

Transnational language and conflicting memories over the Spanish Civil War

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80 years after Franco's *coup d'état*, the country still ranks number two in the world on the number of missing persons, behind Cambodia. Different from other similar cases, such as Germany and Italy, in Spain the fascist regime never faced trial. This has had a strong impact on the official narrative of the War, such that both sides – brothers against brothers – are seen as equally responsible for what happened. Even more, in today's mass media, it is not uncommon to find examples of a revisionist discourse, which argues that the four decades of dictatorship saved the country from Communism.

In order to gain perspective, it is useful to tackle this debate from a transnational approach, by focusing on sources written in the so-called international language, Esperanto. In fact, Esperanto was popular in the 1930s and played a number of roles in the war – it was used, for example, by the anarchists, the communists and the Catalan government. With some difficulties, Esperanto was effectively used also in the post-war years.

"Nothing, absolutely nothing justifies the madness of seeding the country with a million graves. What did we win? What would we have won, if the losers had been the winners?" This way reflected in 1998 Fernando de Diego, known for his impressive translation of *The Ingenious Hidalgo Don Quixote of La Mancha* by Miguel de Cervantes into the international language. However, most of the Esperantists of the period were among the war's losers and have different memories of the conflict. Eduardo Vivancos, a young anarchist, and life-long Esperantist, who fought for democracy in the Republican side, recalls thinking that the victory over fascism would bring peace and justice to the country. In the terrible conditions of the French concentration camps to which he was sent, he met and befriended a fellow esperantist, Jaume Grau Casas, a prominent figure of the Catalan nationalism, who dreamt about a fully sovereign Catalonia. Meanwhile, many international volunteers – a not negligible percentage of whom were Jewish – were also there, regretting their inability to defeat the Axis Powers in Spain, which they believed could have avoided the Second World War. To a great extent, these conflicting narratives are reproduced in today's historical debate.