

Interview by Laura Alvarez Soler of the Goldsmith University in London – to Professor Vicente Navarro

1.- You are one of the major scholars arguing that the Spanish transition was not as exemplary as it appears on the history books. Could you please explain why?

It is not quite accurate to indicate that the history books defined the Spanish transition as exemplary. Let's not confuse things here. It is the Spanish establishment which wants people to believe that the transition from dictatorship to democracy was exemplary. History has not said anything about this and what it will say in the future will depend on who writes about that specific historical event.

The transition was not exemplary because it took place under the enormous dominance of that process by the state apparatus inherited from the past regime. That dominance meant that the democracy that was established was very limited and it was not comparable to the democratic systems that exist in Europe. One person can go to jail, for example, for criticizing the King. And freedoms are seriously limited. Another consequence of that dominance is the enormous regressiveness of the tax system within a very poorly developed welfare state.

2.- Was it an 'agreement for silence' imposed by the right-wing, which probably had something to be silent about?

There was an agreement to be silent about the atrocities committed by the fascist side during the civil war and during the dictatorship, and they did not favor going back to look at what had happened. The successors of that fascist regime, led by the King, were very powerful and continue to be very powerful. The amnesty law (that forgave the crimes committed under the dictatorship) became also the amnesia law. The left and the democratic forces were not powerful enough to make a break with that previous regime. As a consequence, the new democratic system inherited a lot of the apparatuses and practices of the previous regime.

3.- Compared with some Latin American countries, or even with Germany, one could suggest that Spain has never come to terms with the past. How did it come? Why is it a taboo, still now?

It is not Spain, but rather the Spanish establishment, which is a very different thing. You should not confuse one with the other. The working class and other sectors of the popular classes were the major forces repressed by that regime and they do have memories. It is the establishment that does not want those memories to be recovered. You have to realize that the King, appointed by the dictator, had indicated that he would not tolerate any insult to the dictator in his presence. On many occasions, he has defined the dictator as being a father for him. The problem is not him, however. The problem is the whole establishment, that is the conservative and neoliberal establishment which includes banking, large employers, the Church, the army and the usual cast of characters. They are the ones who do not want to look back at what their ancestors did.

4.- Why do you think that Spain is refusing to face the truth of its past?

As I said, you are confusing Spain with the Spanish establishment. It is not Spain, but the power structure which does not want to face the past. The Spanish Supreme Court (which has several ultra right-wing members) brought Judge Garzon to trial because he wanted to charge those responsible for past crimes, especially those responsible for the disappearance of

thousands of people during the dictatorship. In bringing Judge Garzon to trial, the Supreme Court was responding to the request of the fascist party, La Falange. The polls show that the majority of people disapproved of the Supreme Court's decision, but that is not going to stop them from doing what they are doing. You should also be aware that most of the media is right-wing in Spain.

5.- In 2008 Baltasar Garzon tried to come to terms with the past. He attempted to bring surviving members of the Franco regime to trial to face justice over human-rights violations under the dictatorship, but he could not do it and now he is facing a private prosecution for overstepping his powers.

- How can this be possible in democracy? Aren't the Human Rights supposed to be on top of all?

- What is your particular opinion about this controversy?

I have answered these questions previously. I personally have written extensively shaming the Supreme Court for their actions and defending Judge Garzon.

6.- Why did the Spanish government pass the Law of Historical Memory (2007) and it was never meant to be fully implemented?

The major problem of the Law of Historical Memory is not that it has not been implemented, but rather that it was very limited. The primary reason for that is that the Spanish state sees itself as a continuation of the previous state and therefore cannot eliminate sentences that were dictated under the previous regime. That means that the sentences imposed by the fascist courts, like the assassinations of thousands and thousands of people, cannot be reversed. Is this shocking? But that is how it is. I recommend you read my coming article this Thursday in El Publico or a more extensive article of mine published in Le Viejo Topo. Also you might like to look at my blog, www.vnavarro.org and look at the section in English or the Spanish section called Historical Memory.

7.- One can strongly suggest that the social willing to recover the historical memory in Spain (and the weak political willing, if any) is pretty recent. Why is this happening now?

The primary reason is that younger generations are losing the fear that their parents and grandparents had because of the brutal repression. So, the grandchildren of those who were assassinated and have disappeared have been the ones who have started asking where their grandparents were buried. In so doing, they have awakened enormous sympathy among the popular classes who clearly support them in their quests for their loved ones.

8.- Is it too late to look for responsibilities?

It is never too late. Crimes against humanity have no statute of limitations, neither legally nor morally.

9.- Do you think that Spain will ever be able to come to terms with its past? How can justice be achieved?

Yes, but it will depend very much on the political situation in the country. For obvious reasons, the right-wing does not want to touch the past and they do everything possible to stop that. They have enormous influence in the judicial system and many of the leading judges swear loyalty to the fascist regime. If the left becomes stronger, the history of Spain will be rewritten. But at this time, the right-wing is still very powerful in Spain and the socialist

government is still afraid of confronting the profoundly conservative and reactionary establishment of Spain. Some positive steps have been taken, more in Catalonia than in Spain, but still there is much more that needs to be done.

Let me add a last note. You keep speaking about Spain as if the Spanish people do not want to face their past. Please understand that Spain is different from Germany. In Spain, the majority of people opposed the fascist coup in 1936 and they were brutally repressed because of that. That did not happen in Germany. The Spanish people are not responsible for having had the most brutal dictatorship that existed in Europe in the 20th century. It took Hitler's and Mussolini's armies for the dictator to be able to beat the popular classes that did not have much assistance from the so-called democratic governments. To make the Spanish people responsible for the dictatorship and for the current situation is to show a grave ignorance of Spanish history and the heroic struggle that many people from the working class and other sectors carried on against that regime. It is not Spain, but rather the Spanish establishment, inheritors of the fascist regime, who do not want that past to be known. Please understand that and write accordingly.