

The Construction of Collective Memory: From Franco to Democracy

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Theoretical introduction

A community's collective memory of a period or a concrete event largely consists of the representations shared by most of those, individuals or groups, who create that story. These representations are organized around a main axis giving them a meaning that allows them to function as the foundation for the community concerned. This founding condition of memory, which has already been highlighted by Maurice Halbwachs in his pioneering book *La Mémoire collective*,¹ the act of rescuing the past from oblivion and setting it up as a reference point for community identity, transforms remembering into an imperative for survival, whose ethical character and collective influence make the duty to remember 'a practice indispensable to any affirmation of belonging to a group'.

However, collective memory is not a spontaneous social product, or the random consequence of a chance conjunction of various factors, but the result of a series of selective practices, carried out deliberately and/or implicitly by those who are acknowledged to have the legitimacy to do so: political and social actors, historians, analysts, etc. For this reason the study of collective memory, as Jean Viard² mentions, does not consist so much of detailing and verifying the facts collected by memory 'as exploring the construction of those facts, the elements they are composed of and the ways of organizing them, for if memory is selective this selectivity is not due to failures in memorizing their specific orientation'. According to Halbwachs, this orientation ability stems from the symbolizing function of memory, which retains only those facts that have a symbolic value, or, in Jean Viard's view, 'those facts that bear particular meanings that the group wishes to recognize as belonging to them personally', that is those that define their collective identity.

This is why the process of selection prefers the facts, descriptions, judgements and actors that the representations depend on, that are their most salient components,

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SAGE: London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi, www.sagepublications.com

DOI: 10.1177/0392192104041688

their structure and hierarchy, in accordance with the options and interests of the ruling class, which attempts to impose them as the basis of its collective identity, the material of its common existence. Because, as Alain Clémence³ perceptively emphasizes, the data, 'even before they are organized by the cognitive apparatus, are what they are by virtue of the intellectual context in which they emerge . . . and for this reason those which memory can directly access are the data that correspond to the dominant thought . . .'. In such a way memory, identity and dominance form the hub of one and the same universe.

But collective memory 'serves not only to establish the identity of each group, it is the political instrument . . . that helps set the power relations between them'.⁴ Hence the inevitable conflict between memories in all communities, which makes Rousso's⁵ excellent monograph on the 'partisan memories' that have proliferated in French historiography since the Second World War an instructive example. For some to prevail finally over others, the process of their respective constructions (with the part played, on one hand, by the selection/objectivization/symbolization of the facts and, on the other, by the legitimation of discourses of remembering) is absolutely decisive. Particularly in the case of appeals to instances of legitimation that are foreign or external to the group itself, as we shall see with the analysis of our case.

The memory of the transition to democracy

The collective memory of Franco's regime transforming itself into a democracy is organized around an event, the *Munich Coalition* (the Spanish word *contubernio* had pejorative overtones in this political context) and a process, the *democratic transition*. Both these elements have in common a central reference point: the legitimation of the monarchy as the only possible political form of Spanish democracy. In both cases this democratic legitimation occurred in a mediated and indirect way, that is, not through the exercise of the popular will, but via an institutional operation whose dual aim was to set up a new legality (a political legality) and ensure the continuity of the Franquist social structure and power. However, we are not going to recount the history of the replacement, through a politico-social or even merely political break, of an autocracy of military origin and pro-fascist leanings with a democracy imposed by the action of democratic forces. The intention of the construction of memory is in fact to demonstrate that establishing a genuine democracy with a series of reforms of Franco's regime, then with the evolution peculiar to it, inspired and directed by the dominant social groups who are both its supporters and beneficiaries, leads to the democratic regime, provided there are no unforeseen deviations.

It is clear that, in order to be completed, this evolution needs to be carried through with the collaboration of the established power. And the social backbone of this power has in the monarchy its optimal symbolic expression and thus its existence is the surest guarantee that any process of change taking place within the area bounded by its field of influence will always be in accordance with the plans for this social dominance. Because there is no more effective reference or instrument than the

monarchy to support and control a political change that in fact claims to be confirming the social order and power structure of the society whose political organization is undergoing change. This explains the role it was given in the construction of the memory of both Coalition and Transition. A role dependent on a series of elements that were part of what actually happened, and, using the mechanisms of objectivization, symbolization and legitimation that we referred to earlier, were magnified, despite their partial and rare nature, to become the sole reality supporting the collective memory.

In the context of this article I shall restrict myself to examining in detail the construction of the memory of the *Munich Coalition*, leaving to one side the complementary analysis of the discourse of the Transition, which I will subsequently refer to only in an incidental, functional way. I shall begin by recounting what 'happened', in as neutral and consensual form as possible, and then present the facts and arguments related to the two main opposing options: the one that denies that Munich had any meaning or importance, which I call *negationist*, and the one that thinks the Coalition – linking democracy inseparably with the monarchy and its reformism within continuity – was a crucial step that irreversibly marked the course of the democratic transition. I will label this second option *pro-democratic*.

Concrete analysis of the memory of the *Munich Coalition*: the data

The period 1957–69 was the central phase of what has been called the second Franquist period. It comprised the institutionalization of General Franco's regime – which had previously been just a military and personal autocracy; domestic political and trade union groups in conflict with the dictatorship acquired formal though clandestine structures, and despite repression achieved a certain political visibility; the economy began opening up to the outside world, accompanied by a modest liberalization of the Spanish economy; economic development and its successive plans became the prime objective of Franquist economic policy; emigration and tourism brought Spaniards' social customs closer to those of their European neighbours.

In these circumstances Europe became the only possible prospect for both politicians and Spanish civil society. This explains why, with this aim in mind, Franco's regime, wishing to escape from ostracism by the international community, attempted to bring in a strategy of rapprochement with the Common Market. For its part the democratic opposition, with the exception of the Communist Party and those even further left, thought that entry into the European community and restoration of democracy were inseparable, and made promotion of Europe the main plank in its platform. The Spanish Association for European Cooperation (AECE) in Madrid and the League for Economic Cooperation in Barcelona were the legal framework that supported public activities inside Spain. Abroad the Spanish Federal Council of the European Movement, chaired by Salvador de Madariaga, guided the activities of the Spanish pro-European democratic groupings, including those of the Basque Country and Catalonia in exile. In order to help them reach a consensus, Enrique Adroher-Gironella, in the name of the Federal Council and the author of this analysis for the

AECE, tried to unite the two groups in a single action. The 'First Week for Europe' in Majorca, organized for this purpose and due to take place in May 1960, was banned at the last moment by General Camilo Alonso Vega, a minister in the government then in power. The second attempt was a conference in June 1961 in Strasbourg, cancelled under pressure from Franco's government.

The year 1962 was decisive for the resolution of this process: on 15 January the European Parliament approved the Birkelbach report, which set out the conditions required of any country applying for entry to the European Economic Community; on 9 February Franco's government ignored them and applied for Spain to join the Community. Finally, in June, in the context of the Fourth International Congress of the European Movement held in Munich, 118 Spanish democrats, 38 of them in exile and 80 from within the country, met together on the fifth and sixth days at the city's Hotel Regina Palace. Those Spaniards from within the country, whose spokesman was José María Gil Robles, were opposed to a meeting with the exiles to discuss the terms of the resolution to be forwarded to Congress; so it was decided to set up two committees and start to deliberate separately. But the cordiality that soon developed among the participants helped to encourage many delegates to work with both committees indiscriminately, so that everyone attended the final meeting and unanimously approved the resolution.

However, in order to arrive at this agreement it was essential to overcome differences over the free election of the political regime (monarchy or republic) and the form of territorial organization (unitary or federal) of the future democratic state. On this second point it proved possible to arrive at a generic compromise formula ('recognition of the personality of the different national communities'); but on the first point the opposing positions appeared irreconcilable between those who proposed a plebiscite to decide the political form of the state⁶ and those who ruled out negotiation on the prior recognition of the monarchy. The consequence was that no concrete decision was taken and the debate was left open using a generic formula: 'introduction of authentically representative and democratic institutions'. On 8 June, despite blocking moves by the Marqués de Valdeiglesias, special emissary from the dictatorship's government, the Congress of the European Movement discussed and approved by acclamation the Spanish democrats' resolution. It stated that any country applying to join Europe should have representative democratic institutions, a condition that the future democratic Spain, symbolically represented by the 118 Spanish delegates present, committed itself to accept, also reiterating its desire to enter the EEC. Then Salvador de Madariaga and José María Gil Robles, to enthusiastic applause, explained the content of the resolution.

As Madariaga indicated, Munich meant the end of the civil war. Convergence towards the same future by groups of historically democratic exiles and the new democrats inside Spain (many of them former supporters of political or social aspects of Franco's regime), backed by representatives of the great European parties, represented an alternative to Franco that could only alarm the dictator. And, furthermore, strikes in Bilbao, Valencia and Cartagena in February and in León, Asturias, Catalonia and Madrid in April and May proved to be a powerful popular megaphone for this alternative. Franco reacted harshly. Suspension of article 14 of the Spanish Customary Law gave him the power to condemn candidates to exile or

deportation, and a press campaign orchestrated by minister Arias Salgado attempted to disqualify the Munich project and those who had played a part in working it out. But the Coalition had shown that Spaniards were capable of freely debating and coming to an agreement, and had committed themselves to support for democratic Spain's application to join the EEC. The unanimous acceptance of this commitment by a section of the democratic European parties helped to make the Spanish democratic alternative seem self-evident.

The negationist option

From the outset the Franco regime mobilized all the communication media at its disposal to discredit the Munich meeting, stating that those present were a handful of losers and traitors without any reputation or influence. The press of the Movement (the name of the sole permitted party) was the most vitriolic. As early as 9 June 1962 Adolfo Muñoz Alonso, Director General of the Press, gave all the newspapers for compulsory publication an article by the French journalist Marcel Niedergang (*France Soir*, 8 June), taking a critical approach to the meeting. The newspaper *Arriba* followed his instructions enthusiastically, labelling the Munich meeting 'treacherous coalition'. This expression was used by all the Franquist press without exception, and despite its normally negative connotation the democratic opposition in the end took it up in reaction, and made it their own.

On 10 June the same Falangist publication insisted the meeting was insignificant, in a long article entitled 'Pelillos a la mar' (Let's bury the hatchet). In the same vein, on 12 June the periodical *Pueblo*, the paper of the official trades unions, published a comment titled 'Cosas sabidas' (Things we know) that emphasized how pointless it was to oppose Spain's membership of the EEC, which Franco's government finally sought; and the newspaper *ABC*, which represented a slightly milder form of autocracy, confirmed its reductionist reading of the event by writing on 13 June: 'the so-called *Munich Pact*, offers little, if anything, that is new'. On 10 July the same paper, under the byline of its contributor Gonzalo Fernández de la Mora, one of the regime's most cherished ideologues who subsequently became one of Franco's ministers, repeated the same assessment: 'the meeting, which in itself was of no importance, since it was held under the auspices of a non-governmental association, has received a deplorable and disproportionate amount of publicity . . .'

Among the opposition this stance of rejection was confirmed by both the Communist Party, which 'reiterates its opposition to the Common Market, since it is contrary to Spain's economic and political interests'⁷ and the PNV,⁸ and particularly the Popular Liberation Front. The latter declared itself 'totally dissociated from the Munich meeting', in spite of the fact that its general secretary, Ignacio Fernández de Castro, took part, because it represented 'for the Franco regime an attempt at an evolutionary type of resolution that guarantees the dominant classes assured enjoyment of economic power'.⁹ Fernández de Castro took up the argument again in his book *De las Cortes de Cádiz al Plan de Desarrollo* (From the Cadiz Cortes to the Development Plan),¹⁰ launching into a thorough-going rejection of the Coalition based on three points:

- Munich put its money on Europe, representative parliamentary democracy and market capitalism, thus putting an end to any plan for a radical transformation;
- Munich rejected violence as an instrument of democratic change and instead accepted the violence imposed by the Spanish ruling class;
- Munich, with its reconciliation between winners and losers, legitimated and consolidated the Franco regime by granting the refusenik party and those who had been part of it a political acceptability that, together with the power they held, made them irreplaceable.

The legitimation external to the process, which was decisive as I have already pointed out, was first of all – as far as the negationist position is concerned – due to the historians Raymond Carr and Juan Pablo Fusi,¹¹ who, in their book *España: de la dictadura a la democracia* (Spain: from dictatorship to democracy), state that the Munich meeting was an event of no significance that had scarcely any effect on Spanish life at the time. In line with this assessment they devote nine lines to the event on page 66, nine on page 218 and one on page 6, in the belief that this brief treatment exhausts the topic. They say that the only consequence was the use Franco made of the meeting in order to strengthen his power still further, thus giving credence to the theory – prevalent among many historians, who are conscious of Franco's power almost exclusively – which holds that the insignificance of the democratic opposition to the regime and its actions was mostly explained by the government's reactions, which ensured that Franco remained in power.

The same approach is taken by Biescas and Tuñon de Lara, who were very close to those who had been in exile and therefore less influenced by the moderate opposition inside Spain. In their book *España bajo la dictadura franquista* (Spain under the Franco dictatorship)¹² they follow the reductionist line, devoting three and a half pages to the Coalition. In addition they present it, both inaccurately and incoherently, as the opposition's response to an initiative from Franco. This initiative is supposed to have consisted of a gathering of the former provisional second-lieutenants from the civil war, which had taken place at Garabitas near Madrid, where the Dictator, in order to demonstrate that the regime was stronger than ever, had spoken in terms and with a violence he seemed to have abandoned forever. The 'response to the Garabitas strategy' argued by these historians gives Munich a secondary and completely minor role, subsidiary to the regime which provides it with its meaning and effect.

The pro-monarchist option

Seeing the Munich meeting as a non-event left the way open for the construction of some other kind of memory. From the very first the monarchists laid claim to all the territory available. Their principal agent was Joaquín Satrustegui, founder of the Spanish Union, who was accompanied in Munich by the main leaders of the monarchist organization. On the evening of the sixth day – when it was already agreed not to make an immediate decision as to the system that would determine the political shape of the state – Satrustegui presented to a large number of delegates the

reasons persuading the Spanish Union to argue for the monarchy as the most appropriate instrument to ensure the transition and support the democratic system. In his lengthy speech,¹³ which ignored the fact that the question of monarchy or republic had just been left undecided, he stated categorically 'that the Monarchy will win the day because it rests in a profound way on the diffuse and almost instinctive support of the whole nation, who do not see the possibility of any other formula for the future . . . since this is the only one that is capable of solving the two fundamental problems: moving on from the civil war and joining Europe'. This was why, added Satrustegui, the democratic monarchists were against any form of prior plebiscite that would cause problems for the restoration of the monarchy and pointlessly complicate or delay the transition to democracy. A lengthy debate with the republican representatives of the exiles opened the way to the idea of the monarchy's objectively democratic value. A second meeting at the Hotel Regina, on the evening of 8 June after the end of the first one, gave Spanish Union members a fresh opportunity to hammer home their choice of the monarchist option, supported this time by various figures from inside Spain, among them two notable leaders, José María Gil Robles and Dionisio Ridruejo. We should remember that nearly all the delegation from within Spain were monarchists, either by conviction (like the Christian democrats Fernando Alvarez de Miranda, Iñigo Cavero, etc.) or tactically (like Tierno Galván's and Dionisio Ridruejo's friends and the socialists from inside Spain who went to Munich) and that this unanimity exerted a strong influence on those who were in exile.

Nevertheless, the groups that had been in exile were still in favour of the idea of a provisional government with a prior plebiscite, the position they had maintained in the past and up to this point. Thus Javier Flores, who participated in the coalition as a delegate from the Spanish Democratic Republican Action party, reminded his audience,¹⁴ in his address to the 'Study Days on the historic significance of the Fourth Congress of the European Movement', that the republicans never abandoned the principle that the Spanish people should decide between monarchy and republic, and that the formula agreed on in Munich did not absolutely assume they were giving up the principles and doctrine to which they had remained totally faithful up to the present day.

However, this resistance did not stop the monarchist option from winning hands down in the construction of the memory of the coalition, in this case too because of the intervention of legitimating voices external to the process, represented paradigmatically by Charles Powell. According to Professor Raymond Carr's colleague, in Munich the monarchy took on the function of an essential axis in the transition to democracy and subsequently maintained this role up to the first general elections in June 1977, that is, till the end of the process. A function that Powell explains and justifies by repeating almost verbatim the arguments put forward by the Spanish monarchists in Munich, which I have reproduced above, but with the addition of an extremely interesting commentary. In his view, even though the monarchists explicitly rejected any form of direct plebiscite on the form of government, they nevertheless accepted the route of a constitutional referendum in order to determine it. Which means they ruled out a yes or no vote on the monarchy, but agreed that the content of this decision should be appended to the text of a Constitution confirming its existence and modes of operation. Powell stresses the importance of this indirect

mechanism for popular legitimation of the monarchy as part of establishing democracy, as proof that approval of the Law of Succession, confirming both monarchy and monarch, was not performed by the Cortes (parliament) but by the December 1976 referendum. This referendum gave the process of self-transformation of the Franco regime its first democratic endorsement, which was finally ratified by the 1978 constitutional referendum.

All the same, though the collective memory of coalition and transition is in both cases unequivocal, it is not the same for the person of the monarch. Neither is it the same for the ambiguous position of Don Juan de Borbón, the heir to the throne, as regards the Munich meeting, a position that was quite clearly portrayed by the statement from his privy council,¹⁵ which rejected any connection between the Pretender and Munich and banned from his council anyone who had taken part in the coalition. This is what happened to José María Gil Robles, who soon resigned his position as councillor.

Don Juan's attitude, which the monarchists at Munich attempted to downplay and justify by attributing it to lack of information (Don Juan was at that moment at sea aboard the yacht *Saltillo*) and the pressure put on him by José María Pemán and Alfonso García Valdecasas, the council chairman and general secretary, has been harshly criticized by the Pretender's various biographers. Luis María Anson¹⁶ deplors the council's communiqué, which he considers 'unworthy of Don Juan', and Rafael Borrás¹⁷ highlights the fact that Don Juan, who always saw himself as the 'King of all the Spanish people', far from seizing the chance offered by the coalition to raise himself to that position, preferred to distance himself by toeing the 'sociological Franquist' line that prevailed on his council. This determination not to cut his connection with the Franco regime and to avoid direct confrontation with him, except on rare occasions, re-emerged at the decisive moment of the transition, when Don Juan refused to denounce the political continuity represented by Juan Carlos and also refused to support, even indirectly, the Junta Democrática, which brought together a large section of the democratic groupings, including the Communist Party.

This ambivalence on the part of Don Juan was not due to day-to-day requirements for survival (he was assisted economically and in perpetuity by Franco's government) or to influence from his most immediate environment (Sáinz Rodríguez, Pemán, etc.), in which everyone belonged to the original Franquist grouping (of the military uprising), but to the contradictory nature of his monarchist views, which claimed to be democratic but in strict continuity with Franquist society. A contradiction that stemmed not only from Don Juan's own wishes but, as we have already noted, from kinship and identification of the monarchy with social power, which Powell¹⁸ sees quite clearly when he writes: 'I would like to emphasize that the monarchist solution is reformist *per se*, in the sense that it makes non-viable the holding of a plebiscite on the form of the state, a demand that was later presented (unsuccessfully) by the successive unitary platforms . . .'. But this aim of self-transformation was finally lighted on as well by the most dynamic groups in Franco's Spain, who chose Juan Carlos to carry it through. Those who constructed the memory of the transition worked towards this by symbolically situating the operation a decade before it actually took place. Indeed, by emphasizing Juan

Carlos's wedding in Athens three weeks before the coalition and the contempt heaped it upon by the Franquist communications media, which went so far as to talk about the 'Athens scandal', pro-monarchist historians anticipated the Juan Carlos option. Thus Powell notes that, even though 'the monarchists thought the incumbent of the future monarchy would be Don Juan . . . many of them ended up attending the wedding of Juan Carlos and Princess Sofía in Athens, which opened up other prospects for the future'.¹⁹

Javier Tusell winds up in the same vein his analysis from the coalition to the Senate Study Days in 1987,²⁰ retrospectively indicating what the Munich meeting meant for Juan Carlos: 'The so-called Athens scandal, the Monarchy of Don Juan Carlos seems to me to have substantially taken on board the programme of the supposed farce of Munich'. However, for Juan Carlos to become the natural heir of Munich it was necessary to exclude his promoters and protagonists from the operation's paternity, which came about via the mechanism mentioned earlier of selection and symbolization of facts compatible with the required objective and the concealment and burial of all others.

Nevertheless, the democratic legitimation of the Juan Carlos monarchy cannot have descended on him by itself, nor can it have been endorsed by the democratic parties historically associated with the Republic. That is why construction of memory was employed on this occasion, as well as the ability to confer retroactive legitimacy possessed by the new democratic state's chief institutions and those who had occupied or now occupy important positions in them. That is why the two main official celebrations of the coalition, the 25th anniversary in 1987 and the 50th in June 2002, took place respectively at the Senate and the Centre for Political and Constitutional Studies, which is linked to the Senate, and why there were, in addition to the Centre's president and the chair of the European Movement in Spain, Messrs Fernando Alvarez de Miranda, as ex-president of the Congress of Deputies, José Federico de Carvajal, as chair of the Council of State, Fernando Baeza, as Spanish Ambassador and Joan Casals, as ex-member of parliament. The representatives of the Republic, the Basque government in exile, Catalonia, all the groups with democratic legitimacy must be denied, not so much in the present, since their absence is obvious, as in their past existence. Nothing has existed except what exists today. The memory of the transition is only the memory of those who won the civil war, who were also those who engineered the transition itself.

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Notes

1. *La Mémoire collective*, Paris, PUF, 1950.
2. 'Contribution à l'actualisation de la notion de mémoire collective', in Stéphane Laurens and Nicolas Roussiau (eds), *La Mémoire sociale*, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2002, pp. 26, 27.

3. 'Prises de position et dynamique de la pensée représentative: les apports de la mémoire collective.'
4. Jean Viard, *op. cit.*, p. 29.
5. H. Rousso, *Le Syndrome de Vichy*, Paris, Seuil, 1990.
6. Account produced for the National Executive Committee of the ARDE in *Archive du Gouvernement de la République Espagnole en Exil*.
7. Statement by the executive committee of the Communist Party of Spain (PCE) in *L'Humanité*, 14 June 1962.
8. Federica Montseny, 'El Coloquio de Munich', in *España Libre*, 6 July 1962.
9. Ignacio Fernández de Castro and José Martínez, *España hoy*, Paris, Ruedo Ibérico, 1963, p. 248.
10. Ignacio Fernández de Castro, *De las Cortes de Cádiz al Plan de Desarrollo*, Paris, Ruedo Ibérico, 1968.
11. Raymond Carr and Juan Pablo Fusi, *España: de la dictadura a la democracia*, Editorial Planeta, 1979.
12. José Antonio Biescas and Manuel Tuñón de Lara, *España bajo la dictadura franquista*, Editorial Labor, 1980.
13. Subsequently transcribed by the speaker himself and published in Uruguay in 1964 with the title *Hacia la solución nacional* by the Españoles en América group in the collection Documentos de Unión Española.
14. Famous days in the Spanish Senate from 22 June 1987 whose contents were published in book form as *Cuando la transición se hizo posible*, a joint work coordinated by Joaquín Satrustegui, Fernando Alvarez de Miranda, Fernando Baeza, Carlos María Bru, Jaime Miralles and Antonio Moreno, Tecnos, 1993.
15. Bulletin from the private secretariat of the Count of Barcelona, no. 6, June 1962. Official communiqué issued to the press.
16. Luis María Anson, *D. Juan de Borbón*, Madrid, Plaza y Janés Editores, 1994, pp. 338 *et seq.*
17. Rafael Borrás Betrín, *El Rey de los Rojos – D. Juan de Borbón, una figura tergiversada*, Barcelona, Los Libros de Abril, 1996, pp. 226 *et seq.*
18. Charles Powell, in *Cuando la transición se hizo posible*, *op. cit.*, pp. 24 *et seq.*
19. Powell, *op. cit.*, p. 26.
20. Javier Tusell, in *Cuando la transición se hizo posible*, *op. cit.*, p. 37.