



At the Foot of the Grave: Challenging Collective Memories of Violence in Post-Franco Spain

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Abstract

Understanding the development and meaning of collective memory is a central interest for sociologists. One aspect of this literature focuses on the processes that social movement actors use to introduce long-silenced counter-memories of violence to supplant the “official” memory. To examine this, I draw on 15 months of ethnographic observations with the Spanish Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory (ARMH) and 200 informal and 30 formal interviews with locals and activists. This paper demonstrates that ARMH activists, during forensic classes given at mass grave exhumations, use multiple tactics (depoliticized science framing, action-oriented objects, and embodiment) to deliver a counter-memory of the Spanish Civil War and Franco regime and make moral and transitional justice claims. This research shows how victims’ remains and the personal objects found in the graves also provoke the desired meaning that emotionally connects those listening to the classes to the victims and the ARMH’s counter-memory.

Keywords

collective memory, social movements, human rights

Understanding the development and meaning of collective memory is a central interest for sociologists. One growing aspect of this robust literature focuses on understanding the processes that social movement actors use to introduce long-silenced counter-memories of violence to supplant the “official” memory. This article thus focuses on addressing and nuancing this literature while answering two related questions: First, how do social movement actors use various tactics (depoliticized science framing, activated objects, embodiment) to break long-lasting silences and introduce counter-memories of violent pasts? And, second, how do these tactics facilitate the ongoing negotiation of collective understandings of violent pasts?

To answer these questions, I look to the case of contested memory of the Spanish Civil War and the Franco regime. I conducted 15 months of ethnographic observations with the Spanish Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory (ARMH) and 200 informal and 30 formal interviews with locals and activists. My analysis finds that activists giving forensic classes during ARMH-led mass exhumations use depoliticized scientific framing to deliver a counter-memory of the Spanish Civil War and Franco regime. After scientific authenticity is established, activists then make moral and transitional justice claims. I further illustrate how activists do not use depoliticized scientific framing alone, but rather,

victims’ remains and the personal objects found in the graves provoke the desired meaning that emotionally connects those attending the classes to the victims. This then reinforces the power and legitimacy of the ARMH’s reframed narrative of the violence and their human rights agenda. This article contributes to our understanding of how human rights actors introduce counter-memories of violence through specific tactics—notably depoliticized framing, activated objects, and embodiment—to maximize their authenticity as the true narrators of Spain’s violent past and increase the emotional resonance of their counter-memory.

Background

On July 17, 1936, the Spanish Civil War began with a military coup led by General Francisco Franco against the

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democratically elected government, the Second Republic (Hochschild 2016; Preston 2007). Massacres occurred everywhere, even where the military did not meet resistance. The killers buried their victims in unmarked mass graves (Hochschild 2016; Preston 2012). The Nationalists killed an estimated 150 to 120,000 civilians in extrajudicial executions, with an additional 49,000 civilians killed in retaliatory attacks against those who supported the takeover. By the end of the war (1939), an additional 500,000 Spaniards had died, democracy had fallen, and General Franco was in power (Renshaw 2011).

In the nearly 40-year dictatorship that followed, the Spanish state wielded immense and brutal authority, repressing anything perceived as threatening to Franco's power (Hochschild 2016). The Franco state prohibited the families of the victims from searching, finding, reburying, or publicly mourning their dead. Any mourning was done secretly; to do so publicly was extremely dangerous (Preston 2012). All state-controlled institutions portrayed the Republicans as "bloodthirsty traitors against Spain" deserving of death and disdain (Preston 2007; Renshaw 2011). This characterized the dominant collective memory for almost 40 years.

After Franco died in 1975, Spain democratized (1975–1978). As the Franco regime had maintained that the violence could be reignited at any moment, Spanish political elites, "via the legal and institutional mechanisms of the old regime," orchestrated the transition while attempting to ensure that another war was impossible (Encarnación 2008; Fernández 2006). The amnesty laws enacted in 1977, which gave blanket amnesty to regime members and Republican prisoners long languishing in prison—brokered by leaders in both conservative and leftist parties—asserted that the atrocities of the war and the regime were to be forgiven and forgotten (Aguilar and Fernández 2002). Many have called these policies the "pact of forgetting" (*pacto del olvido*) as they promoted censorship to prevent further political polarization (Davis 2005). Scholars have argued that the transition also changed the dominant memory so that culpability for the Franco regime's violence was collectively shared (Aguilar and Fernández 2002). This framing perpetuated the marginalization of the victims and institutionalized a new form of sanitized silencing of their suffering (Colmeiro 2011; Encarnación 2008).

The pact of forgetting began to fade in the 1990s when Spaniards started to broach the topic of the past. In 1998, Judge Baltazar Garzón indicted the former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet for the disappearance of over 3,000 people, including several Spaniards, during his regime (Encarnación 2007). The indictment led many to question why Spain was willing to prosecute another country's war criminal without addressing its own history. In September 2000, journalist Emilio Silva published an article titled "My Grandfather Was also Disappeared." The article listed Silva's phone number, which was then used by a forensic anthropologist who wanted to help (Ferrándiz Martín 2007;

Renshaw 2011). In October 2000, Silva, working with a team of forensic investigators, located his grandfather's remains, among 12 others, in a mass grave. This marked the first time Civil War-era dead were scientifically exhumed in Spain (Silva 2005).

Due to the success of his grandfather's exhumation, Silva founded the Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory (ARMH) in December 2000 (Renshaw 2011). The ARMH's goals are to promote and coordinate research on the Civil War and its victims, scientifically search and identify those disappeared during the war and the regime years, and work to gain public recognition for those who created Spain's first democracy and those who resisted the dictatorship (Anon n.d.). Shortly after the ARMH's founding, similar organizations began to form across Spain, starting the historical memory movement.

The ARMH, among others, became so prolific that in 2007, the government passed the Law of Historical Memory, which allocated limited state funds for civil society organizations to conduct exhumations (Encarnación 2008; Torres 2007). However, in 2011, a conservative government was elected and then promptly ended all funding for exhumations. The ARMH managed to survive through private donations.

In 2018, the socialist party took control of the Spanish government. The new ruling party has made a series of promises to address the past violence, most notably proposing to exhume Francisco Franco from his burial site at the Valley of the Fallen to a family mausoleum.¹ At the time of this writing, it is uncertain what changes the government will actually enact and what their impact will be.

However, the stakes created by the ARMH and the historical memory movement should not be underestimated. First, the pervasive fear created by the violence and repression of both the war and the regime as well as the continued state silencing promoted by the democratic transition have made even talking about the past very difficult (Renshaw 2011; Rubin 2018). This is especially true in rural areas and communities that suffered extreme repression under the regime, such as Galicia and Castilla Leon, where the majority of the ARMH's exhumations take place. The ARMH's work has helped to break this silence and provide venues for others to do the same. Second, as previously mentioned, the centralized Spanish state has responded to the work of this movement by creating and ignoring memory laws. Yet,

¹The Valley of the Fallen is an enormous mausoleum where nearly 30,000 Spaniards, from both sides of the conflict, as well as Franco, are buried. It contains a 262 meter-long basilica, a monastery, and a 150 meter-high cross that is as wide as a two-lane highway and took nearly 20 years to build (Preston 2002). Twenty thousand Republican prisoners—whom the regime had sentenced to reeducation via labor—built the Valley of the Fallen. Many of these prisoners were injured or killed during its construction. Spanish taxpayers have paid and continue to pay for the site's upkeep (Rubin 2018).

Spanish activists working alongside Argentine associates opened a universal jurisdiction case against Spain in 2010 demanding accountability against the Franco regime for crimes against humanity, including enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention, torture, and the stealing of babies (Ryan 2017). The presiding judge, Maria Servini de Cubría, has indicted over 20 men for crimes against humanity. However, Spain has refused Argentina's extradition request. Yet due to their indictment, these men have effectively been put under country arrest, much like Pinochet, the ex-dictator of Chile in the late 1990s. Additionally, due to this case, over 50 people have been exhumed from mass graves in Spain, the majority exhumed by the ARMH. This case is ongoing. As such, the work of the ARMH, among others in this movement, has put substantial pressure on the Spanish government to address the past and made large inroads in getting the public to do so as well.

Reframing Spain's Collective Memory of Violence

Sociologists have a long-running interest in understanding the development of collective memory (Halbwachs 1992; Olick and Robbins 1998; Steiner and Zelizer 1995), including how certain events, individuals, or groups become included/excluded from these conceptions (Armstrong and Cragge 2006; Irwin-Zarecka 1994; Pelak 2015) and how collective memories of difficult pasts have been challenged (Schwartz 1991; Vinitzky-Seroussi 2002; Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz 1991). In addition to this research, there is also a developing literature on silence, social forgetting, and refutation of certain historical facts (Cohen 2013; Rivera 2008; Vinitzky-Seroussi 2002; Zerubavel 2006).

Yet, memory and forgetting are intertwined processes that often reflect state interests as memory, silencing, and denial often justify state legitimacy and nationalist mythologies (Whitlinger 2015; Zerubavel 2006). For example, those in elite social and political positions are able to promote certain and "official" versions of the past as they control the methods of diffusion, access to information, and the very terms of discussion (Bourdieu 1986; Whitlinger 2015; Zerubavel 2006).

Additionally, some states, especially after instances of state terror and violence, have a stake in purposively silencing particular pasts (Cohen 2013; Zerubavel 2006). This kind of silencing is exemplified in Spain's democratic transition (1975–1978) as it institutionalized a sanitized silence that maintained the status quo and further denied the victims a voice (Encarnación 2008). Scholars have argued that this form of silencing destabilizes social solidarity by threatening the trust and open communication that shapes the foundation of democratic political cultures (Whitlinger 2015; Zerubavel 2006).

However, while elite-imposed silences can be difficult to undo, the passing of time creates new opportunities for disruption (Whitlinger 2015; Zerubavel 2006). These disruptions, according to scholars like Wertsch and Roediger

(2008), are all part of the active processes of contestation and contention of collective memory, history, and collective remembering. They argue that while the state will always have enormous influence over societal understandings of the past, "memory" is still a collective creation produced by groups of people who share similar sets of cultural tools, "especially narrative forms, when understanding the past" (Wertsch and Roediger 2008:324). Again, Spain is a striking example of how after 80 years, memories of the past violence are still being debated and recontextualized via the actions of social actors who are using cultural tools to rewrite collective understandings of Spain's violent past.

Framing

Yet, the success of counter-memories, as Pierre Bourdieu (1986, 2004) notes, depends on the "authority of the speaker." As such, social actors putting forth counter-memories of state terror and violence must be seen as legitimate and not oriented by revenge or corrupt purposes (Olick and Robbins 1998). Subsequently, one such cultural tool that is used in the contestation of collective memory and maintains legitimacy: depoliticized scientific framing. By framing, I mean the process of using interpretive schemas, which individuals or groups use to negotiate, define, and understand their experiences within a social environment (Benford and Snow 2000; Oegema and Klandermans 1994; Snow et al. 1986).

The social movements' literature has long argued that framing authenticity can intensify cogency of movement arguments with audiences (Williams 2004). However, what resonates as authentic is often tied to the individual social movement's goals and claims and can be produced through individual activists (Schrock, Holden, and Reid 2004), their representation of beliefs (Luna 2017), their relationships (Oselin and Corrigan-Brown 2010), or the lack of relationships with other groups or institutions (Pastor and Ortiz 2009; Walker 2016). However, the global forensics-based human rights movement has attempted to overcome this authenticity challenge by framing its work as being grounded and motivated solely by objective, and therefore depoliticized, science (Rosenblatt 2015; Sanford 2003). Activists, using what I call a depoliticized science frame, thus position their work in a way that simplifies and condenses their counter-memory of state terror as merely being the conclusion of objective scientific findings from exhumations, DNA identifications, and historical research, as opposed to political motivation or malice.

This is an effective framing strategy as previous scholarship has shown that forensic science, and science in general (with the notable exception of climate science and vaccines), is generally received by the public as being objectivity based, truthful, value neutral, and "uncontaminated with political values, and therefore an objective arbiter of truth," unlike people, who are open to bias (Donnelly 2012:94; Specht 2013). Intriguingly, other research has suggested that crime

scene television has also helped bolster the perceived legitimacy of forensic science worldwide, which may explain why it has not been as easily dismissed as some other forms of science (Schweitzer and Saks 2007). The literature on forensics-based human rights activism has shown that once activists provide scientific evidence, such as DNA identifications of bodies in mass graves with 99.9 percent accuracy, or forensic proof of torture, it can be difficult for rivals to reasonably contend that the activists' version of violent pasts are false or tainted by politics (Arditti 1999; Rosenblatt 2015; Sanford 2003).

Though the forensics-based human rights movement has existed since the 1980s, it has only recently become a subject of empirical study (Rosenblatt 2015; Rubin 2014; Sanford 2003; Wagner 2008). Moreover, relatively little explicit attention in this developing literature has paid attention to activists' use of framing. This article addresses this gap. Additionally, this research also contributes to the broader conversation in the collective memory literature by empirically analyzing activist behavior and their use of shared cultural tools, such as depoliticized scientific framing, to introduce counter-memories of Spain's violent past that break long-lasting state-imposed silences. This article further argues that the depoliticized science frame ultimately works as a collective action frame, or a frame that garners and mobilizes support while defining the problematic condition and urging others to act, by providing an alternative to overly politicized counter-narratives, and therefore not politically expedient versions, of past violence (Benford and Snow 2000). By agreeing with the science and its findings, supporters do not necessarily have to support any political ideology that could mark them as being antigovernment. This then allows activists to build and gain societal support for transitional justice demands.

Actor Network Theory and Embodiment

Nevertheless, depoliticized scientific framing only works if there is evidence, such as bodies, bones, and DNA. However, I argue that activists do not rely on the remains and personal objects found in graves solely as evidence but rather that the objects themselves are actively participating in the reframing of the past. The literature on objects and their impact on individuals and groups, or materiality, is deep and rich. Materiality studies see the material world not solely as an incarnation of ideals and values but rather what gives social relationships meaning, structure, form, and limitations (Griswold, Mangione, and McDonnell 2013; Zubrzycki 2017). This perspective also allows objects to have agency as expansions of personhood that create reactions from social actors (Gell 1998; Zubrzycki 2017). As such, materiality studies attempt to understand the dualism between objects and subjects to illustrate how social relations are developed on and through material culture (Griswold et al. 2013; Zubrzycki 2017).

Building on this perspective, but coming from science and technology studies, actor network theory (ANT) provides a powerful venue to analyze materiality and how objects can have "a voice of their own" (Latour 1987). According to this view, objects are not simply acted on but can influence action directly as this power is distributed among actors, human and nonhuman alike (Akrich and Latour 1992; Griswold, Mangione, and McDonnell 2013). These nonhuman actors, also known as *actants*, affect behavior via how human and nonhuman interact with each other. For example, nonhuman actants, whether it is border control policy (De León 2015) or an art museum layout (Griswold et al. 2013), can change how humans (like migrants or museum visitors) respond to them, thus creating new ways of interpreting and classifying the world (Griswold et al. 2013). This theory helps trace how people and objects work together in the stabilizing of scientific findings as well as give power to particular ideas.

I add to this conversation by illustrating that the ARMH, via their teaching of their technical work at mass grave exhumations, set into motion a specific kind of interaction between the visitors and the nonhuman actants found in the grave. Specifically, the ARMH classes, including the historical and forensic facts taught to the visitors, work *with* the objects in the grave to give an amplified and materialized "voice" to the remains that stabilizes and empowers the ARMH's counter-memory of Spanish history. This analysis adds an additional layer to understanding how the materialized voices and agency of nonhuman actants both impact and interact with social actors who are attempting to introduce counter-memories of past state terror and violence.

This literature recognizes that materiality, voice, and agency of objects have the ability to produce certain affective reactions from people. Some scholars have shown how material objects can transform the abstract to the physical, thereby encouraging affective attachments and feelings of belonging to the nation-state (Cerulo 1993; Rose-Greenland 2014; Zubrzycki 2017). Others, like Fiona Rose-Greenland (2014, 2017), have shown how antiquities and valueless ceramics maintain important interactions between the state, ordinary citizens, and the materiality of nonobjects to build national cultures and identities. Much like this previous research, this article illustrates how material objects can transform relationships between citizen and the state. However, my work shows how social movement actors are using the intense emotional and affective attachments created by the agency of the remains and objects found in mass graves to challenge the state's sovereignty over collective memory.

Additionally, this literature does not necessarily explain why certain actants have more agency than others in meaning-making. The literature on embodiment helps fill this gap. Embodiment is the idea that a feeling or concept (or in this case, the dead) can manifest or become visible and tangible. Scholars have shown that human remains have the capacity

to trigger emotional responses, as objects of mourning, from both relatives and witnesses alike (Renshaw 2011). Zoë Crossland's (2000) work on the return of skeletonized remains of disappeared people in Argentina demonstrates how parents become deeply affected when reunited with their children's remains as the bones became their embodied dead children (Crossland 2000). Other scholarship has similarly contended that when relatives see skeletal remains of their family members that the bodies become embodied with the "living memories" of their loved ones, which bridges the "otherness" that skeletons can sometimes illicit (Hallam and Hockey 2001).

In Spain, there are few living children of the victims or survivors of the violence; the majority of those searching for remains are the grandchildren of the victims (Renshaw 2011). Layla Renshaw (2010a) has argued that this lack of direct relationships between the dead and living does not diminish the impact that remains can have. Rather, post-memory, which is the sense of historical connection to the remains, helps bridge any otherness that the bones may provoke otherwise (Renshaw 2010b).

However, sometimes those viewing mass graves do not always emotionally connect or feel impacted by the human remains (Cassia 2005). Instead, for some, personal objects or clothing can become the locus of intense connection as the personhood of the dead becomes powerfully distributed through the physical objects (Crossland 2013). Personal belongings thus can conjure emotional and embodied moments that facilitate relationships between the living and dead. These connections transform the objects into becoming a part of a tangible reality, allowing them to be easily imagined having been used in life (Renshaw 2010b). Sarah Wagner (2008) similarly argues that personal objects found in graves in Bosnia Herzegovina recall a life, a person, and a story.

I contend that the objects and remains found in ARMH-led exhumations are so powerful because they are embodied with the lives of the dead that emphasize and magnify the "story" the activists and the objects are already telling. The embodied objects also facilitate a relationship between the agency and voiced materiality of the remains with the visitors, which again also intensifies the bones' voices. The activists also act as necessary interpreters for the remains and objects as the forensic and historical information help give meaning to the remains and objects' agency. Moreover, the combination of the remains and objects' agency and embodiment thus also amplifies the ARMH's framing of the past.

This research permits the development of my conception of why certain objects need interpreters for their voice and agency as well as how the combination of embodiment and ANT can provide a powerful tool in reconstructing meaning and memory. This approach increases our understanding of how this combination can increase the authenticity and resonance of a social movement organization's framing of the past. Additionally, by combining framing, ANT, and

embodiment in understanding the negotiation of collective memory, I explore a useful opening in theory building between the literatures. This combination allows us to deconstruct the complex and fluid processes of how non-state actors attempt to challenge and change collective memory in polarized societies. It also provides a venue to analyze how ANT and embodiment as a dual process enhances the affective impact of material and agent objects.

Data and Methods

This article draws on 15 months of participant observations conducted in two waves (2015; 2016–2017) with the Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory. My ethnographic fieldwork consisted of observing the daily operations of the ARMH's laboratory and attending public events as well as observing and fully participating in searches and exhumations of mass graves. A multisite approach to participant observation encouraged my decision to follow the association, which provided the opportunity to be embedded in all of their work and gain access to those interacting with the association (Marcus 2009). Additionally, this approach allowed me to observe many different regions of Spain, including Galicia, Castilla-León, Madrid, and Cádiz. Given the political significance of regionalism in Spain, this approach offered the opportunity to view the association's work and impact across a variety of regions and reception by locals. I selected the ARMH because it was the originator of the movement in Spain as well as the most active and recognized organization in Spain conducting exhumations during the time I was in the field.

I obtained access by contacting the association, who welcomed me to work alongside them during the times I requested. In exchange, I did volunteer work, such as organizing and digitizing documents as well as translating various items such as records, guest books, and reports. While in the field, I took full field notes that were then hand-coded. On occasion, I would also record public events or access to the association's videos of public events to further cross-check and add details to the full field notes.

Additionally, I conducted 200 informal interviews with nonactivist Spaniards who attended mass grave exhumations or other memory events. I also recruited 15 activists working within the ARMH and 15 nonactivists to do formal and recorded interviews. I used snowball sampling to recruit the formal interviews.

For all the interviews, I designed and followed a semi-structured interview guide. The guide covered the respondents' opinions on the history of political violence in Spain, human rights in general, the memory movement in Spain, the role of exhumations and DNA on human rights, and whether they thought the dominant historical memory was changing and why. For the activists, the guide only changed to include questions about their personal experiences working in human rights. The interviews ranged from 30 to 120 minutes and

were conducted and transcribed in Spanish. I conducted the formal interviews in private locations. During the data analysis and coding process, I translated the key parts of the interviews. I coded all of the interviews using the qualitative software HyperResearch. In an attempt to protect the identities of those working with the association, as it is a very small organization, I have opted to identify them only by their work titles. I have removed all nonessential utterances for clarity.

I conducted the informal interviews in public spaces, including graveside during searches and exhumations and in theaters, cafes, and houses. I realized quickly that in these public spaces, even with the promise of confidentiality, the use of a recorder was limiting in terms of access and responses due to the pervasive fear that still remains when talking about these issues. While I believe that privacy and recording is useful in obtaining good data, in this case, the open, casual nature of my informal interviews with the respondents was a better way to access the respondents' true opinions. However, the majority of the time I was one on one with the respondents even though we were in a public place. My informal interviews functioned more like conversations during which, when appropriate, I would take notes. I would wait—often no longer than 10 minutes—to reconstruct the conversation in my field notes. I coded these interviews by hand. However, I was able in some cases to record these informal interviews. The recorded interviews were transcribed and coded. I have removed all identifiable information from the informal interviews to protect the privacy of the respondents.

Findings

In the following, I discuss the structure of ARMH's impromptu classes given at its mass grave exhumations.² I explain how activists begin by framing their work as pedagogically oriented since they are teaching the forensic science that tells the true history of Spain. It is here that the depoliticized science frame is deployed as it grounds their work in science rather than politics. Next, I examine how they then weave in claims about the rights of the victims' families to retrieve their loved ones' remains. Then I analyze how the ARMH class leader allows the activated objects to "speak" their truth, which has been translated by the forensic experts. I illustrate at this moment how the objects transform into the embodied lives of the dead, which then allows ARMH activists to make sharper critiques of the Spanish state's memory politics and introduce claims for the need for transitional justice. In the final section, I show how the impact of the classes can lead to participatory democratization of collective memory.

²I use the word *classes* because the activists themselves called these interactions *clases en el pie de la fosa*, or classes at the foot of the grave.

Classes at the Foot of the Grave: Introducing Depoliticized Science Framing

The ARMH actively seeks the presence of locals at their exhumations with the goal of encountering more witnesses who can help locate a grave or fill in additional details about the violence. The ARMH is hopeful that more victims' families will be interested in searching for missing relatives and will come to exhumations to make initial contact. To make this happen, the ARMH contacts newspapers about their upcoming work, with special attention dedicated to the individuals who are in the grave and the location of the search so people will know where to go. Most visitors will have heard about the ARMH's work through newspapers, which especially in smaller towns, are the key media used to communicate the association's work and purpose across age groups as opposed to other media, such as word of mouth or social media.

To find the exhumation, visitors often do not have to go far to look as ARMH exhumations normally take place off of main roadways or in civil parts of local cemeteries, wherever the mass graves are located.³ Depending on when the locals arrive, the team can be in a variety of excavation or exhumation stages. However, to protect the grave and the workers from the elements, ARMH workers put up tarps, canopies, and physical markers near the grave, such as red and white tape, to delineate both the grave's margins and create a boundary line to where visitors can approach.

The team is aware that visitors may be nervous upon approaching due to Spain's history of repression, fear, and silence, not to mention that human remains are fully visible. As such, the team tries its best to create an open and welcoming atmosphere at the gravesite. They do this by greeting every person who visits and engaging with them at a personal level. Visitors very rarely come alone and are often accompanied by friends or family members. The ARMH can have from 1 to upward of 90 people visiting a grave at any given time. The team's engagement facilitates connection and reduces the sometimes overwhelming emotions that can appear when one is viewing a mass grave for the first time. As a team member explained, "One of the most important goals of creating an open environment is that everyone, even those who are against our work, feel welcome to approach and interact."

Visitors often approach slowly, with many staying a good distance away from the grave until encouraged to come closer. I have observed a variety of emotional reactions of visitors viewing a grave for the first time, ranging from stoic

³In traditional Catholic cemeteries, the graveyard is normally segregated between consecrated ground and the civil part of the cemetery, which holds the remains of suicides, unbaptized babies, and non-Catholics.

silence and gasps to hands over mouths and often intense curiosity that inspires the visitor to lean in closer to the grave. As one older man who was visiting said, “Que horror, que horror [what a horror, what a horror]. . . . I can see exactly how they were thrown in. Time stopped when they buried them.” This description is accurate in that when viewing a mass grave, it is quite easy to imagine how the killers buried the bodies. If the bodies were not previously disturbed, they have stayed in the exact positions they were thrown in and are sometimes still wearing various accessories they had when they were killed, such as wedding rings, shoes, belts, hair combs, and so on. It should be noted that remains with clothing, other than traces of cloth, are very rare as textiles tend to degrade faster than metal or rubber.

Once a critical mass of people (decided by ARMH leaders), mostly locals living near the gravesite, have arrived at the grave, ARMH leaders will begin an impromptu class. The class, in spite of its apparent spontaneity, almost always follows the same script, beginning with a crash course in forensics. ARMH leaders, often the lead archeologist, start by explaining that the team is following international protocols created by the United Nations on how to exhume mass grave victims, grounding their work within the international human rights community (for more on protocols, see Cox et al. 2008; Haglund, Connor, and Scott 2001; Stover, Haglund, and Samuels 2003). They then explain that through forensic anthropology, in combination with extensive historical research, it is possible to ascertain certain facts, such as who is in the grave, their sex, their age at time of death, and sometimes explaining the existence of perimortem injuries, or injuries occurring at or near time of death. The forensic archeologist, or other trained class leader, then explains how forensic anthropology differentiates female and male skeletons by looking for various osteological differences, like the width of the pelvis or the back notch of a cranium. If there are female and male skeletons in the grave, they demonstrate these differences in the grave. It is here that the class leader highlights that the team is using science, and science only, to guide their conclusions. Politics, as the class leader argues, does not affect their findings as the protocols and the science itself do not allow room for an identified objective or the political bias to enter.

They then weave in the known history of the victims and how they died, using the research of the ARMH’s in-house historian and oral testimonies from relatives and locals. In some cases, they edit out some of the more gruesome details, such as testimonies of intense torture, including castration or rape, so as not to overwhelm the visitors. However, sometimes those listening, especially if they are from the local village, will lean toward whoever is close to fill in the missing details.

The class leader then segues into explaining the work happening in the grave by pointing out what stage of the excavation (the removal of dirt on and around the remains) or exhumation (the removal of the bones from the gravesite) that the team is in. For example, they sometimes point out a

specific team member and explain the various tools they are using, the regions of the body they are working on, which regions of the corpse are more difficult to excavate, and the importance of the painstaking nature of the work. The class leader then describes how the bones will be catalogued and wrapped in newspaper, put in boxes, and transported to their laboratory for further analysis. They explain that a volunteer forensic anthropologist will later analyze the remains following international protocols, after which they will hopefully have an identification of the victim. The class leader explains that restituting a body to its biological identity is an internationally recognized human right and is one of the most important aspects of their work.

The class leader clarifies that sometimes identifications can be procured from forensic anthropology and archival work alone, such as one case where the victims were a mother and son. Once the sex of the bodies was determined, the bodies had their identifications. Other times, victims can only be identified through DNA testing. They explain that for many years, the ARMH had to pay to run DNA tests because there is no national DNA database or state support and no Spanish genetic laboratory offered to do the work pro bono. Due to this, the ARMH could not perform genetic testing until, as the course leaders says, “the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team (EAAF), one of the most important and influential teams in the world,” took over the ARMH’s DNA testing needs for free because “they believe in the work of the ARMH.”

The leaders’ focus on explaining the technical nature of the work and the ARMH’s international connections and support solidifies and legitimizes their claim that it is an internationally recognized science-based organization not outwardly motivated by politics. This focus reinforces the ARMH’s authenticity as educators whose job is to inform the people about its work in “recovering Spain’s true history based in the evidence found in the grave.” By doing this, the ARMH is alerting those listening to the fact that a renowned international human rights organization, the EAAF, believes and trusts the ARMH with the goals of bringing international human rights norms and science to Spain. This emphasis on the science and pedagogy of its work also functions as an introduction to the collective action frame of depoliticized science, which grounds the validity of their work in internationally recognized scientific methods. The science and the protocols being introduced by the leader are thus presented as being agenda-less and depoliticized; they are simply the arbiters of truth. Once this credibility and legitimacy have been established, ARMH activists can more easily navigate the rewriting of the collective memory of the past. They do this by transitioning the class into describing how families contact the association to find and exhume their missing loved one.

Introducing Moral Claims and Frames

The class leader will explain that to gain access to the association’s expertise, victims’ relatives must first make a

formal request, where the family gives official permission to the association to search and exhume, if possible, the body of their relative. Once they have the request, they begin the historical archival work, which includes requesting official documents such as birth and death records, if they exist, from the local governments. This can be a long process as some regional governments are opposed to this work and engage in stalling but due to the Historical Memory Law, are eventually compelled to comply. When it can be determined where the person died, the association will search to locate the grave or speak with locals about the grave's location. In many cases, the association's luck in finding a grave depends on when the killing occurred. It is easier to locate it if the killing occurred during the Franco regime as they documented their actions.⁴

The class leader will remind everyone that the association's main goal is helping families of the victims of state terror recover their relatives and bury them according to the families' cultural and religious beliefs. As they tell every class, "The most important part of our work is the reinterment. We do this work so that the families and *not* the killers get to decide how the victims are buried." The leader continues by stating that the association does not believe the families should pay for any of the associated costs of the search and recovery of their relatives, but rather, the state should be responsible; however, "as the state is not paying, we [ARMH] have taken over their responsibility." They explain that the ARMH does not make any of the reburial decisions as this right only belongs to the families, "a right that has been denied to them for 80 years, a right all families deserve." However, the ARMH does offer to do a commemoration event before a reburial if the family is interested. The ARMH always defers to the family's wishes on the details of both the commemoration and reburial to ensure that the family is supported in every way possible. The ARMH has even provided headstones for later cemetery burials.

The leaders' focus on the moral imperative of the rights of families has long been the stance of the ARMH and something that they have been criticized for (see Bevernage and Colaert 2014). However, the tactic of focusing on the families, their suffering, and the very human need to honor the dead rather than the politics that led to their relative's deaths is a useful tactic as it neutralizes opposition. It is able to do so as the ARMH is tapping into long-existing cultural norms surrounding death rituals and the obligations of families to their dead kin (see Ferrándiz 2013; Renshaw 2011; Robben 2017). Moreover, it seems to be a working strategy. In the majority of the interviews, informants voiced the ARMH's common

refrain, as one woman put it, "All families have the right to recover and bury their dead." Another man, who visited an exhumation along the famed Camino de Santiago, said with a pained sigh, "These families have suffered enough."

The critique of the state is also tempered as the ARMH are suggesting that the state should be responsible for helping victims move forward and not demanding that the state be overthrown, pay reparations, or even apologize. However, this is not to say that the classes are actually depoliticized. As pointed out by team members in interviews, politics is always there and therefore not necessary to be explicit about it. As one association leader said, "Everyone who comes to see the graves knows that this was political violence. Everyone knows at least that. Why is it necessary to hammer the point and potentially run off curious people who are afraid of being associated with 'red' politics?" This quote suggests that ARMH leadership is strategically depoliticizing their work in hopes of reaching more people and therefore having a larger societal impact.

Additionally, this part of the class frames the ARMH's work as being apolitical as it is working at the request of victims' families, conservative or liberal. Thus, the ARMH frames itself as a venue for the will and agency of victims' families, not a political organization with explicit political goals. ARMH leaders' emphasis on the victims' families also places scientific exhumations as *the* medium for families and communities to gain much needed closure for wounds that never healed, as opposed to a political act motivated by revenge or the desire to destabilize the country. Their framing also connects the association's work to the larger international human rights claims that all families have the right to recover their missing loved ones as a form of justice and that the victims of enforced disappearance have the right to be repatriated with their identities.

The Grave Speaks

The classes, especially if there are skeletons bearing marks of violence, are successful in providing an authentic counter-memory because the skeletons do most of the talking. The skeletons, due to the clear "truth" that a bullet hole can bring, become the materialized examples of state terror against its citizens. It is not necessary to beleague the point that these were violent and unjustified deaths when you have the physical remains of a person who was clearly shot execution style and buried in a ditch alongside of the highway. As such, when bodies have clear signs of violence, they are able to speak and exert a certain type of agency onto those interacting with them. The bones' agency and voiced materiality of state terror thus work to amplify the ARMH's framing of the past as it gives it additional weight and authenticity. The ARMH's use of depoliticized science also helps position the activists as the bones' interpreters as they are able to provide detailed technical explanations on how to

⁴The Franco regime started creating records in 1937. However, it should be noted that many of these documents do not provided explicit enough details to locate mass graves; rather, further substantiation by oral testimonies is often needed.

differentiate sex, age, or evidence of torture, which strengthens the agency and voice of the remains. Furthermore, starting the second part of the class with the presentation of evidence of violence signals the beginning of a clearer criticism of the Spanish centralized state and seizure over the collective memory of the past.

The Bones “Speak” Their Truth

After the discussion of the technical work, the class leader segues the classes’ attention to any objects found in the grave, usually starting with bullets, bullet casings, or the clear presence of bullet wounds in the remains. The course leader begins by pointing to the bullets, normally at this point being passed around and touched by visitors, and declares that these objects “are clear signs that a crime has taken place, but” pausing for effect, “it is impossible for any of the families to receive justice due to the Amnesty Law of 1977.” They continue by saying that the Spanish state, as a further insult, has ensured that the educational system and government continue to ignore the past. When the lead archeologist is teaching, he pulls from his personal experience by saying not once during his education, including when he earned his degrees in forensic archeology and history, did he learn about the Civil War, the dictatorship, or that “Spain is second only to Cambodia in terms of how many mass graves exist in the country.”

The course leader then directs the focus to signs of violence on the bodies, such as bullet holes or perimortem fractures, and explains how it is scientifically possible to discern the difference between exit and entry wounds, although sometimes visible holes can be caused by other sources. Through my observations, I noticed that visitors are drawn to clear signs of violence, such as a bullet wound to the skull or a chest cavity filled with bullets. Visitors often attempt to get physically close to the skeletal remains to see the wounds and ask for explanations about what they are looking at, for which they will receive a technical answer. Bodies with clear signs of violence have less ambiguity, thereby allowing visitors to more clearly hear the voice of the remains, their materiality. The technical answers additionally strengthen the ARMH’s positioning as the true translators of the remains’ voice and Spain’s violent history.

In my informal interviews with visitors, many would mention that bones with signs of violence spoke the true history of Spain. At one exhumation, a local woman in her late sixties came to see the grave with her sister after reading about the exhumation in the local newspaper and explained, “I had to see it for myself. After all the stories I had heard growing up . . . I just had to see for myself what was done to these boys. I had to know.” The woman continued, saying that what she saw was more violent than she had expected due to the bullet wounds in their skulls. She maintained that in spite of this, she was glad she came because she wanted the dead to know that they were being met with kindness and that hopefully could be returned to their families. She asserted that she

thought all Spaniards should be required to see the graves as she felt that the bones spoke more loudly and honestly than any politician. In this case, the clear materialized voice and agency of the remains worked to affect and solidify this woman’s understanding of the past, which echoed and gave immense power to the ARMH’s framing of the violence.

Many of the visitors I spoke with also cited skeletons with signs of violence as being one of the more important aspects of visiting the exhumation and tended to write about it in the visitor’s book. In one, a woman wrote:

I was so impressed to see the skeleton and the cranium with the little bullet hole. What feelings of emotion were running through my body, and the tears forming in my eyes! I hope that the families can finally receive the news that their loved ones have been found.

Another man wrote, “It is unbelievably impressive to see the bullet wound in the head. Your work is a moment of light for those who were impoverished by the darkness of a bullet.” Yet again, these writings suggest that the materialized voice and agency of the remains containing bullet holes are clear and eloquent. The story the remains are telling is that these deaths were violent and this was state terror. Moreover, these findings suggest that those who are listening to the voiced materiality of the remains are interpreting them in the way that the ARMH has framed it. As such, the ARMH, using objective science, are providing clear truths via the use of scientific protocols that reveal clear evidence, such as bullet wounds. Additionally, the bones themselves are speaking their objective truths in strong voices, all of which together culminates in the amplification and reification of the ARMH’s reframed narrative of the past.

Embodied Objects, Embodied Loss

For many visitors, family members, and team members, personal objects become embodied with the imagined lives of the dead. The classes use these embodied objects to encourage those in attendance to humanize the vacant skeletons, so they are seen as humans—as victims—who died in a moment of state terror. The objects, like the physical remains, similarly provoke a materialized voice and agency but add an additional emotional layer due to embodiment, which increases the intensity of the skeletons’ voices and the ARMH’s framing. Additionally, the classes reinforce that these people are worthy of being remembered and cared for, as opposed to forgotten, which, according to the ARMH, has been the state’s perspective for 80 years.

Breaking the Silence and Advocating for Accountability

After discussing signs of violence, the class leader then calls attention to a personal object in the grave. Throughout the

course of my fieldwork, almost every grave exhumed contained personal objects belonging to the victims. The most common objects to survive 80 years in the ground are metal (e.g., rings, clasps, buckles, etc.) or shoes as they were made out of either rubber or leather, which take longer to degrade.

During one exhumation of four people (two couples), the course leader pointed out the wedding ring, the hair comb, and red earring still resting on the cranium of a 23-year-old female victim, who according to locals' testimonies, was eight months pregnant at the time of her death. After pointing out her personal objects, he asked the group,

What kind of threat was this woman to the state that could have justified her execution? How can it be that the government also says that this woman and her relatives would be unable to receive any kind of legal justice for her murder? Or that her story, among the over 120,000 stories of the disappeared, should never be told?

At a different class, he displayed the remains of a black leather shoe that had degraded enough to reveal the foot bones of a 15- to 17-year-old boy who died alongside his father. Again, he asked the class how this violence, this silence, and this impunity were justifiable.

In my observations as well as throughout the informal and formal interviews, personal objects were frequently mentioned as being one of the most impressive and moving parts of the class. One woman, who attended the class with the boy's shoe, began crying when the archeologist displayed it. Later on, she explained, while holding onto her 10-year-old son who came with her to the exhumation, that she was overcome when she saw the shoe because "those were the shoes that boy died in." Here the embodied life and death of a child via shoes helped facilitate an emotional connection and relationship to a visitor. Moreover, this moment of embodiment also facilitated a connection to the remains and their agency. This was the unjustifiable murder of a child at the hands of the state. As the visitor said, "a child not that much older than my son."

Team members also noted personal objects as being one of the more emotionally provocative elements of their work. During one interview, a female activist explained how at her first exhumation she was surprised that she did not feel anything. She explained that it wasn't until she saw a pair of shoes where the heels had been worn down in a similar way to how her boots wear down that she began to feel the impact of the work. As she said, "It wasn't until then that I understood them [the remains] to be humans whom had lives. This person had been walking—in the same way that I walk—they were having a life and then it was over, taken from them for no reason." At this moment, she became overwhelmed with grief, so much so she had to leave the gravesite until she composed herself. Then she went back to work. Another team member who was so emotionally affected by the pregnant victim with the red earring later incorporated the image

of the earring into a tattoo, thereby turning his body into a permanent homage and locus for further "teaching moments."

This connection to the individual victim via personal objects was not limited to visitors or team members but also extended to the relatives of the victims. As previously mentioned, the families of the victims are often deeply involved in searching for their loved ones, including staying at the graveside during exhumations. At one exhumation in a small village in Galicia, a part of Spain known for concentrated repression, the association was exhuming two bodies. One of the bodies was discovered still wearing detailed blue and green art deco cufflinks. The victim had been a local tailor who had been interrogated by the Civil Guard about his knowledge of the rebels living in the surrounding hills. His final moments of life were brutally violent as his skeleton revealed many torture-induced premortem fractures.

During an interview with one of the victim's grandsons, he explained that while he had not known his grandfather or his family's full history up until that moment that he was grateful to have been able to, along with his cousin, have the opportunity to "meet his grandfather" and learn his family's history through the story of his bones. It was important to him, as a sign of respect, that their grandfather's body be removed from his clandestine grave. He maintained that the cufflinks were beyond meaningful saying, "What a beautiful remembrance to have. What a beautiful way to connect to him. . . . I can't wait to take them home with me. That way we will always have him with us." For the grandson, the cufflinks embodied the life of his grandfather and were a way to feel a deep emotional connection to him.

Personal objects make the humanization of the victims possible because they facilitate a visceral connection to the past; they tell the story of the life that was lost in a very clear and simple way. If a skeleton is still wearing a pair of shoes with soles made out of tires, it is easy to see the life of a poor yet clever peasant who made shoes that would last. A wedding ring speaks to the existence of a spouse, possibly children, and a home life left behind. A pair of earrings or a hair comb tells the story of a woman and the kind of fashion style she preferred. These objects sketch out the basic outlines of a life, of a person.

This embodiment of the objects is intensified when they have been presented in combination with the basic historical and forensic facts about the victims, such as their age, sex, or the discovery of fetal remains or torture-induced fractures. Furthermore, these embodied moments merge with the voiced materiality and agency of the remains so that the message is loud and clear. This combination allows for the personal objects to embody not only the imagined lives of the dead and what was lost with them but also the horror and cruelty of state terror. Additionally, as these moments of embodiment are being realized, the witnesses are also looking at a hole in the ground containing the skeletonized remains of murder victims whose violent deaths are easily imagined, thus making their last moments of life all the more real and terrifying.

The Public's Emotional and Political Responses to the Forensic Lessons

At the end of every class, the class leader asks if anyone has any questions, starting a question and answer (Q&A) session. The visitors, the majority of the time, have a standard range of questions, starting with: What will happen next? How do you DNA test bones? What happens if you can't identify them? These questions are answered relatively quickly with a quick rundown of the next proximate technical steps, including a review of the anthropological and genetic tests to come, how they are done, and what happens when someone is identified or not. If they are identified, they try to plan for the reburial based off the family's wishes; and if identification is not possible, the remains will stay in the laboratory until the day they can be identified. However, visitors often use the Q&A sessions to process emotions or express political opinions. In many cases, the first emotion expressed by visitors is gratitude.

Forgiveness and Political Speech

After one class during the exhumation of four repression victims who had been killed in 1949 in a shootout with the Civil Guard, locals used the session to express both gratitude and contrition for the past. It should be noted that these victims of state violence had not been disappeared, nor were they citizens of the local village where they were buried. Rather, they were guerrilla fighters who had been living and hiding in the mountains for 10 years battling the regime. Thus, their deaths and autopsies were fully documented, and they were buried in individual caskets in the civil part of the cemetery. However, according to local legend, they were buried in red caskets as they were "reds."⁵ As such, many of the village elders who attended the exhumation were the children of those who had been responsible for the deaths of the four individuals.

At the end of the class, a local elderly woman, who had attended every day of the exhumation, raised her hand to speak. She turned to the victims' relatives, which included the daughter of one of the victims, and said,

I want to thank the team for their tremendous work. I want to thank them for allowing us to close this painful chapter in our town. It is very emotional to see this. And to the families, I want to say I am sorry for what was done to yours. They were not bad like they said, and neither are we. We are sorry for what happened here and hope that you will now have peace.

She then went over and hugged each of them. Others from the town followed her lead and also approached the families to offer similar sentiments and hugs. One of the relatives

⁵Calling the defeated Republicans "reds" was a common form of othering, often racialized in nature, that worked to label and repress both Republicans and their offspring as being communists or Marxists.

responded to the outpouring of support by announcing, through his tears, his gratitude to both the team and the town for allowing them the opportunity to retrieve the remains of their loved ones and for "helping us close this wound in our family."

In this case, the class worked to facilitate the acceptance of a counter-memory that was different from the dominant state-backed narrative. The original narrative was that this violence was necessary to take down a violent communist guerrilla threat. However, after the class, it changed into one of unjustified and brutal state terror. Moreover, the class gave a public venue to the children—on both sides of the violence—to facilitate a mixture of connection, atonement, and the beginnings of closure. The majority of the villagers of this local town were very affected by the violence that had occurred. During my informal interviews, locals expressed how the exhumation gave them an opportunity to express both their sadness and feelings of guilt over the past as well as relief that this chapter had finally come to an end. For some locals who I spoke to, this opportunity was extremely important as they wanted to apologize, ask forgiveness, and show the relatives their humanity; they wanted to be seen as distinct from their parents. The families of the victims whom I talked to were overwhelmed by this show of support and felt grateful that they had been able to participate, with one female family member happily taking pictures with the villagers and team members for her family photo albums.

In other circumstances, visitors used the Q&A sessions to make explicit political statements and connections, which the ARMH does not officially engage in during technical work. During one exhumation in the south of Spain, where the class size was upward of 90 people, all but one of the responses was politically oriented speech. During the Q&A session, a well-known Civil War historian asked to speak. He was also a repression victim—his physical body testified to the brutality of the regime—he was on crutches due to a childhood battle with polio because children of "reds" were denied access to vaccines. He began by thanking the team for their work in finding four more of the lost. He then launched into the history of how many were killed in this region of Spain, how many graves are still unopened, the importance of remembering what happened in the past, and remembering them as victims of fascist state terror. He went on to say,

Each Spaniard needs to see these [exhumations] to be *informed*. We need to be informed about what we are looking at [pointing to the grave]; there are four cadavers, the remains of four people who were assassinated. . . . The people of Spain need to see this clearly, so that they understand what happened . . . it is not valuable to hear or see our history *decaffeinated!*

He ended his speech with repeating the common refrain of many global memory movements, "¡nunca mas!," or "never again." After he was done, the class leader introduced him to the group as a prominent historian who had helped create a

list of the missing in the Andalusia region, which had been helping the association locate many victims.

In this case, the Q&A session became an extension of the class as a well-respected historian led it, which helped reinforce the ARMH's pedagogical and scientific legitimacy and their counter-memory of the violence. Additionally, as the ARMH have positioned themselves as scientists and are being received as such, they are also distanced from the politics of the dead and the visitors. Rather, the ARMH is helping, as the historian said, to inform Spain of its real history in a "caffeinated way," or a less sanitized manner. It is then up to the visitors, or the witnesses, to decide what they think is the real history of Spain. Moreover, it is the visitors who are making the political statements and not the ARMH. The ARMH is thus somewhat distanced from the consequences of these opinions.

Participatory Democratization of Collective Historical Memory

However, not all Q&A sessions were as supportive of breaking away from the status quo. At one exhumation, a retired judge was in attendance. During the Q&A session, the judge began by first thanking the team for their work. He then asked a question about the efficacy of justice and whether the Spanish state was actually obligated to do anything under international law. The judge maintained that the amnesty law was needed because it had maintained peace during the democratic transition and to hold judges accountable for failing to help victims' families was an unfair critique. At this point, some of the other 20 people in the class began to murmur disapprovingly. It should be noted that something as simple as disapproving public murmurs would have been impossible only a few years ago as this was a powerful man during the regime.

As the judge continued to argue against the need to change any of the judicial structures, even contesting the need for judges to have any part in exhumation efforts, a woman standing near him interrupted him. She asked him, while gesturing to the remains, "How can you say these institutional silences could be just?" Another visitor stated, "The remains clearly show that a crime has taken place, look at the bullet holes!" The class quickly became a group discussion over the role of the judiciary and what needs to change—or doesn't—to achieve justice. One ARMH volunteer, a woman in her early thirties, jumped into the conversation to say that if it weren't for a judge, she would never have been able to exhume her grandfather. In fact, she continued, her grandfather's case was the first in Spain to be issued and supported by a judge and "without the judge's support he would still be buried in a ditch like a dog." The judge eventually capitulated that families have the right to retrieve their dead and that this is important for healthy democracies to respect. This discussion continued and covered the role of the Spanish

state, the politics of the democratic transition, as well as how the victims should be remembered, including a brief dialogue over defining the victims as civilians or "rebels" who died in battle—with some scoffing at the idea that they were rebels. The conversation ended by everyone agreeing that this was the time for Spain to finally acknowledge its violent past. What was particularly poignant about this moment was that this negotiation of collective memory occurred directly in front of the exposed remains of six victims of state terror.

I asked about this exchange later in a discussion with team members. One suggested that this conversation was emblematic of all of Spanish society. He said,

Here you have the institution, the judge, who is interested in maintaining the status quo and is not interested in investigating or pursuing justice. Then you have the local people who are listening to the judge, most scared to say anything, with the exception of a small, but vocal, group of people, most who have been directly impacted by the violence. Then you have the left and the academics [the ARMH], and they just stayed silent.

However, while this may be an accurate interpretation of the failings of the various actors in the memory movement, the fact that some of the locals felt that they could disagree and engage in a *public* debate with a person representing institutional power is, as some of the ARMH leaders said, a sign of progress. Additionally, by not participating in the debate, ARMH leaders maintained their explicit depoliticized stance. They present and frame their work as being the pedagogical medium of Spain's true history, not its political leaders.

This debate as well as the first vignette of group contrition reflect the impact of these classes. In both cases, locals, after listening to the classes, felt empowered enough to push back and have meaningful conversations, using the information recently learned to back up their positions. Although some stayed silent, they were also watching and were provided with a valuable model of how to have these kinds of discussions as well as what breaking the silence without fear looks like. Additionally, those silently watching also witnessed that there were no serious or dangerous repercussions for breaking the silence. As fear of breaking the long and institutionalized silence, whether grounded in logic or not, is pervasive in rural Spain, this demonstration is powerful. All of which, I posit, works to restructure how history and collective memory can be understood and expressed by citizens, away from a top-down approach to a more participatory and democratic process.

Conclusion

This article has examined the tactics (framing, activated objects, embodiment) that activists with the Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory use to introduce long-silenced counter-memories of the violence of the Spanish Civil War and the Franco regime. I have shown how activists

use depoliticized science framing as the foundation for its legitimacy, which then opens the door for activists to introduce moral and judicial claims about Spain's past and future. I have further demonstrated that the legitimacy and impact of this counter-memory is bolstered by the agency and embodiment of the remains and personal objects exposed in the graves. This tactic works to reclaim the dead as fellow citizens deserving of proper burial and care, as opposed to "reds" warranting death and disdain. This combination of voiced materiality, agency, and embodiment of the remains and personal objects increases the affective impact of the ARMH's reframed version of Spain's violent past. Altogether, I have illustrated how these strategies work in tandem to guide visitors to perceive the past in a new way, which encourages a bottom-up participatory democratization of the ownership of collective memory.

The collective memory literature has problematized the complexity and fluidity of the formation of memory (Gamson 2018; Olick and Robbins 1998), including how certain events, individuals, or groups become included/excluded from these conceptions (Armstrong and Crage 2006; Irwin-Zarecka 1994; Pelak 2015); how collective memories of difficult pasts have been challenged (Schwartz 1991; Vinitzky-Seroussi 2002; Wagner-Pacifi and Schwartz 1991); as well as how social actors, including the state, vie for control of historical narrative, collective memory, and remembering (Wertsch and Roediger 2008; Whitlinger 2015; Zerubavel 2006). This research adds to this conversation by exploring how social movement actors are using cultural tools (framing, activated objects, embodiment) to introduce counter-memories of Spain's violent past, creating space for emotional interactions about the past trauma, and make compelling arguments for transitional justice. This research thus pushes our understanding of collective memory creation, contention, contestation, and fluidity.

Additionally, this research contributes to the literature on collective memory by placing it in conversation with three other distinct literatures: framing, actor network theory, and embodiment. By addressing the social movement literature on framing, this article nuances how activists both introduce and find acceptance for their counter-memories. Previous work has shown that authenticity in framing is important to the acceptance of movement arguments from audiences (Luna 2017; Walker 2016; Williams 2004). Similarly, this research has shown that ARMH activists, by using depoliticized scientific framing, not only increase the resonance of their counter-memory of violence but also further spread their movement's agenda and introduce potential members to their movement. By emphasizing the legitimacy of depoliticized science, ARMH activists create an additional platform to present their counter-narrative as well as introduce claims about the rights of victims' families and the need for further transitional justice. More research, like that of Francisco Ferrándiz (2013, 2016), should continue to investigate to see how successful this tactic is at mobilizing locals into continued support of the

ARMH's agenda after an exhumation in their town and whether this builds cooperation among local governments who may originally politically oppose their work.

Additionally, this study provides evidence of how depoliticized scientific framing can maintain more macro-movement mobilization in hostile climates. Other organizations that mobilized in Spain in the early 2000s, most notably the Forum for Memory, another activist group that engaged in scientific exhumations and at times a vocal critic of the ARMH's depoliticized approach (Bevernage and Colaert 2014; Ferrándiz 2013; Rubin 2018), aggressively put forward leftist political arguments and sentiments and worked with political parties in their exhumation work. However, they have since switched focus away from exhumations to educational and protest events. They have also been vocal in supporting the exhumation of those buried at the Valley of the Fallen. The ARMH, however, continues to perform exhumations and hold memory events and is a formidable voice in the memory politics of Spain, due in much part to their successful navigation of the political terrain by framing their work around depoliticized science and the rights of victims' families.

At an even more macro level, the forensics-based human rights movement offers an example of where science is still seen as a legitimate and untainted source of information (Donnelly 2012; Rosenblatt 2015). Considering how science is viewed in other instances, such as climate change, this research provides an interesting perspective on how science can still intersect politically sensitive aspects of society, be framed as having irrefutable answers, and maintain its depoliticized status. Additional research should be conducted to understand why forensic science versus other types is considered more legitimate as well as the continued impact of forensics-based human rights framing in postconflict societies to see if this framing maintains its power long term. Furthermore, this research has illustrated that depoliticized scientific framing is being used to make space for emotional interactions with the target audience. This is an intriguing finding, and further research should look to see if there are other instances where social movements could benefit from using depoliticized framing as well as combining it with ANT and embodiment to more effectively and affectively make their case.

Lastly, my findings contribute to understanding how other variables, such as activated objects and embodiment, also play a role in the reframing of collective memories of violence. Whereas previous work has pointed to the role of non-human actants in facilitating human behavior (De León 2015; Griswold et al. 2013), this study provides a case in which activists are playing the role of interpreter for the non-human actants in the grave. Without the forensic explanations and signs of violence that appear on the bones, the skeletons would be speaking a foreign language to the majority of the visitors. By positioning themselves as the scientific experts, ARMH activists become the official voice of the

story that the bones are telling. One could argue that in every translation lies the bias of the translator, and certainly in this case, the story being told has a particular agenda. However, the power of this movement tactic is that it specifically grounds itself in the perceived “unbiased” nature of science, its methods and protocols, and that certain anthropological facts cannot be contested.

Moreover, by combining this framing with the agency and materialized voice of the remains with the embodied personal objects, we are provided with an example of how these processes are working together to facilitate a direct relationship between the visitors and the dead. The visitors are able to have a conversation of sorts where they can hear the story told by the remains, which the class leader can further explain and contextualize within the ARMH’s reframing of the past.

In addition, the personal objects then embody both the lives and violent deaths of the people in the graves. These findings thus nuance previous literature on the affective impact of objects on the public’s relationship with the state (Cerulo 1993; Rose-Greenland 2014; Zubrzycki 2017) in that the objects are not producing feelings of nationalism or positive bonds. Rather, activists are using the affective attachments produced by viewing these objects to challenge the state’s sovereignty over collective memory. Additionally, while previous research has pointed to the emotionality of embodied remains and personal objects (Crossland 2013; Wagner 2008), my findings advance the study of collective memory and counter-memories to include the impact that embodied and activated objects have in giving voice to the past.

The inclusion of these three different theoretical perspectives helps explain why the ARMH’s, or other forensics-based human rights activists’, reframing of the past is so powerful. These mechanisms alone may not be as compelling, but rather, it is their combination that makes them potent in the reframing of the past. As such, this tactic is formidable because it relies on the intersection of objective science that provides a venue of the voiced materiality and embodiment of items and remains found in mass graves. The voices of the embodied-activated objects stabilize and strengthen the ARMH’s counter-memory of history. As the visitors are looking at the objects, they transform into the embodied dead, thereby intensifying the visitors’ emotional connection to them and the narrative explaining their existence. This extremely effective one-two punch leaves visitors with a visceral experience of the past violence, which in turn provides the basis for the counter-memory to take root.

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