has accepted the monarchy, the first thing it does before even drafting the regulations of a democratic parliament is to get into the amnesty law. There was such a rush that this was left tied up, no? So, the process for a law is that the Communist Party presents a draft, then the socialist Party, then the Basque and Catalan nationalists. None of these drafts speaks of impunity for the Francoists. In early

October 1977, Unión Centro Democrático, which is this group founded by a young man who hadn't fought in the war that created the Francoist right to enter into democracy as if they were not there. He registers his amnesty law and all those who had presented a project before vote for the UCD bill, whose second article is shielding this amnesty to protect the Francoist elite. Political impunity was agreed to in a corridor, so to speak.

Just yesterday, one of the founders of the constitution, Miquel Roca, was talking about how when he first sat down to draft the constitution of 1978 Fraga scared him and later cried on the day he died. They belong to groups in power who shared interests and at first were scared for their interests and later realized that they could share these interests. What's missing for me is the social, what are people going to do? Because one thing is what happens in elections, in parliament, in the courts and another is what the people actually do. And so I think memory worked a lot in this area. The Second Republic arrived in Spain without a single shot after municipal elections where towns, seeing that in larger cities republicans have won, first in Éibar and then in Sahagún de Campos, take a republican flag out to the balcony and proclaim that Spain is a republic. Seeing what had happened, maybe in the Soviet Union and surely trying to safeguard all his corrupt businesses, which he had in droves, King Alfonso XIII decided to leave the country.

Here we are in 1978, we approve a constitution and a Socialist Party that supports all the pacts made with the elites is coming to power. It won't give the King any trouble. If this socialist victory makes people, as it did in '31, for example, like Mr. Pamparacuatro in Sahagún de Campos, decide that we are going to change the model of the State and the best for this is a vaccine, right? And this is how I interpret the 23F coup. A grand televised scare, because if it had not been a coup that had had no impact and even including the time that they had said that it takes for the King to write a speech. Because the journalist Pedro Erquicia leaves from the Prado

Del Rey on his way to Palacio de la Zarzuela to interview and hours pass and I understand that if you want to give people a scare, what you have to leave the people to stew in the fear, it may be that you have to let the fright sink in and now you, who has given the scare are the same person who has produced it. You're the guy who's gonna save everyone from the big-bad-wolf. And this is how the juancarlist monarchy constructed its legitimacy and social impunity. And for many years, with this scare no one asked practically anything of the past.

Parallel to this political, juridical, and social impunity a pact of silence is agreed to that continues into our present. What factors protect this silence?

There's a part that you could say is fear. I've experienced it in my family, with my Grandmother. I imagine that, to my Grandmother, seeing the images of the coup was like dying from fear all over again. But the good thing about the coup here is that it said a lot. "How clumsy are the Guardia Civil that they don't even know how to disconnect a TV camera? Look how dim they are." But if we apply this to the theory of Pavlov's Dog and condition response... my grandma saw these images for the first time in 1981. They put them back on the only news program in Spain at the time in February of 1982, then again in 1983, and they continue reminding that these people were still around.

We could say that in a democracy, silence can act as the voice of the perpetrators. For example, there are people who don't speak out of fear. There are others

who don't speak because they have to whitewash their reputation. They have interests in continuing to be the elites of this country in all contexts because they were occupying all of them, cultural, academic, educational, political, and they need for the witnesses, those who know, to be quiet. The coup served this purpose and the amnesty law doesn't affect the Francoists or, most often than not, the idea the people have of the Francoists. Juan Carlos de Borbón was the head of a dictatorial state two times, because the actual head, who was the dictator Francisco Franco, had fallen ill. No one elected him. The citizenry never elected him to be head of state. If an investigation was opened into Francoism he would also be sprinkled throughout. Silence normally has a beneficiary and a victim, and in this case it harms the victims and benefits the executioners.

And it's not just the witnesses' voices. There were media outlets during the transition that did very impactful things. The magazine *Interviú* is a review that not only disrobed women, but disrobed Francoism too. In fact, in one of the largest media turns, I would say in the history of the Spanish transition, is when the director of *Interviú*, Solís, is dismissed. You read *Interviú* articles from the 70's and the antifascist language is brutally shocking. So, there they reported on mass graves and they discussed a ton of things having to do with Francoism, its crimes. The silence has also been a great media silence that's remained until today in many ways. For example, the national library doesn't have the publication *Arriba* digitized. It's a publication within the public domain therefore you don't have to negotiate the rights to put it on the internet, as they have hundreds and hundreds of publications in their digital newspaper library. But it was a publication managed by father Juan Luis Cebrián, and in which, in the final years of the 60's and 70's, we would see many people who later have made a career perfectly portrayed within the dictatorship. From the association, we presented a complaint via twitter to the National Library and a ton of archivers called us paranoid but I don't believe in coincidences. Now, I have found that *Arriba* is partly digitized in the newspaper library of Madrid, but there is a gap between 1966 and 1974. It was in these years when Juan Carlos de Borbón was acting head of state, that newspaper editors were also news editors for Francoist television. All of this, with a click and a web browser, and we would enter his name. Or Fernando Ónega, who is a journalist who is still working, who was an editor, press officer of the movement in Galicia, who was its director of *Arriba* and who wrote things that, evidently, he no longer wants us to see. But it's not like that here, even more so when public television, for example, has never done anything to recount to this country what has happened.

Who benefits from the prolongation of this historical silence and situation of impunity?

The majority of the shooters and the murderers are dead. Now, these people don't need the benefits of impunity. But there still are large beneficiaries today, no? There are descendents with fortunes made at the end of a pistol. For example, the change in government ends. And in this government there was a minister of health that went largely unnoticed who has a very significant last name which is Miñones. He is the family member of a republican deputy from Coruña named Pepe Miñones, who was a lawyer with a lot of money, a lot of businesses. He was detained at the beginning of the coup in Galicia. There was no war there, they halted it. His family was obligated to pay 1 million pesetas of the time, 6.000 €, which was a fortune, with the idea that they'd free him. However, they took him for a day to Campo de La Rata, which is where they shot the majority of the people from Coruña, and they

murdered him. This man was the head of a company which was called Eléctricas de Galicia, the largest electric company in Galicia. Now it is a company called Naturgy. There are many more stories like this. Thus, it is better to speak of impunities. But there are many beneficiaries. There have been many people in our political lives who have been "children of." And here there has always been the myth that, when PP or the UCD or PSOE and PP governed, we were not ruled by the children of Francoists, who were fundamentally the only ones going to university in the 40's and 50's. So now, what all these people want is for the generation of children, of the direct inheritors, to die, because then you already create a firewall, that this generation has died without speaking, that the forces have remained where they left them in '78 because some historian went to the military archive to tell us what the dictatorship was.

From your point of view and in light of all the testimonies that the ARMH has collected, would you say that behind the ideological conflict that distinguishes "the two Spains," there is a class struggle?

Wars have always been fought for interests that can later have other symbolic representations. But, behind them there are always economic interests. For me there is a book, I would say one of the best, for interpreting the war: La columna de la muerte by Francisco Espinosa Maestre, which precisely explains how some officers, who went up with Franco's army through Extremadura, and who then went to liberate the Alcazar of Toledo, some of those officers were sons of landowners from Extremadura and went "cleaning" the their parents' villages of day laborers, trade unionists, people who had fought for rights, who had occupied land, who had wanted another distribution of wealth, etcetera. Then they can talk about saving Spain, about the Catholic Church, about when we were an empire, etcetera. But really those who set this in motion, and directly among them someone who spent a lot of money doing so, Juan March, of Banca March, who is one of them. These are economic interests, no? Then there will be other people who maybe were not involved with those interests but fought thinking that they were not fighting for those interests, which is quite common, to use other people. What for? So a day laborer who has put on a blue shirt and has started killing people is defending my interests while I am in my farm waiting, listening to the radio to see what happens with the war.

How does the ARMH respond to statements such as "crimes were committed on both sides" or "reparations must occur for both sides"?

The people don't do this. Last October, on the 31st, which, curiously, will be the day of the victims of Francoism, Pedro Sanchez gave out some certificates, which is another very curious symptom. The Spanish Parliament celebrates on June 27 the Day of the Victims of Terrorism. The Spanish Senate celebrates on January 27 the Day of Remembrance of the Victims of the Holocaust and the Day of the Victims of Francoism. They do this in an auditorium. That also explains many things. But there Pedro Sanchez handed out diplomas to both sides, participating in a big lie, because the people who died from the "Marxist violence," as Franco called it, were immensely repaired with scholarships, with civil servant positions for their whole lives. Until the 1970s, the descendants of former dead, captives or mutilated had extra points on competitive examinations. They were favored by the State. They were given tobacco shops, Lottery

stalls. Then the problem is when one makes the reading, which is the same that José Bono did when he was Minister of Defense. He paraded together on October 12 a member of the Blue Division and a member of the nine that liberated Paris from the Nazis, equating them at the same level when it was nonsense. But, Bono is another son of a Francoist mayor. Perfectly, by that logic he wants to create that image.

The problem here is ignorance. It is fighting ignorance. A few days ago, the Council of Europe published a report that has created an observatory on how history is taught in European countries. And Spain has been hit from all sides, because what the report says is that in Spain there are active policies to prevent young people from knowing their history. The result of “the two sides” argument then, has everything to do with that education. Nobody would go to the Basque Country to talk about the two sides and take a member of ETA who died preparing a bomb and a victim of it and pay homage to them. Here that has been preserved, because it is precisely that which whitens the image of the Francoists. Just yesterday, which was the anniversary of the Constitution, I went to the website of Congress and then I am reading how the website of the Congress of Deputies tells the history of the Constitution, it does not call what there was before dictatorship. It calls it the previous regime and then it says that the fundamental laws of the movement allowed reforms, which is almost saying that when they were approved the Franco regime was already on the verge of creating democracy. This is an insult to all those who suffered at the hands of the dictatorship. And this is in the year 2023. Right now someone puts “Constitución 1978 congreso. es” in Google and finds a version that tries to whitewash Juan Carlos de Borbón fundamentally, who swore at the beginning, arm raised high [in the fascist salute]. And even the sides, all that language that equates coup plotters with those who were faced with a coup, right? But for that there has to be an education, which is where a society that cares and takes care of these things is formed. For now there is none.

The origin of ARMH is inevitably linked to your family history and your grandfather, Emilio Silva Faba, who died in 1936. Who was your grandfather? Did he die fighting in the war or was he killed?

Truthfully, my grandfather was never in a war. That's another trick. Spreading the war across the whole country. Many people, like my grandfather, never saw two trenches where people were shot, because my grandfather lived in El Bierzo. Commander Manso arrived on July 20 from Galicia. He was conquering the road from La Coruña to the mountains of Madrid. And already the first day someone was waiting for him, because the first day he arrived in Villafranca del Bierzo, where my grandfather was, he tried to have my grandfather arrested. Someone was at the entrance of the town saying, “You have to catch this guy.” I say that because that is the kind of improvised coup that is told many times. My grandfather was pulled out of a truck by a very conservative neighbor with whom he got along very well. Otherwise, he would have gone to what is today the Parador de San Marcos in Leon. So, he was not in any war. Politically, he was a member of the Republican Left. He had no visible political activity in his town. And when he was arrested the coup had lasted for three months and what he did was to bleed money, to buy his death, because the Falange left him a little piece of paper every few days saying that he had to deliver a certain amount of money, that he had three days to do so and that the money was to help the Falange militias, who were doing so much good for the town, which are the militias that killed him. This account of the war has been massive, invasive and very much worked by the Spanish right wing. My grandfather was in his town, the Town Hall, occupied by a group of Falangists and he had to leave. People, someone told him to leave, but

the poor guy never thought that what happened to him would actually happen.

You have said in other interviews that you came across the story of your grandfather's murder almost by chance while you were researching republican guerrillas in El Bierzo. This process is recounted in the book *Las Fosas de Franco*. Can you tell us how you came across the family story?

I was working in a big French publishing house and had become a father, and I left my job in the summer of 1999 to write a novel. So it wasn't my grandfather's story, but it took place in the area where he lived. I would go there very early on Sundays. It was a four-hour drive there and four hours back. I would leave early in the morning, do six interviews and go home. And one of those Sundays I had a meeting with Arsenio Marcos, a Communist Party militant arrested by Franco's police in 1962. He was a childhood friend of my father's. We went to a small village called Cabañas Raras, where there were several anti-Franco guerrilla fighters, which was the subject that interested me the most. And in the afternoon we had an appointment with another man who was going to tell me a story about the guerrilla in a small village called Vega de Brañas. It is on the way up from León to Lugo and we were having lunch. It was a week before the elections that Aznar won with an absolute majority and we were watching the TV commenting on the news. The phone rang and this friend called Arsenio to tell him that he had a family problem and that he could not come and that he was going to write me a letter with everything he wanted to tell me.

If that man had not had that family problem, I would not be sitting here because I would have gone with him. I questioned Arsenio about other things. My grandfather ended up coming up in the conversation and he told me that he knew more or less where it was, that it wasn't very far. We went there and there was a fellow from that town in El Bierzo, who was walking next to where the grave was. I asked him. They showed me the three walnut trees that were in a ditch and he told me that the grave was there. And super thanks to Arsenio. Because on the road where my grandfather was going, when the truck parked in a ditch there was a car with four Falange pistol men behind it, who were the ones who were going to kill them. There are two people who jump out of the truck at night and get away from the lights of the car as best they can. The Falange gunmen come out, shoot them at point-blank range, shoot into the darkness and kill one. But the other one is saved and spends the whole night fleeing, eventually destroyed because he went at night, falling into whatever he fell into and by day he recognizes in the distance some mountains, they were 30-odd kilometers away from his village, but he recognizes a mountain that is close to his village and walks there to be helped by his best friend. This man's name was Leopoldo Moreira, he was assassinated ten months later by the same Falangists who were also furious with him because he had escaped from them. But those ten months he told him some people, who had been the murderers where he had been and the first person he went to look for help was the older brother of Arsenio Marcos, since there was, let's say, a thread to pull.

Finally on October 21, 2000, once the location of the mass grave was determined, the remains of your grandfather were exhumed. What steps did your family have to take to carry out the exhumation?

I called my father immediately. I said, "Look, I'm over here," then he turned his head. During my four hours in the car, with my head racing, we started to make arrangements, to search with an uncle of mine, to see if we knew who was with him,

because we didn't know. They had told us 13, 14, 15 bodies and we did not know who they were. We thought they were coming from the same place, but we didn't understand why they had taken us so far away, because they had to go 33 kilometers. But that was because they went to pick up another person on the way. A sister of mine, who worked as a civil servant in the Ministry of Health, started to look for administrative procedures, she went to the Ministry, to the Junta de Castilla León, to the Diputación de León, to see that we notified the Guardia Civil when we were going to exhume it, to the court, to the Archive of Ferrol, and actually the permission we needed was from the owner of the property, they were on private land, and on the other hand, a sanitary police permit given by the town councils, and the mayor of that town did not even know what that competence was because nobody had ever asked him for it.

It's kind of a bureaucratic residue of epidemics. If someone suddenly went into an epidemic, a lot of people all at once and someone needed the same body to process an inheritance or whatever. So that permit had to certify that the exhumation could not open another problem of public health or sanitary policy. The mayor didn't even know about it. My sister found out in the end, after going around and I told the mayor. The mayor has a municipal advisory service in the Provincial Council and they explain to him that there are two lines, because obviously those 64 years later he had nothing to pass on. Administratively it was like that. We had four names when we started, we have had seven, there are six, there is even a one-armed man that we thought, well, when it is known that there is a one-armed man they are going to say now this one is not from there or they do not have a family and we have not heard of him, no? Administratively, precisely that is one of the reasons why we created the association, because we already knew the method, so to speak, right? It was nothing. We imagined it to be much more complicated than it was. We went round and round in administrations that ended up having nothing to do with it.

How much does an exhumation cost?

I don't remember. The forensic experts, archaeologists and others were volunteers. My father and one of his sisters paid for all the food, dinner, hotels, expenses. But I don't know. We never did the math.

Should the Spanish government (regardless of the political party in power) pay for the exhumations process?

Of course. In no case should it have to be up to the families. Tomorrow there is an attack and the families have to go to investigate it, because it is not only the exhumation, it is the investigation? And many times the families are confronted with people who tell many lies in these towns, right? We have had a case about a year ago in Villadangos del Páramo, where for many years relatives of a group of 70-odd people who were murdered there have gone, each one on their own, hearing lies, bits of truths and piecing together the puzzle. They did this up until they got together and we were going to do the exhumation, and the mayor pulled a neighborhood referendum out of his sleeve. He did not stop when he could not stop because the people said so, and the people voted no. But behind that there is a terrible thing and it is that if two policemen from the Spanish police had gone to that town with their police card and interviewed the six who know, in three hours they would have found out what the families needed 17 years to ascertain. Literally. It is as simple as that. It is easy to send the police 4000 kilometers to Ukraine, but 400 kilometers from Madrid is very complicated. It's expensive, but there are relatives who have to hear insults, contempt during the whole

process because the State omits its duty and says “this is yours, it is your problem, isn't it?” In fact, the 2007 Law of Memory repeated on several occasions something that no other law for victims of terrorism says. Zapatero's law of memory said that this memory is personal and family. That is, it is a matter for you and your family.

How many mass graves have been identified in Spain?

It is very difficult to say right now, because the landscape is very complex. There are many associations, there are companies collaborating with institutions. There must be close to 1,400. We will never know how many there are. That is impossible. We constantly receive information from someone who notifies us or we have made exhumations that have not been in any list because they suddenly appear. There may be 4000, or there may be more.

What happens when a mass grave is located on private property and the owner refuses to allow the exhumation?

We have only had one very curious case, because many right-wing media outlets during the Zapatero years, some newspapers like La Razón, talked all the time about the “memory business.” We have only had one very curious case, because many right-wing media during the Zapatero years, some newspapers like La Razón, talked all the time about this “memory” business. We had a case in Salamanca where we were looking for a grave and the woman, the owner, said that she wanted her part of the business. So she asked us for 3,000 €. Then it was settled. In general, nobody wants to have a grave on a property. Even someone who is against or for what has happened to those in the grave. But nobody wants to have that on a property. I think this is the reason, because that has not been a problem for us. We have more problems with fear, for example, which still exists. We have been to a town called Los Cerralbos twice in the province of Toledo. There are people who tell us that they know exactly where the grave is. It is a huge estate of a landowner and they don't tell us because they don't want problems. Normally with the landowners we have not had any problems.

Is there a census of mass graves and missing persons?

The closest thing that exists to a census was the attempted investigation made by the Audiencia Nacional in 2008. This produced a list of 114,226 people. But that list is from 2008, 15 years ago. We have found plenty of graves that were not there. We have received information of many disappeared people that were not there. During the transition, tons of documents were burned. They even used bakeries to burn city hall documents. There are many things that we will never know.

Are there other groups or associations trying to identify the whereabouts of these graves?

There are them in many places. We are the only ones who don't ask for grants to do it, but there are. There are associations that are essentially archaeological companies that, in order to manage money, need to find relatives who want to ask for a grant. There are quite a few, I don't know exactly, but each autonomous community usually has its own team, and so on.

You have experienced an exhumation firsthand, what does it mean for the family of a missing person to finally find the remains of their relative?

On the one hand, there are very emotional elements. In fact, I would say that even the movement for memory brings families together. I am in a group of some relatives from Villadangos that I don't know how many of us are on whatsapp and they are getting to know cousins they didn't know and suddenly this week they have added two more cousins to the group. They are tracking them down because sometimes the shockwave of these crimes has broken up families, right? They've fled, every man for himself. Or somebody thinks, "I want to create another autobiography and I have to separate myself from this so it doesn't look like I was one of the Reds." And so there is this very emotional part. When my grandfather's grave was exhumed his six children were still alive, five were there. The one who lives in Venezuela did not come, he is the only one who is alive today, but for them it was very important.

It does not repair anything of their lives, so to say. But obviously the symbolic is very important, so for them to be able to bury their father with their mother, which was my grandmother's wish. My grandmother, some years before her death, many years after her husband had been murdered, bought a new mausoleum in the cemetery of her town and put my grandfather's surname Familia Silva Faba at the top. The day my grandfather was buried, we made a stop at the house where he lived in Villafranca and then we entered the village four kilometers away in the middle of the Camino de Santiago, where he was originally from. For my father, for his sisters and brothers it was very powerful. And for me, when the graves appeared, it was a very moving moment because there was almost no soil left to look at. Two days had passed and in that little piece of land still lived the man, Francisco Cubero, who at 17 years old was forced by the Falangists to bury them here, and I knew it's always, more or less here. And the last day, it seemed that maybe the road had taken them away, I had gone to look for another testimony, helping this man in desperation and when I'm coming back someone would signal to me, "Run, run!" well I double park and go running and at that moment the operator of the bulldozer, that pit had been made 64 years before. But it takes more than 100 years for the soil to be compacted again. So he, when he put the scoop in there, he said "Here's something". Then the archaeologist said "stop, take it out". He pulled it out slowly. The archaeologist started with a trowel to move the soil aside and a boot appeared and I remembered my grandmother. A logical thing to do. My grandmother had died two years and seven months earlier. If she could have lived through that, then I thought of my grandmother. Then you go on, you even write a speech about it. They can still be found, let's see if it's them, etc.

But for me, the first impact was to think of my grandmother and my father. We have a photo of her, in February 1936, in a political rally for Azaña on the road from Coruña to Villafranca del Bierzo and there is a demonstration that goes out to welcome Azaña. My father was carrying a banner that said "We want the school group ¡Viva Azaña!" And my father is nine years old and eight months after carrying that banner in his hand, he leaves the school where he was studying and never enters again. So everything that he took in front of him is part of me. The other day I heard a phrase, "Before I was you, who were you?" And someone answered "my parents." Well, I was my parents. So this is not a memory, this is me, so to speak.

In 2007, the Spanish Senate passed a Historical Memory law. Isn't it strange that a law has to be passed in order to make "memory?"

We organized a very powerful concert on June 25, 2004. Very powerful because thousands and thousands of people came and, let's say, a great part of the symbolic capital of the Spanish left passed through the stage. For us it was like a demonstration of strength, that we are not only from Bierzo, buses came from Asturias, from Andalusia, from Catalonia, from Valencia. Republican octogenarians came from a lot of places. It was very impressive. 15 days later, Zapatero announces that he is going to create a commission to study the victims of the dictatorship and the war. Always the same lot. We have a meeting. It was the only time I have been to the Moncloa Palace not to go to the Archive to work as a journalist. With these issues in mind we had a meeting in December 2004.

And what we were told at the end of the meeting was that in four months the law will be in the Boletín Oficial del Estado, sorry, in three months, January, February, March. And instead of three months, it took three years. There were several problems. One, that the person responsible for the law within the Government, María Teresa Fernández de la Vega, was the daughter of a man decorated twice by Franco. She has enjoyed a lot of wealth with illicit origins. Among that patrimony, some electric energy companies that she sold five or six years ago and she was responsible for the law. In an act of propaganda in the year 2004, in the fall of 2004 the Foreign Correspondents Association gave us an award and who chooses to give us the award in front of all the correspondents - María Teresa Fernández de la Vega. She does her thing there. But something happened inside and I think it has to do with maybe a struggle. There were people who wanted to go a little further and others who did not. What I have found is that there is a report by a State lawyer that talks precisely about the properties, and about the problems of legal and economic insecurity that can be caused if they go all out on the subject.

And that is the argument or the instrument used by certain people in the Government to make the law in this way. They are all responsible, but in the end it is a law that was not approved three months before the general elections. It is not by chance that it speaks several times of personal and family memory, that it says that it is going to make things easier for the relatives of the disappeared. And I do not know if it is that an archaeologist passes by the square or a terrace of a bar and they move his chair aside to make things easier for him. There is no commitment to anything. In fact, when we were awarded the correspondents prize, we asked María Teresa Fernández de la Vega about the law and about ours, so to speak, and we told her that it was easy to create an organism and she did it with a face like this. The first report made public on the 2007 Law was made public on July 28, 2006. If you covered the seal and showed it to the Minister of the Presidency, he did not know what country that report was talking about. It did not mention Franco's dictatorship, it did not mention the dictator. It is a generic thing. And if you cut out that shield, you take that report and you don't even know where they are talking about. That report is precisely what made a group of associations decide to go to the National Court.

When we see that the political response is going to be hyper milktoast, we're going to the courts. We had already gone to the courts. I filed the first exhumation complaint in July 2002. There was a judge who opened proceedings, took DNA samples, she was very young, she had just arrived. Then, years later, another one of these things happened and she did nothing. And she learned what she had to learn. But that was the decision. The text of the law uses a PSOE rapporteur, who is a professor at the Political Faculty, Andrés Torres Mora. And three days before they debate the law in Congress, Andres Torres Mora is in the Vatican because they are beatifying

400 martyrs of the Civil War and some uncles of his. He is like a man who carries the two Spains inside him, isn't he? Then suddenly this man appears to be in PSOE, the one who is going to defend the law, because he has those two Spains inside. And the text did not really get into anything, it did not get into summary trials.

The responsibility of the exhumations has created a great trap for many city councils, removing streets or monuments to Francoists, but to leave in the law a subjective criterion like how much of a Francoist was Millán Astray? Well, he did not kill anyone with a gun, because a judge from Madrid came and gave the street name back to him. So they have to do things like that. A city council has the competence to put whatever name it wants on a street. But the trap has been to use the historical memory law because it is where they have left an open flank, being the judiciary as in this country, it should not be very difficult to find a judge you can denounce as having removed Francoist street. "He was not a criminal. He did not shoot anyone in the back of the head with his pistol. Mr. Millán Astray was involved in the coup, but he really wasn't." That trap is in the law. The local government in Oviedo, I think in the end four times, has moved the streets precisely because of that. The law was "let's do something, but do nothing." And then I always have the idea that the local governments think that we are not going to accelerate this so that they can entertain themselves with this issue, right? Because if tomorrow they will really create an organization to search for the disappeared and I don't know, then maybe we will come up with another one of these issues. It would be better for them to be here for years. And if this law had been committed to the issue of the missing persons, it would already be 16 years old. Now at the end of December, the issue would be almost solved.

On September 15, 2020, the socialist government of Pedro Sánchez proposed a draft bill called the Law of Democratic Memory. In 2022 this bill becomes a Law, why draft this second law?

There is a shift in language. Everyone is using historical memory and democratic memory. If someone enters in Google the expression "democratic memory, Ministry of the Presidency," which is the term that was en vogue in the last legislature, it'll be the first result. The first place in the text where the Government explains why it adopts this term, is the Constitution of 1978. There is a reaction in many areas, let's say from the PSOE, from the left and from the right, that all this movement of memory is somehow weakening the idyllic vision of the transition. Florentino Pérez heads a foundation for the defense of the transition. Suddenly, the transition is a threatened lady and needs knights-errant to defend herself, no? So in the left, and I am talking about the left in a quite broad sense, they reflect and decide that the interpretation that I think is made, "we are going to use memory to recover the good image of the transition" and that is where the terminological leap is and that is where the wording of the last law comes from, isn't it?

In 2002 I rented a car in Madrid and I went to Geneva with three children to present 64 cases of people who disappeared here during the dictatorship to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights at the Palais Wilson. In 2003, the Working Group on Involuntary Enforced Disappearances of the UN, for the first time, makes a report where Spain appears and from there a file is opened on the Spanish situation. In 2014, the Working Group on Involuntary Enforced Disappearances arrived here in September 2013 and so does the Special Rapporteur for Truth, Justice, Reparation and Guarantees of Non-Repetition in March 2014. The two organizations produced two very strong reports, talked to politicians, victims, jurists, NGOs, El País, and produced reports.

I suddenly remembered one thing in the 2007 law. In the appendices there is a clause that says that any action under this law does not prevent legal action by any of the family members. That clause was inserted there by the international secretary of Amnesty International, who shortly before the testimony was drafted, the final version was written in Madrid, met with some relatives and then went to Moncloa to review all these things. But that little thing that they opened there remained. The 2020 law, on the one hand, is a way of responding to the two UN reports. When the Government of Aznar in the Human Rights Assembly of the United Nations has to answer to those two reports, the video that is on the Internet is shameful, because what the ambassador of the Spanish Government in the United Nations says is practically that their report lies. That everything was arranged here during the Transition and that this is more or less lies. This is what she says in front of many people from countries who know things and who were there, who did not blink an eye.

So the PSOE, which is the opposition at that time, puts a lot of effort into the reports. When the PSOE comes to power, it has to say, for a minimum of coherence, “well, now I am going to respond to the United Nations.” The law is a response to these two United Nations reports. We could say that it is in the preamble, but not in the articles. For example, it is full of grandiloquent things, of truth, justice, and reparation. But among the articles there is not one that is going to tell us the truth, there is not one that is going to guarantee justice and there is not one that is going to repair the political parties and those who had patrimony in 1936. Not one thing for the people.

The 2020 law speaks of “democratic memory” and the ARMH speaks of “historical memory”, is it important to maintain the use of “historical memory?”

Many historians were annoyed when we used the expression historical memory. I remember Santos Juliá, other people who wrote some things, I have them all saved, as if the past was a monopoly of historians, no one else can touch it, right? And then this generation that defends that official version of the Transition was suddenly questioned. And now we are in power and we are going to redirect this. The expression historical memory for me is very easy to explain, because it is something that took me to my grandfather's grave and my grandmother's grave was there and what happened there was a historical fact and the thing that has taken me to this history is the memory of that gentleman. To me that is the perfect application of that term. I have nothing more to discuss. Democratic memory is seen in the law, in what the law does, this reflection of we are not going to do something forceful, we are not going to put an end to impunity, but we can take advantage of this for what we are interested in.

How do you explain the political and electoral use of memory by the different Spanish governments?

The political and electoral use of memory is very visible in the three spaces in which Pedro Sánchez has decided to place memory policies. Since he comes to the presidency in July 2018, First he puts it in the Ministry of Justice because that is where the United Nations wants it to be. When the general elections come and the fight with the right is very important to mobilize votes, he takes it to the Presidency. When the general elections are over, but there are regional elections with PP and Vox governments, he takes it to territorial policy. It is very explanatory of what are the intentions with respect to these policies. One goes to a web page that is a general direction of support to the victims of terrorism and it has never changed its place. There is a political criterion that says that it is the responsibility of the Ministry of

the Interior and it has been changing according to the change of governments.

There is no real political criterion here. We take away the acronyms around it, we take away the political, it is a discourse. This is a matter that we have to work on from within the Ministry of Justice. Perfect. There is no political criterion. It's, "Now it's convenient for us to respond to this." It has taken three days for the new minister to say that he is going to fight for the autonomous communities to comply with their laws. Do not tell them to comply with their laws, tell them to comply with yours, which is the one you have to defend. You are not an autonomous government. In that game the text of the law is very interesting to make a reading of how a Secretary of State who belongs to the generation of the Transition, I mean, who is watching over the official narrative of the Transition, who does not want any conflict. Just look at the Secretary of State's Twitter feed as a demonstration of "armchair republicanism". I would call it. Great characters of history, the day laborers who fought I don't know where. We are not interested in that. They are going to make a census of victims, but not of executioners. Well, that is no longer the truth. Call it something else. Call it a "census of victims". But the truth is more complex. And what has the law done? What does the law do? What does the government do? A little bit of that. I close the zoom of all this on the victim. It is the one that saves me from certain political debates. It's been a long time. I disguise this as nostalgia, and so on. "These old people who are already very old, who want us to do things this way," with this focus and the whole context we leave it out of democratic memory.

Is Franco's regime condemned in either of the two memory laws?

Yes, in the first one it calls it illegal and the second one talks about the nullity of the summaries. But it is a nullity without any consequence. So if you were judged and when you were condemned, they will take your house away. Or, there are many cases of families who spent years paying a fine in installments. The nullity does not imply the restitution of what the sentence took from you. It is not a nullity in a strict sense. They had not done, they were Francoist military, they had not done the position of judges in a democracy. And the law perpetuates something that for me is also quite annoying, which is - and I perfectly understand the families that ask for it - these diplomas of personal reparation that do not repair anything. When one puts so many surnames to the word reparation it is because one wants to turn it into something else. The act that Pedro Sanchez did on October 31, this year he did not do it on October 31, he did it on October 30, which is another demonstration, because on October 31 a certain princess was swearing in the Constitution.

When did Spain begin to speak of "victims" of Franco's regime?

There are people who resent it. Many tortured people don't like to use that terminology, for example. I have spoken to quite a few, who prefer to use other terms. I think in the Transition it is a term that was not used. But why is that? If we hide that there are victims, we hide that there are executioners. It is a planned concealment and then this country has only had a few victims for decades, it is a victim of terrorism. In fact, I remember us, at the beginning, when someone compared something of ours. Yes, we used the word "victim" for people who were left without a life, violently. I didn't use that language at the beginning either.

A lot of people have died in this country without memory or a wink of an eye from any president of the government. That has been a democratic barbarity.



There was even a complex. These are victims. You talk more with people, elaborating the stories they tell you, the situations you get to know and so on. My grandfather was murdered like Miguel Angel Blanco, with an aggravating factor. They took everything my family had. My grandfather's murderers ruled his town for 40 years. When they went hunting, they would pass in front of my grandmother's house with a shotgun on their shoulder. And that's a considerable difference for those who are left alive. So who are the ones who pass this on.

Do you consider yourself a victim of Franco's regime?

Totally, I have been. There is a term that some academics use to refer to grandchildren that bothers me because it is "post-memory". I am not post-memory. I was educated directly by the trauma that was my father's.

When is the word "disappeared" first used or the fact that there were "enforced disappearances" mentioned?

I used it in the first article I wrote in the press when it was just about my grandfather, it was a newspaper that no longer exists, La Crónica de León. "My grandfather was also a disappeared." It was titled that way, bringing the phrase that was more known socially and politically, mediatically, which was the disappeared of Latin America, to a case that is exactly the same. I also have a good collection of columnists saying that this term was a Latin American thing, that it was like a barbarism, that here it is something else. And my grandfather was illegally detained, tortured, murdered and his corpse was hidden. And what do you call that? I believe that this movement was also destined to break silences. And sometimes euphemisms are forms of silence. So we also had to call things by their name. And from the beginning we were quite clear that we were going to get involved or we were going to frame this fight in the field of human rights. That is why I went to the UN in 2002, because we did not want a partisan fight. There is a part that had to do with language. There are many people, at the beginning, who did not understand that word.

Is there an office to assist victims and relatives of victims of Franco's regime?

Nothing like that exists. The government did not want to create the law and did not want to create anything along these lines, as it does not need a law to create it. I can only interpret that as planning to stretch time. It is the gray men of Momo smoking the people's time. It's not that it's a threat to the stability of the country. I can only understand that it is a strategy. Not creating that office is a strategy and I think for two things. One, for stretching this over time, some children are still left. When we were in the Basque Country I went to pick up a degree award and there was Maria Luisa, a 96-year-old woman who is still looking for her father. We still have a relationship with some children, but we do not have to wait long for those who have lived and know directly about these things to be gone. If we drag this out a little bit, they are gone. We are going to let them die.

I also believe that there is something more perverse. The Spanish State has ratified several United Nations agreements that oblige it to take a series of measures with these families. If I open a door to the State and let a relative of a disappeared person enter and a State official, a representative of mine tells him what the problem is that he has. And I have ratified, for example, in September 2009 the Convention against Involuntary Enforced Disappearance. In that conversation between the

victim and the State, a contract is being signed that obliges me to do things. If I distribute the money of the subsidies not through the town councils but through the Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces, and what I believe is a partisan model, because then there are some town councils that do ask for the money and there are other town councils that do not ask for the money, so if we have a town A and a town B, a family has disappeared in town A and a family has disappeared in town B, and if they have any possibility, not to exercise their rights, but to receive some help from the State, it depends, it depends on the configuration of the municipal plenary. It is very serious for the victim of terrorism that if he has any right it depends on the result of the elections. In this case it is like that and it is like that because there is an electoral use of this. I am the good guy where I ask for money, and I am the good guy where the mayor does not ask for money.

What is preventing the law, what is preventing the State, from opening this office, is that this meeting takes place. They could very well say that “nobody has come to the Victims’ office to ask me to apply for the UN Convention.” Of course, if the office does not exist, nobody is going to go to the office to ask for it. In that skein, I believe that is where something so simple, which is almost what we have demanded the most from the law. And realistically, we have asked for more things, but within reason. That one is obvious. And when you see that they have not And when you see that they have not it is evidently because not doing so produces benefits in some way.

What is being done in formal education to review this moment in Spain’s recent history?

We had the first meeting with the Government in December 2004 and we talked about the issues of the disappeared and education. Those were the only two issues. We did not talk about other things, but there were not a lot of collective ex-prisoners there either. But we talked about education because for me, let’s say in quotation marks, as recognition of the men and women who are in the graves, the best tribute is a page in a textbook. I think that is the best tribute above any other.

Within their designs there is also a scholarly and academic impunity. I am in a community right now, in Madrid, which has five large public universities and has no research or project on Franco’s repression here. There are very interesting theses on Madrid, but nobody is doing research on Franco’s repression in this community. And these are also political decisions. They are not neutral, objective, academic things. The teaching, and it says it in a report that has gone out to the Council of Europe, that despite the various legislative changes in the laws of education in Spain, has retained the disinterest in young people knowing the past. It is a consensus, not of those who have governed that has not not changed, not even with the last law of the last coalition government. That is a place where we are often not even allowed to go sometimes. They write to me from some high school and the person who wrote to me says “well, better another course” because inside someone has complained. I have been told that they come to indoctrinate, I have heard that many times. But if the problem were to indoctrinate, they would not tolerate priests teaching religion in public schools. But the problem is not indoctrination, but teaching what should not be taught.

Are you called to talk about all your work at the University?

I live in Madrid. I am part of a movement that is of interest to some historians, but I have never been invited to a history faculty at the Complutense, for example. Never.



There is a concept that the past is the property of historians. The Academy has its embarrassments. It has experienced the same lack of democratic reconstruction as the Judiciary and other powers as well. The Spanish Academy has been pure continuity. The Complutense University of Madrid preserves the Arco de la Victoria, which is its property and is about to give it to the City Council of Madrid to restore it. Right now we have a German student in the laboratory in Ponferrada. Lots of different nationalities have passed through, but only one Spanish one, who is next door. So these are decisions of the Academy, which did not get involved when it should have and now does not want to get involved either.

In the last 20 years we have seen a boom of novels, films and documentaries on the subject of the Civil War. Are there any films about the disappeared and the victims of Franco's regime?

I have not seen it in culture. Very few times I have seen a portrayal of the savagery of the machinery of repression in the villages to murder more than 100,000 civilians, to bury them, to take many of them away. That is a great machinery. I have not seen it culturally reflected. For example, I had a glimpse of things that I hear in the towns of who those people were or who directed that violence in Pan's Labyrinth, for example, which is by a Mexican. I could see that in Isaac Rosa's Vano ayer, which also seems to me to be a guy who makes it around Franco's death, which suddenly clashes with that account that then makes that other damn novel about the Civil War.

But in general, there is no great book about the disappeared that I know of. There are good documentaries, but still... I think it's yet to come. Something that for me would be a great reflection, would be something that takes you somewhere. I am thinking, for example, of Nostalgia for the Light, by Patricia Guzmán, or the Pearl Button, which is to talk about this and create it from a place that for me is impressive and that requires an ability to think about the subject. I believe that not much thought has been given to the subject here. So there are many automatic answers from different places. But, well, there are also people who have thought about it. Andrés Trapiello published a novel defending the Falange gunmen because they were young and were not very aware of what they were doing.

I remember a play that Copete did, an author from Extremadura who died two years ago, called Soliloquio de grillos, which is quite good. But there has not been, at least for me, something that has shocked me in my head. I understand that it's more difficult to shock me, because I'm very involved in this. But then I also have a kinder concept that even a bad film can be a gateway to knowledge. There were very harsh criticisms of the film The Thirteen Roses, but maybe someone who sees it will Google it and buy a book tomorrow. But there is one that has been very forceful, but that has never been published in Spain and has been made by a granddaughter of a guerrilla born in the United States, which is Death in the Valley by Christina Hardt.

On November 23 I attended the presentation of the Historias Desobedientes project at the Mirador Hall. With you were Analia Kalinec, Verónica Estay and Loreto Urraca. Listening to the testimonies of Analia and Veronica we can understand that in Chile and Argentina it is possible to disobey the mandate of silence because there has been a process of justice, reparation and truth. In Spain, however, to disobey means to denounce directly, do you think this project is possible in Spain?

At that event there were three people sitting in the audience with three stories of three sagas, some very powerful in the history of Spain that are threatened by their families. They want to speak but do not dare. There, that has happened and there has been a social context that protects you if you do that. Here, you go nowhere. As Loreto Urraca, who was the Spanish granddaughter of a Red hunter in France, told us, for the Germans the Jews had no families. She has had to deal with a family that says "if you speak ill of grandfather". I do know some cases. Be prepared. And this is not a joke, get ready.

Politically, culturally, socially, the context has not been created for someone to say no. In fact, the event was partly to give confidence to those in the audience. That's why there was a judge and that's why there was a historian from Falange, who some people say "you don't paint the historian very much", but he was there because he was talking to them. Here there hasn't been that, because it's really quite a lonely task. You're not going to get support from the institutions. You have these threats. I've had trials. There have been a lot of people tried here and convicted for trying to tell truths. There hasn't been a context for that here. Where a person like that, to say "well, but it's that even if my family gets angry with me and I accept that they get angry, I have a place here where I have social warmth". That does not exist. The act was trying to light an ember for those women. It's funny because all the ones I've had contact with are women. It's very curious.

There have been very few cases here. There is a novel, *Dicen* by Susana Sánchez Aríns, which is very good and for me is spectacular. It is about the denunciation of a repressive relative. There is a professor at the University of Seville with a Francoist notary relative who told his family how that made it easier for him to be a professor because he was the son of a notary. There is very little dissidence in this area. Very few because there is also a part of the left that has precisely hidden its origin so that it seems that they do not come from where they come from. For example, Alfonso Guerra, who is now in the pages of the newspapers complaining about the jokes that can and cannot be made in Spain. He was going around Seville with a car with Army license plates, with a driver who was doing his military service, the driver of his father, who was an officer of the tribunal against Freemasonry and communism in Seville. Guerra positioned himself as an extremist. Maybe all that crazy histrionics of Guerra had to do with appearing to be an errant prince against the old Franco regime. So, of course, there are a lot of people camouflaging themselves. And that also forces these women to be afraid to come forward. We invited Judge Martín Pajín to talk to them about what they could be getting into. They and maybe if someone else had approached them, we don't know because they also listened to him.

Do you think it is possible to trust that there will be justice, reparation and truth when you can still hear cheers for Franco in the demonstrations called by the right-wing parties against the PSOE for the election results of 2023?

It is normal for people to lose faith. Of course, because if the State were forceful with some things there would be no discussion. Punch a fist on the table. I went again a week ago with an Argentinean artist, at Franco's tomb in Mingorrubio. It is a brutal thing because walking with her I discovered that in the Palacio del Pardo there are still a handful of Franco's coats of arms. Where was the little light of the Pardo that signed the death sentence? Democracy and national heritage have not gone there to make democratic hygiene. Of course, it is normal that people distrust. They tell me about Ferraz and there are people in

the street who tell me "Take care". Or when Vox emerged. But of course, it is the State that has the possibility to be forceful and give confidence. But if it does not do so, it is because it does not want that confidence to exist.

How would you describe Spain's democratic health?

I think there is a lot of Francoism. We are all sociological Francoists at heart. We all tolerate things that if we were more solid democratic spirits we could not tolerate. But, I was going to say that we can expect much ado about nothing, much talk about things that are not interesting for people's lives, which is another tactic that Spanish democracy has learned. Sometimes talking about amnesty and that's it, isn't it?

I see a lot of Francoism, but I see it, for example, in the low rate of party affiliation. I see it in the fact that we have the highest youth unemployment rate in Spain and young people do not even kick a garbage can, which is also democracy at some point. I believe that there is still a culture here that has been transmitted from family, school, media, politics, academia, and that shapes this democracy. The 15M was an attempt at a small rebellion. It was like the Vicalvarada, another revolt, in Madrid in 1854, which fought against bipartisanship, almost the same thing. I think it was an interesting ethical reflection on politics, but in the end it seems that much of it remained a scare. I would say that the university students who have an Erasmus and that the crisis told them that they were not going to live as Erasmus students. I say this because the first movement there is a profile that comes and I think that the problem of 15M, or what would have been a fuse for that, is something that happened in the Second Republic. When it was 15M I made a montage immediately for my Facebook profile, which is on the left the proclamation of the Republic on April 31 and on the right the plaza del Sol.

But I believe that what was not there, as there was in the Second Republic, is the connection between those Erasmus and the young people who have left school or who are going to be the cheap labor force of this country. That is what could have turned this into something much more powerful. That has changed things, that has influenced many things and that I went very little because my daughter was little and sometimes when I was there I was amazed with the strangers I heard talking. It was spectacular at times. Suddenly voices of people who stood up there in the Plaza Jacinto Benavente and gave a speech. There is an intelligence there. But that intelligence does not usually enter into the parties.

What price is to be paid when the right to justice, truth and reparation is defended in this country?

Let's see, I paid at the beginning. I collaborated with a weekly where I have done the reports that I have liked the most as a journalist and when I published a book about the graves, they never bought a report from me again. Never again. That was the first warning so to speak. I believe that I have paid a great price because of this fight, for my political ideas, my emotions, what I have of humanity, of humanitarianism, of concentration, many things. For me it is a reparation to do this. It is not given to me by the State.

It gives me something that I think is very well represented by a poster of Castelao that an exhumation worker gave me. One day in Piedrafita de Babia, in the north of Leon, he came to the pit, spent about three minutes shitting on Spain - "This is what a shame that these people who defended democracy" - and he says that

"I have brought you a gift", he goes to his car and brings a poster of a drawing of Castelao from 37, from a series that was called Galicia Martyr – In reality, there was no war in Galicia – but where you see a group of corpses, people throwing bodies of civilians into a grave and in the distance there are some crosses to explain what they are doing in a cemetery. And below is a legend that says "Don't bury corpses, bury seeds." And I shuddered when I read that and I think it explains perfectly why I and a lot of other people are involved in this fight. I must have paid some price, but luckily I'm going to say in quotation marks it hasn't been... Professionally, it scared me off. In fact, in the next company I worked for, I was almost hiding.

How do you feed your energy in an environment where hostility to the cause defended by the ARMH predominates?

For me, what I said before, I think that it is my political ideas, my idea of what this country should look like, how this country should change, how this country should improve. And then there is a lot of satisfaction in helping the people we help. They are the people who have been outdoors for 40 years and no one has put an awning over them to stop the rain in 45 years of democracy. If someone as a child had any idea of helping the weak, of the people in a democracy, he did not even have the power to demand that the state gives him a minimum of reparation. In the end, that is a reflection of weakness. I like to say, " call a demonstration, we will mobilize." I know many people who are afraid, who support us and who would never go to a demonstration. In the end I can turn that into a demonstration of weakness. I know that there are many people who support us, who would never come out publicly to say it, because sometimes I get stopped in the street or when I go to an event.

That has to do with permanence. There are people who have come to help us, who are angry because we cannot organize things to help them. They get angry with us. We have a lot of people willing to do things. We have had volunteers from over 20 nationalities who have come here, some without calling. I remember Totoro Arakawa, a Japanese man who in 2004 took a plane and presented himself with a photo of a Japanese newspaper at the City of Ponferrada, in Leon, Spain. And he was lucky that one of the associates came out who had a cousin who works as a custodian in the City Hall. They called him Cousin East, he hugged him and he was a Japanese man who came four summers until he died, who read that report and had no link with Spain. he felt challenged by what he read about the relatives and from May to October he came for four years to help us and then we asked, when he died, from the Government, a medal for Civil Merit, which of course they did not give. But we have had many cases of things that are, I will say, wonderful in that fight.

From the constellation of the commons (CC) we are working on the production of a useful and proactive imaginary that encourages citizen participation in the transformation of the hegemonic system. Can you share some good news with us?

Because we are going to continue. How beautiful to resist like the film How beautiful is to live!. Let's see, I'm here because this association gives me very good news. I am very emotional. I cry over a lot at things. I get very excited. But it gives us great satisfaction. I have met amazing people in these years that make me understand the place where I live much more. And, if I want anything in this country, it's because of those people. That's the good news.