

Disrupting ‘Wills to Truth’. How Catalan TV Documentary Contributed to the Democratization of Spanish Civil War Narratives

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Abstract

Catalan television journalism disrupted the existing hegemonic discourses of the 1990s and 2000s by broaching unknown or silenced topics regarding civilian suffering and the post-Civil War atrocities of Franco’s Fascist dictatorship. The author introduces the concept of “narrative democratization” to highlight the existence of alternative narratives regarding the Spanish Civil War and its consequences, paying special attention to a number of documentaries by award-winning journalists Montserrat Armengou and Ricard Belis. It is suggested that narrative democratization is grounded in four discourse strategies: giving the victims a voice; unveiling untold or unknown stories; representing remembrance as an act of justice; and internationalizing the narratives of the Civil War. Taking a Foucauldian approach to the concept of “will to truth” (*volonté de vérité*), the author argues that

television documentaries presented new perspectives on the public story of the Spanish Civil War.

Keywords

Democratization; Holocaust documentary; Spanish Civil War; Television; War memories

TV documentary and collective memory

Perhaps the shortest line between memory and history is the “will to truth”. In Foucauldian terms, the *volonté de vérité* works through a system of exclusion backed up by an institutional power and accompanied by a set of practices that includes pedagogy, school, libraries, etc. (Foucault, 1999 [1970]: 22). As Sheridan explains (1980: 121), one of the systems of exclusion included in Foucauldian thought is the opposition between falseness and truth, but when confronting memory and history we should perhaps refer to truth and not-truth discourses. The media, and specifically television, could be added to this list of ways in which knowledge in/about society is established. Therefore, the relationship between social memory and what is regarded as “history” is the adoption of individual and collective narratives about the past as institutionalized “truths” or, in the words of Foucault, as the “true discourse”. This approach to discourse and memory brings the debate around to how the control of social discourse can generate what is considered a “historical truth”: a particular narrative about the past, sponsored by social and political powers and socially accepted. The question to be addressed, then, is who has sufficient power to establish history. “History is written by

the victors”, states the cliché. Does this confine the “losers” to the sphere of memory, as a “mode of discourse natural to people without history?” (Klein, 2000: 143).

The mechanism that controls social discourses is by no means straightforward and the space of collective memory keeps storing, retelling and displaying non-controlled and even non-public discourses on the social context and the past. These narratives are not part of the “order of discourse”. In this regard, history does not greatly diverge from other sciences. It, too, needs a “true discourse”, which is constructed through processes that elevate personal and collective stories to the category of proofs or indicators of this discourse. Among other popular media forms, television is a sort of “machine” that converts “memory discourse” into “historical discourse” by applying a particular “will to truth” that orders the collective memory as discourse.

Maurice Halbwachs pointed out that, unlike dreams, collective memory has a kind of organization, in which we find a consensus on the construction of the past. In this “rehabilitation”, stories about the past are constantly recycled. Halbwachs (1992 [1952]: 43) used the visual figure of stones still visible in Roman buildings but previously used in more ancient constructions. In this regard, the telling of the past is always in and for contemporary use, and this is especially salient when the past involves violent conflict. Halbwachs also distinguished between historical and autobiographical memory: the former is based on social records of events, the latter on experience. As Labanyi suggests (2008), collective memory can be regarded as a sort of bridge between past events and personal experiences and memories. The processes through which these collective memories become publicly accepted history are numerous, but they should be encouraged and ordered by a specific “will to truth”: memory (collective or individual) has never enjoyed the status of a true account in social terms, but its potential must not be underestimated. As Labanyi argues (2008: 122), memory “records experiences that

are mostly absent from official documents” and, although always constructed from the present, they reveal the attitude to the past.

Scholars, most especially historians and those adopting a critical theory perspective, are sceptical of the idea that television programmes can establish any kind of discourse that can be regarded as “history”, pointing out that media, at best, can “popularize” history. Moreover, it is commonly thought that popular enjoyment cannot be compatible with “true discourse” regarding the past – or any sort of “scientific discourse”. The delegitimation of television and the moving image itself as capable of establishing “historical truth” is particularly relevant to entertainment programmes. What role do the media play, particularly television, in this process of establishing memories as history? In this debate, Simon Schama (2004) suggests that television can and should “ride to the rescue” of memory, arguing that television history can “get serious”. We should, then, rethink the idea that only printed history can have the status of “truthiness”.

The image has, of course, the power of visual proof, but current television has intensified the “fictionalization” process in a wide range of news and journalistic features (O’Donnell, 2007). This process, which involves narrative and technical forms of fiction, detaches viewers from their sense of “validity”. Serge Tisseron (2006: 49–50) noted that the “reality of the world” is not easily distinguishable from the “reality of images” offered by television. This phenomenon is present in fiction and non-fiction programmes. Other authors have pointed out that television news and reports make increasing use of a “cinematic style” (O’Donnell, 2007; O’Donnell and Castelló, 2011). Documentaries today have a highly sophisticated narrative and their use of visuals and other techniques involves inserting music, archive images, images from the “real world”, computer-enhanced images and all types of shots.

Perhaps one of the most controversial narrative options not only in television documentary programs, but also in newscasts, current affairs and other fact-grounded formats, is the use of re-enactment, or reconstruction of the past through dramatized scenes. This resource combines aspects of individual and collective memory (including experiences) with “conjectural and provisional interpretations of the past” (Agnew, 2005: 300). Taylor Downing has straightforwardly defended this use because it frees history from the “tyranny” of the archives. From the point of view of the “true discourse”, re-enactment has considerable drawbacks, as it can be perceived as pure fiction and as detached from “reality-history”. As Downing (2004: 13) points out, however, re-enactment of the past is “perfectly justifiable” as it can “evoke the spirit of a moment”. The use of re-enactment in conjunction with personal testimonies of the past has been welcomed by viewers of televised history programmes, as has been noted in several cases by the BBC (Bell, 2009) and many other television channels. At the same time, Catriona Elder (2009: 231) states that “re-enactment cannot solve the problems of the past”, in the sense that, when applied to television, it reveals the problems of sealing off the past and represses and denies “the links between past actions and present social relations”.

The ways in which television uses melodrama to address collective and individual memories are also commonly criticized. Documentary testimonies mixed with music and archive images can clearly create highly melodramatic stories of the past. Because television is a popular medium that provides entertainment, it seems acceptable to mix drama and sentiment to some degree to better connect with the audience. Personal testimonies of the past on television are packed with feeling; they engage viewers and seek empathy with them. López (2009b: 11) states that this undoubtedly and necessarily involves the “emotional manipulation of the audience”. On the other hand, to suggest

that there is a dichotomy between feelings and knowledge would be inappropriate. Ultimately, televised memories, in conjunction with such other techniques as re-enactment and expert opinions – so important for Foucauldian theories, as they ratify “the truth” – provide viewers with new accounts of history, which, with time and work by journalists and researchers, establish renewed narratives. These stories can be sustained in what Ryan (2011) has called “mnemonic resistance”, which is the resistance of repressed individuals and minorities. In this regard, television can become a great gatherer of untold histories and of silenced narratives and can use all kinds of techniques to present these as “true history”.

Television history is a field in which different “wills to truth” interact and even struggle against one another to establish popular understandings of the past. All the features that characterize television as a medium are important if we are to understand how the “sense of truth” is constructed and how discredited memories can be elevated to the level of prestigious, accepted historical truth. Below we shall analyse how a series of documentaries produced by Televisió de Catalunya (TVC) collected the memories of victims of the Spanish Civil War and constructed a newer discourse regarding this conflict. These memories, presented in the form of televised documentaries, portray conflicting pictures of the past, just as noted by other authors for other contexts (Pöttsch, 2011; Quílez, 2009).

TVC’s contribution

Recent studies of Televisión Española (TVE) during the Franco dictatorship (1939–75) have revealed that this Spanish public broadcasting corporation did indeed touch on the topic of the Civil War during this period (Montero and Paz, 2011). The traumatic past of the Spaniards, then, was not entirely silenced when TVE operated as the

television of the regime (1956–77). Accounts of the Civil War evolved during this period of just over twenty years leading up to the death of the dictator Franco. The controlled corporation portrayed a range of discourses from the “unavoidable disaster” of the early dictatorship period to the discourse regarding “pacification”, “liberation” and “economic growth” of the latter years. As authors like Vilarós (2005) argue, the years of *aperturismo* (“openness”) brought about greater economic development but no parallel social progress in terms of education or freedom: dis-information was a key feature of the public corporation in the 1960s (Coronado and Rueda, 2012: 46). As far as TVE narratives regarding the Civil War are concerned, however, the whole period can be summed up as the reproduction of stories that (1) justified the war – despite its terrible human consequences – as a historical episode necessary for the peaceful future of Spain; (2) blamed the Republic and the unsustainable situation of violence for all the suffering; (3) presented a Manichean account of the conflict, with clear heroes (those who fought against communism, separatism, etc.) and with villains (supporters of the Republic, left-wing and anarchist parties, etc.) who were driving the country into chaos.

This was the mainstream public narrative regarding the Civil War as Spanish society became a democracy through a socio-political process known as *la transición* (“the transition”), a period of major historical significance and of controversies which were to generate further conflicting narratives about Spanish history. Other stories remained in the sphere of the collective memory, in books written in exile and in the clandestine media, however. Democratic elections were finally held in 1977 but Spain had to wait four further years for a new law on the public radio and television corporation, RTVE. This was after only the second elections in 1979. With freedom of speech now protected by the Constitution (1978), regional and alternative media increased the dissemination of wider political readings of the past. The country suffered an attempted *coup d’etat* in

1981 and the political context remained unstable. But it was not until from around the mid-1980s that the significance of the democratic transition was represented in different forms. State-based television, most particularly programmes like *La transición* (TVE, 1995), largely portrayed this phase as successful in putting an end to national tensions (Hernández, 2010); Catalan and Basque television, however, adopted more critical perspectives regarding the process, which was considered far from complete and even as having failed in its attempts to integrate national diversity within the Spanish state and recognize the victims of the dictatorship.

The 1980s was a crucial decade, as the progressive democratization of Spanish society brought with it new ways of producing and experiencing all forms of culture. TVE scheduled several historical programmes; in 1986, in particular, it broadcast a documentary on anarchist women during the Spanish Civil War by two American journalists.ⁱ

All in all, as can also be inferred from other works (Gutiérrez and Sánchez, 2005), although TVE has not totally avoided the topic, it has made little effort to deal with the war in historical or documentary programmes. For instance, TVE's historical series *Memoria de España* (Blasco, 1986) began in 1898 (the war with the USA that resulted in the "loss" of Cuba) but ended in July 1936, just before the start of the Civil War.ⁱⁱ According to Smith (2006: 72), the 1980s – influenced by the so-called *movida madrileña*ⁱⁱⁱ – was one of greater liberty, marked more by "the pursuit of pleasure" than by mourning and melancholia (although it was by no means a time of "apolitical hedonism"). Music and pop culture flourished and TVE programming was overhauled. It was a time when Spanish society was eager for modernity and political participation. Journalists were by no means seduced to revive the ghost of the Civil War and its fatal consequences. It was not a period of complete silence on the topic, however; as Julià

(2006) has noted, a number of reports were published in *Interviú* magazine. Nonetheless, I coincide with Barragán and Castro's (2004: 151) assertion that this production on a small scale did not reach major audiences and had no consequences for the victims' claims.

Nevertheless, Civil War narratives flourished in the realm of television fiction, providing a background for daily life and love stories. TVE produced fictional series about the war and its origins, which, according to Palacio (2001: 159), were part of the "new socialist imaginary".^{iv} For Rueda and Coronado (2009: 71), the portraits of the fictional TV series of the 1980s constituted iconographic references and character constructions close to "the common imaginary of the left-wing tradition." These narratives of trauma had no precedent, but approaches to the Civil War were by no means straightforwardly political. One of the indicators of the dearth of political meaning of the Civil War narratives of 1980s TVE was the absence of investigative journalism and the few historical documentaries and true-life accounts of repressed peoples. TVE narratives regarding the Civil War of this period mostly appeared in fiction and drama series, the impact of which should not be underestimated, as audiences were considerable. Some of the more popular series were literary adaptations that focused much more on personal drama than on political issues.

I tend to agree with Francisca López (2009a: 93), who states that these series did not give a partisan version of the past but attempted "to depoliticize and universalize (de-historize) it, to convert it into a common inheritance and heritage of democratic Spain". López argues that the TVE series of the 1980s that dealt with the Civil War gave room to different regional sensibilities. They had a broader concept of national identity, in accordance with the new political model of autonomy, and constructed a narrative of "otherness" in which "the other" was the lack of both freedom and tolerance (López,

2009a: 96). This author (López, 2012: 139) also agrees that the official Spain of the 1980s achieved, through television, the depolitization of the Spanish Civil War and the Second Republic. This “low political profile” of the version of the past is still present in some productions like *Cuéntame cómo pasó* (“Tell me how it was”, TVE, 2001), which some authors have related to a sense of “reflexive nostalgia” (Corbalán, 2009; Coronado and Rueda, 2012).

During the 1980s, the increasing sensitivity of TVE to the regions was accompanied by the loss of the public corporation’s monopoly over television in Spain. The fact that the first three regional channels in Spain appeared in the so-called “historical regions” (the Basque Country, Catalonia and Galicia, in 1982, 1983 and 1984, respectively) is no coincidence. As Sampedro states (2000: 351), the recent centralist and autocratic past of TVE explains why the political forces emerging in the regions never viewed Spanish public television as an alternative. The Catalan public television station (TVC) aimed to become the main referent for Catalans and to put their language on air. At that time, TVC was seen as a competitor for Spanish television; indeed, the general manager of RTVE, José María Calviño, made various controversial statements – later nuanced – suggesting that the regional channels would be restricted to providing “anthropological television” (Baget, 1999: 95; Cardús, 1995: 73-82). This was far from the case. The Catalan TV project rapidly acquired a dimension all of its own and screened programmes in a wide range of formats and genres, thus creating an audience that became used to hearing to Catalan on television. TVC has been, during the last three decades, the main project in the mission to ensure “the penetration and normalisation of the Catalan language and culture in the areas of audiovisual communication (Gifreu, 2009: 90).

History was one of the earliest interests of the new Catalan channel, eager to popularize other viewpoints on the dominant narratives of the country. However, it was not until the 1990s that production policy was to award any importance to the Civil War. A team of well-prepared journalists began to investigate a range of topics related to the war and the post-war years and to produce reports and documentaries (30 to 60 minutes long) on topics such as the execution of Lluís Companys (president of the Catalan government) in 1940, the assassination of Andreu Nin (founder of the POUM, the Spanish Workers' Party for Marxist Unification) by Soviet agents in 1937 and the execution of Manuel Carrasco i Formiguera (a Catholic democrat and member of Unió Democràtica) in 1938. Among these journalists were the pioneers Dolors Genovès, Ricard Belis, Enric Canals, Montserrat Besses and Joan Salvat, who investigated military archives, historical documents, personal testimonies and other sources in order to question the hegemonic stories and locate untold/unknown histories.

The programme *30 minuts* ("30 minutes", 1984, TVC) became a referent during the 1990s with reports like *Companys, memòria d'un president* ("Companys, memory of a president", Úbeda, 1990), *L'or de Moscou* ("The gold of Moscow", Genovès and Millà, 1994), *Sumaríssim, 477* ("Summary trial, 477", Genovès and Montserrat, 1994), *Línia Pirineu: la defensa ignorada* ("The Pyrenean line: the ignored defence", Salvat, 1996), *El combat i la memòria* ("Combat and memory", Salvat, 1996), *El llarg camí* ("The long road", Salvat, 1997), etc. TVC also produced special programmes like the 60-minute documentary *Operació Nikolai* ("Operation Nikolai", Genovès and Belis, 1992) and the 13-episode series on Francoist repression entitled *Classificació ACR: Activitats contra el règim* ("Classified ACR: Activities against the regime", Canals and Millà, 1995). All these productions screened topics that were familiar to academics and

historians but which had not been popularized as “media discourse” referring to the recent history of Catalonia and Spain.

A new stage in the democratization of the Civil War in the first decade of the new millennium was, perhaps, the clearest contribution of TVC. The list of productions aired on the topic contains around twenty individual programmes, several two-episode documentaries and several historical series, among them *Zona Roja* (“Red zone”, Solé, 11 episodes, 2003), an account of how the war was experienced in Catalonia, Valencia and Majorca. The subtopics and motives are diverse, but the macro-themes are all connected: the repression of civilians and politicians, the untold testimonies of the war and of exile, previously unknown stories and historical investigations and the stories of individuals. The reports and documentaries included not only the stories as told by the losers but also more complex stories. In our view, Manichean narrative on (good) Catalan-republicanism versus (bad) Spanish-fascism was avoided (as a section of Catalan society supported Franco). The proof lies in stories about anarchist crimes at the beginning of the Civil War and the legal proceedings initiated by the Republicans against politicians, members of religious orders and people suspected of collaborating with the rebels – for example, *Roig i negre* (“Red and black”, Genovés, 2006) and *Desafectes a la República* (“Disaffected with the Republic”, Miró, Rodríguez and Pigrau, 2011). It seems reasonable to affirm that Catalan narratives in documentaries and reports were much more interested in questioning the hegemonic and apolitical discourse regarding the Civil War. The combination of a victim-oriented perspective, a complex dialogue structure, the historical framing and the linkage with the ongoing political context produced a new way of recounting narratives. These productions added new information and perspectives that took, of course, the side of the silenced.

Here we briefly discuss four productions by Ricard Belis and Montse Armengou (Catalan National Journalism Award, 2002). They deserve closer analysis because they provide important clues for understanding TVC's discourses and narratives about the war; they do this by summarizing some of the main characteristics of overall Catalan production on the topic and arousing considerable interest in a troubled political context. Armengou and Belis have been rather neglected by scholarship on media, culture and memory studies, despite some exceptions (see the special issue of *Tripodos* [16; 2005] on "El documental" and Herrmann, 2008a; 2008b). Their productions tackle such controversial issues as the loss and death of children during Francoism, the exhumation of people killed by military repression and the bombing of civilians in Barcelona during the war, three topics that Spanish democracy was, or perhaps was not, prepared to face. The four documentaries analysed here are *Els nens perduts del franquisme* ("The lost children of Francoism", 2002; two episodes of 43.30 and 51.08 minutes); *Les fosses del silenci* ("The graves of silence", 2003, two episodes of 55.00 and 54.33 minutes); *El comboi dels 972* ("972 on the train to hell", 2004, one programme of 52 minutes) and *Ramon Perera, l'home que va salvar Barcelona* ("Ramon Perera, the man who saved Barcelona", 2006, one programme of 58 minutes).^v

Four documentaries, four strategies

One of the features of all these documentaries is that the *victims are given a voice*. Their stories and memories are interwoven with historical facts using archive pictures, documentary and footage. The journalists placed the witnesses in front of the camera and asked them for their stories on the war, exile, repression, etc. The telling of their experiences is interspersed with the intervention of experts, whose role is to add context and "historic truth" to the memories. The voices of the witnesses and victims have a

dual role. They are presented as proof or evidence of the facts, which in some cases means that details are given of how the children were treated and how they were recovered (*Els nens*), when those who disappeared were taken (*Les fosses*), how those on the train experienced the horror of being taken to a concentration camp (*El comboi*), or how people died in the streets of Barcelona after a bombing raid (*Ramon Perera*). Details of these memories provide moments of great drama and are part of the climax of the documentaries, which also use music to highlight the viewers' feelings, although avoiding melodrama. The personal stories are also interwoven with contextual accounts of the history of the time and are supported by archival images and the reading of official documents. The documentaries do not exclude other voices, for instance, those of the antagonists of the victims. In *Els nens*, for instance, we see and hear Mercedes Sanz Bachiller, director of Auxilio Social (the foundation that cared for the mothers and children); and in *Ramon Perera*, journalists interview one of the Italian pilots who bombed Barcelona.

Regarding the visual aspects that reinforce this narrative strategy, it is important to point to the power of images when testimonies are recorded in the place where the crime took place, the family was separated from the victim or the body was buried. The direct intervention of interviewers is minimal (they remain behind the cameras) and the goal is for the testimony to be experienced as a true account told by the people who suffered the act and experienced its consequences. We are often invited into the living-rooms of the victims, to view old photograph albums, letters or official documents. In one of these visits in *Les fosses*, the camera angle makes the viewer feel like a participant in the conversation taking place regarding photographs, letters and documents.

The new “will to truth” that is being reflected here is based on unheard voices. The fact that these voices have been neglected is explicitly highlighted at various moments throughout the documentaries. Perhaps one of the most illustrative examples is that provided by a child stolen during the war – now a mature woman – who says: “I am sixty-two. This is the first time I have talked about this; this is the first time anyone has asked me.”^{vi} The striking sentence is the last voice to be heard in the documentary, which reinforces the idea that all these stories have been silenced for decades and left neglected by public discourse. The authors of the documentaries have the same aim in *El comboi*, a work grounded in investigation and eye-witness accounts.

Investigation is important because the data we give must be rigorous, and eye-witness accounts reinforce our ethical commitment to give a voice to those who have not had one under the dictatorship or in democracy. (Armengou and Belis, 2005:19)

The second discursive strategy in these documentaries is to present *memory as an act of justice*. Herrmann (2008a) studied the first three of the documentaries and concluded that they are a form of trial, or studies of justice. However, I would defend that the main goal of these documentaries is not to replace courts as the agent that judges the events: they offer, rather, a silenced memory as an act of justice. This is a very different position. In *Les fosses*, the journalist accompanied the sons and daughters of people who had been executed to the locations where the killings and mass burials had taken

place and asked them about their feelings (the questions asked by the journalist are usually heard). In some cases, the victims know who killed their father and can even identify them by name. The visuals here also play a predominant role in reinforcing the loneliness of the testimonies, the lack of support from the authorities and the sadness of the fight to recover some dignity through exhumations or recognition. For example, in one of the cases a group visits the place where relatives were shot or thought to be buried. In *Les fosses*, the use of images is highly artistic and even metaphorical: the relatives of the victims walk in a large, deserted field under a cloudy sky, as if in a void.

All these elements make for a powerful narrative strategy but, rather than being offered up as evidence in a hypothetical trial, they are recounted as acts of justice in themselves, showing how people live with this traumatic past weighing them down. The journalist asks one person, who has always lived close to the person he says killed his father, a leading question: “And how did you tolerate this [living near this person]?” The son answered: “Well, we had to respect him. We were terribly afraid”.^{vii} TV programmes has used personal memories, documentation and archive images to record what Paul Preston (2012) called the “Spanish holocaust”. In this regard, the documentary narrative attempts to bring the trauma of the past to the present, in some way providing reparation for the “fractured transmission of the memories of the dead” (Renshaw, 2010). One of the interesting visual resources that reinforces this “act of justice” is visiting mass graves or cemeteries or viewing memorials as poetically depicted at the end of the documentary *Els nens*.

This idea of memory as an act of justice was proposed in a short prologue that the former president of Spain, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, wrote for the book *El comboi dels 927*, which narrates the tragic story of exiled Republicans, first kept prisoner in a

camp in Angoulême (France) and then deported to Mauthausen concentration camp. Zapatero wrote that the report was “a valuable contribution to preventing oblivion. Today, memory is the best means for obtaining justice” (Rodríguez Zapatero, 2005: 16). In this strategy, re-enactment, as in *Els nens*, is a key tool, used from the very outset to place the audience in the historical situation. Interviews with witnesses are treated as a top priority as most people who experienced the terror of the early years of the dictatorship (when the worst violence was perpetrated) are by now dead or too old to remember. The journalists point out that first-hand remembrance of atrocities is actually becoming more complex. The memory recounted as an act of justice is presented as a “last chance” for justice. Audiovisual language here also assumes great importance as one of the things we are invited to do in remembrance of the victims is to at least visit their graves. In some cases, the viewers accompany the relatives of the dead people.

The third of the discursive strategies is *to internationalize the narratives* of the Civil War and its consequences: the texts are not only about Catalans and how they experienced the war and post-war repression but are also about the consequences for Spain and the Spaniards and, in a broad sense, for the history of Europe. In general terms, TVC’s historical programmes attempt to link the history of Catalonia with the history of the world. This discursive strategy not only corresponds to its public function, but is also an attempt to imbue audiovisual products with an international interest – as TVC productions usually have little impact on Spanish television. Therefore, addressing potential “international audiences” and drawing their attention would also reveal a democratic deficit of Spanish society to the world, as argued by the documentary directors. As stated in the book on *El comboi*, “dictatorship acted, democracy forgot” (Armengou and Belis, 2005: 18). The objective here is to achieve some impact on the

international media – an aim that was met in the case of *Els nens*, as dailies as influential as *The New York Times* published an article about the lost children.^{viii}

In another illustrative example of internationalization, *El comboi* reveals that a train transporting Spanish Republicans was one of the first to enter Mauthausen concentration camp. The documentary contains archive footage and documentation (letters and telegrams) that make it clear that there were negotiations between the Spanish and German Fascist governments during the transportation and confinement of detainees in the camp. Since this is a holocaust documentary, the interpretative use of witnesses does not focus exclusively on Catalans or Republicans, but adds the memory of the Spanish people to a “transnational memory” in the sense of Hirsch and Spitzer (2009): it does not just use memory to construct a discourse on identity. This discursive strategy is also present in other TVC documentaries such as *Zona Roja* (a series of 13 programmes), as the first words the audience hears refer to Lluís Companys as “the only democratically elected European president to be assassinated by 20th-century fascism”.^{ix}

Perhaps the clearest example of the internationalization of the narratives is the documentary *Ramon Perera*, an engineer who constructed bomb shelters that protected Barcelona civilians from air raids. The documentary is of relevance not only for Catalan and Spanish audiences but also for the British, who took an interest in his work after he was exiled to London, bombed by the Luftwaffe during World War Two. The documentary begins with a voiceover which explains that “Barcelona was one of the first cities in history to be bombed and its population massacred...”.^x These words accompany archive footage of planes dropping bombs and dead bodies being recovered from the ruins. In *Ramon Perera*, Armengou and Belis studied Anderson shelters and compared them with Perera shelters. To capture the British interest, the documentary is

laden with footage from British archives and of British experts (engineers, specialists and historians), witnesses (a fireman, an East End resident who lived through the bombings of London, the grandson of the UK Minister of Defence in 1940) and others. One of the narrative climaxes of the story is the speech given by Winston Churchill in which, making specific mention of Barcelona, he encourages the British people to resist:

I do not at all underrate the severity of the ordeal which lies before us; but I believe our countrymen will show themselves capable of standing up to it, like the brave men of Barcelona, and will be able to stand up to it, and carry on in spite of it, at least as well as any other people in the world.^{xi}

This passage is accompanied by archive images of Churchill from this period. The whole documentary is full of references to Perera's expertise and the refusal of the British authorities to apply his methods to their constructions while people were dying from the bombings. The documentary ends in Rome, with an interview of one of the Italian pilots who took part in the bombing of Barcelona. Some 786,000 viewers followed the unknown story of Perera^{xii} – a striking number for a historical documentary and for the Catalan television context. The aim to arouse interest overseas is evident in the subtitle of the book which appeared soon after the documentary had been aired, which referred to the history of a disregarded lesson and to why England rejected the shelters that had saved thousands of lives in Catalonia (Armengou and Belis, 2008).

All these documentaries make up the discursive basis for a journalism which “makes” history. The documentaries brought silenced topics to the screen. In a book about *Els nens*, a documentary which had Ricard Vinyes as the historical consultant, the authors argued that this kind of story should be part of a wider history and be included in school textbooks and subjects about history and politics.

This would be the only way to find out what was concealed during the forty years of Francoism and twenty-five years of democracy. The only way to perhaps do justice to the amnesic transition which chose to forget, pimping the word reconciliation, adulterating its meaning and denying citizens their right to know the history of their country, depriving them of a tool to construct their own political and, overall, moral, criteria. We are now paying the consequences in the form of political banality, ethical submission and civil indifference (Vinyes, Armengou and Belis, 2002: 12).^{xiii}

Therefore, the discursive strategy of *unveiling silenced stories* is crucial throughout Belis and Armengou’s work. These journalists reclaim the memories of the Civil War and the associated suffering. Perhaps the greatest urgency arises in regard to *El comboi*, as the people confined in concentration camps were, by 2000, already very old or dead. These journalists have referred to the deaths that happened in the course of the investigation:

The biological clock of the victims is rapidly ticking away and time is running out for these protagonists, who fought for and defended the

democratic freedoms which we enjoy today; as living memories, they are testimonies with much to tell us (Armengou and Belis, 2002: 21)^{xiv}

The makers of these documentaries have posed several questions to Catalan, Spanish and European audiences regarding their research and the memories evoked regarding stolen children, re-education, Spanish citizens in concentration camps, mass graves, blanket-bombing of cities and civilians, etc. A wider interpretation could bring us to formulate the more general question posed by journalists to their audiences in the 2000s. Are you aware that all this occurred in Spain, a Western country, in the 20th century? And are you aware that the current Spanish state does not seem to be interested? These untold stories (and histories) existed: historians know about them, witnesses and the people who experienced the violence remember the facts and others learned about them from rumours or stories that everybody knew but nobody could prove. Critical TV journalism has shed light on these stories and histories, located witnesses and used historical documents and archive footage to provide them with a “status of truth”. And so a new “will to truth” is screened that competes with the hegemonic will. The strength of this discourse, attractively forged with well-grounded reasoning, has brought together “wills to truth” that contribute to developing a competing story of the Civil War and its consequences – among the Catalan people at least. Today, Catalan viewers hear discourses on the collective memory other than those consumed by the wider Spanish audience. This is, naturally, a disturbing situation for the continuity of existing discourse hegemony and even for the attainment of hegemonic status by new discourses on the past. As stated by Castelló (2012), the existence of such divergent mediatized stories of the political conflicts –in this case regarding the past– is

of crucial importance to understand the current tensions in the relations among regions in Spain.

Conclusion

By giving the victims a voice, by telling untold stories, by gathering and structuring memories in a “discourse of truth” and by internationalizing the narratives of the Civil War, documentaries like those of Armengou and Belis have democratized the narratives of the Civil War. These narratives do not simply take the side of the victims and avoid other versions and memories; rather, they question the reign of hegemonic silence governing apolitical discourses on Spanish national television. These documentaries appeal to young Spanish democracy and, I would argue, greatly influenced public opinion, most especially Catalan public opinion. In particular, they contributed to framing the context for a law on historical memory (Ley de la Memoria Histórica, recognizing the sufferings of the victims of the Civil War) passed by the socialist government of Rodríguez Zapatero in 2007 and for the creation of a public institution called Memorial Democràtic in 2007, the objective of which is to recover, commemorate and foster democratic remembrance regarding the period 1931 to 1981.^{xv} Television, as a popular medium, thus made it possible to democratize Civil War narratives. This is perhaps a key aspect of the media’s historiographical innovation potential, namely, the capacity to evoke a specific historical period in the popular imaginary and even in the political agenda.

This article has tried to explain how TVC documentaries, in the first decade of the 21st century, constructed a discourse that interwove various “wills to truth”, in Foucauldian terms, and re-told the story of the Civil War using journalistic criticism as a tool for transforming society. Revealing a conflict of remembrances is a way of

communicating history. I would add that these memories in conflict should be understood in a Simmelian sense, given that conflict (whether personal or collective) is a form of socialization.

Since the first decade of the 21st century, the media share a more diverse collective memory of the Spanish Civil War. Catalan journalism has made a major contribution not only to Spanish democracy but also to a European understanding of a conflict that preceded a devastating continental war. In a study of how the press and parliamentary debates represented the Civil War and articulated a discourse on Franco's dictatorship, Aguilar et al. (2002) pointed to the problematic relationship between the Spanish national identity and its authoritarian history. The authors also pointed to the need for every nation to face the darker and more conflictive aspects of its past. Today, Spain and its political elite have still not found a way to confront this recent period of its history. The new discourse that was developed since the 2000s in TVC, which mostly blew the dust off personal and social tragedies, was constructed through a new "will to truth" that directly conflicts with the existing hegemonic discourses on the Civil War and Franco's dictatorship. These journalistic works represent a turning point in that they construct a more inclusive "narrative democratization" of the war as a traumatic past event and pay particular attention to the victims' viewpoint. They add to existing, if small-scale, criticism already voiced within Spanish society regarding accounts of the recent past. In this case, the conflict in the discourse on the past re-opens narratives that were thought to have concluded. As Simmel points out (2010[1904]: 21), a position of opposition in a particular relationship avoids one side being completely crushed and preserves consciousness. From this positive viewpoint, collective remembrance offers the possibility of a richer relationship among different social groups by fostering the diversity of interplaying "wills to truth". In modern day Spain, political conflict can be

interpreted in this positive manner, in the sense that social debate is alive and that there is still room for greater and healthier levels of democracy; this prevails not only as regards collective remembrance, but also in wider political, social and cultural spheres.

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Notes

ⁱ *All our lives* (1986), by Lisa Berger and Carol Mazer. Available online at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1-4oSVzmzW4> (Accessed October 31 2012).

ⁱⁱ See “‘Memoria de España’ pretende rescatar medio siglo de historia hasta la Guerra Civil”. *El País*, 17 April 17. Available online at http://elpais.com/diario/1983/04/17/radiotv/419378403_850215.html (Accessed 31 October 2012).

ⁱⁱⁱ A cultural and social movement that developed mainly in Madrid and spread to other cities. Mostly urban and with a countercultural meaning, *la movida* was expressed in popular music, cinema, media and literature.

^{iv} Among others, this author cites the following for the period 1982-1990: *La plaza del diamante*; *Los gozos y las sombras*; *Crónica del alba*; *Lorca, muerte de un poeta*; *Visperas*; *El mundo de Juan Lobón*; *La forja de un rebelde*; *Los jinetes del alba*; and *El olivar de Atocha*.

^v Parts of the documentaries are available online: *Els nens perduts del franquisme* (part I) at <http://www.tv3.cat/videos/165691658/Els-nens-perduts-del-franquisme-1>; *El comboi dels 927*, trailer with English subtitles, at <http://www.tv3.cat/videos/2875330>; *Les fosses del silenci* (parts 1 and 2) at <http://www.tv3.cat/videos/178600768>; *Ramon Perera, l'home que va salvar Barcelona*, trailer, at <http://www.tv3.cat/videos/767279> (all URLs accessed on 3 July 2012). These will be referred to in abbreviated form as “Els nens”, “El comboi”, “Les fosses” and “Ramon Perera”, respectively. It should be clarified that some Spanish channels broadcast these documentaries; however, criticised

was the fact that TVE screened only a late-night summary of *Els nens* on its second channel (La2). La2 also showed *El comboi* as part of its *Documentos TV* programme. *Les fosses* was broadcast by Canal Historia, a thematic channel in Spanish. In general terms, Spanish television (public and private) pays little attention to Catalan productions. One controversial issue is the Catalan language. Recently, for example, the producers of the historical fiction series *Barcelona, ciutat neutral* (“Barcelona, neutral city”, 2011, TVC-RTP) explained that TVE and Antena 3 TV (Spanish private channel) did not participate in the production because it was being shot in Catalan (Source: *Ara*, 24 November 2011). TVE-TVC historical fiction or documentary co-productions are rare; one exception is the recent miniseries *Tornarem* (“We shall return”, TVC-TVE, 2011).

^{vi} *Els nens perduts del franquisme*, part 2 (TVC, 2002). All translations from the programmes are by the author.

^{vii} *Les fosses del silenci*, part 1 (TVC, 2003).

^{viii} See, for example, ‘Families search for truth of Spain’s ‘Lost Children’, by Victoria Burnett, *The New York Times*, 28 February 2009, available online at http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/01/world/europe/01franco.html?_r=0 (Accessed 3 July 2012).

^{ix} *Zona Roja* (Episode 1, TVC, 2003).

^x *Ramón Perera, l’home que va salvar Barcelona* (TVC, 2006).

^{xi} Winston Churchill’s speech to the House of Commons (18 June 1940), reproduced in *Ramón Perera...* (TVC, 2006)

^{xii} Source: <http://www.tv3.cat/actualitat/208119637/Lespecial-de-30-minuts-sobre-Ramon-Perera-lider-daudiencia> (Accessed 8 January 2013).

^{xiii} Original text: “Seria l’única manera com es començaria a saber tot el que quaranta anys de franquisme i vint-i-cinc de democràcia han intentat tapar. L’única manera com potser es faria justícia amb aquella transició amnèsica que va decidir oblidar prostituint la paraula reconciliació, adulterant el seu significat i negant als ciutadans el dret a conèixer la història del país, privant-los d’una eina per construir el seu propi criteri polític i, sobretot, moral. Ara en paguem les conseqüències en forma de banalitat política, submissió ètica o indiferència civil”.

^{xiv} Original text: “El rellotge biològic de les víctimes va molt de pressa i el temps s’acaba per a aquests protagonistes, que són alhora els lluitadors i defensors de les llibertats democràtiques de què disfrutem avui dia, memòria viva, testimonis que encara tenen moltes coses a dir”.

^{xv} See <http://www20.gencat.cat/portal/site/memorialdemocratic/> (Accessed 28 June 2012).

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