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BACHELOR THESIS
LIBERAL ARTS AND HUMANITIES

**Valle de los Caídos – a symbol of Franco’s legacy which has withstood
Spain’s *transition* into democracy? The reception of national identity
project through the onsite ethnography in Spain**

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Statement

I hereby declare that I wrote this thesis independently, and that all of the works used have been duly cited. This bachelor thesis has not been used to attain any other title here in the Czech Republic nor abroad.

Prague, 24th of June, 2022.

Belén McKechnie Charle

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In honour to all of those who suffered the Francoist terror and to their families who are still living with the consequences of it.

Dedicated to those people who have worked tirelessly to recover the memories, stories and experiences of those who were officially silenced on part of the Spanish state, both during and after the Francoist Dictatorship. Without their work, this thesis would not have been possible.

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Abstract

The Valle de Los Caídos (Valley of the Fallen) is a monument commissioned by Franco that the Spanish state, to this day, still maintains and preserves with public money. Intended to commemorate the fallen on the nationalist side of the Spanish Civil War, it shows how monuments serve to accentuate certain memories over others, while at the same time, legitimising and reinforcing Francisco Franco's version of events. Within the framework of collective memory through ethnographic research, this bachelor thesis will try to analyse the current perception of the monument, and its role in propagating a Spanish national identity curated by Franco's regime, along with the ongoing debates over the past in Spain.

Key words

Collective Memory Processes, Sites of Memory, Symbols of National Identity, Ethnography of Monuments, National Mythology, Ethnographic Research, Cultural Memory

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“The dimension of our Crusade, the heroic sacrifices that victory contains and the significance that this epic has had for the future of Spain, cannot be perpetuated by the simple monuments with which they usually commemorate in towns and cities the salient events of our history and the glorious episodes of their children. It is necessary that the stones that are raised have the grandeur of ancient monuments, that they defy time and oblivion and that they constitute a place of meditation and repose in which future generations pay tribute of admiration to those who bequeathed them a better Spain. The choice of a secluded place where the grandiose temple of our dead will be erected, where those who have fallen on the path of God and the Fatherland will be prayed for throughout the centuries, will be prayed for. A perennial place of pilgrimage where the grandeur of nature will provide a worthy frame for the field where the heroes and martyrs of the Crusade will rest”

(Decree 3149/1940)

Introduction

The Valley of the Fallen, located in the Valley of Cuelgamuros is an architectural complex composed of a 150m roman cross, a Basilica, a Benedictine Abbey and monastery, within which there is a catholic all boys school. Francisco Franco commissioned the monument in 1940, one year after the end of the Spanish Civil war (BOE, 1940). The Basilica, often referred to as a Crypt served as Francisco Franco's grave until 2019 and still holds the body of the founder of the ultra-right wing party Falange, Jose Antonio Primo de Rivera. Falange would be the only legal party during the regime, and would serve as a key figure throughout, but specifically during its first stages (Tiana Ferrer, 2002, 00:22:18).

Part of the labour undertaken in the Valley of the Fallen was done by the regime's political prisoners, who were present in the Valley from 1940-1950. The Valley of the Fallen is currently the site of Spain's largest mass grave. There are an estimated 33,847 bodies of *both sides* [of the war] "buried" (stored) in wooden boxes underneath and within the structure of the Crypt (Basilica) (Menasanch de Tobaruela et al., 2020, p. 653) . These bodies were transferred from across Spain to the Valley of the Fallen from 1959 to 1983 (Franco died in 1975). These bodies were taken from cemeteries, in the case of nationalist bodies, and from mass graves, in the case of republican bodies.

Creating the idea of 'valid victims' was central to the establishment of Franco's regime. Through a series of cultural practices that became known as the "worship of the fallen" (culto a los Caídos), Franco ensured that the memory of the fallen on the nationalist side would not be forgotten (Bernecker, 2011, p. 67). This would permeate into Spain's period of *transition* into democracy, due to the pact of forget that was a determining factor in the continual refusal to acknowledge the victims of the other side of the civil war, and more importantly of the Francoist regime. Initially intended to commemorate those "fallen for God and for the fatherland" (Ferrándiz, 2022, p. 210) and the Nationalist victory of the civil war, this monument was to become a monument in "memory of *all* of those who fell during the civil war". However, its original purpose remains and currently makes no effort to recognise the victims of the republican side of the war or the regime (del Moral Salmoral, 2020, p. 16).

Using the words of Jay Winter (2008), the reason behind this stems from the fact that Spanish people have not yet made amends with their past. "Where moral doubts persist about a war or public policy, commemorative sites are either hard to fix, or places of contestation" (Erlil et al., 2008, p. 62), the Valley of the Fallen falls into both of these tropes. The creation of such a monument served several purposes of legitimation for Franco and his regime. According

to Winter (2008), the top-down approach of imposing their version of events results in “the significance of sites of memory as a materialisation of national, imperial, or political identity” (Erlil et al., 2008, p. 63).

This materialisation of imperial, national and political identity is seen in the lack of action taken by democratic governments, since the end of the regime, at a national level. These “attempts” have been left in the hands of the Judiciary through two laws regarding the public display of symbols related to the dictatorship (del Moral Salmoral, 2020, p. 20). The first law of so-called *Historical Memory* in Spain was passed in 2007 and the second one, was approved in 2020, both by socialist governments. Despite the efforts, these have managed to dodge the largest monument created for the commemoration and praise of the nationalist forces. Although the 2007 law specifically emphasised the removal of symbols and artefacts related to the regime, those located in the Valley of the Fallen remain untouched.

By the time the Valley of the Fallen opened in 1959, 19 years after it was commissioned, the regime was in its second stages. The defeat of the fascist forces in WWII, the growing economic crisis at home and lack of international allies abroad would push Franco’s regime to slowly reopen itself. This time, it would turn towards the Catholic church, instead of Falange, to help promote itself as the defender (and saviour) of traditional Western European values (Tiana Ferrer, 2002, 00:24:42) (Ferrándiz, 2022, p. 221).

As stated in the book *Memory in Mind and Culture* by Pascal Boyer and James V. Wertsch, “Increasingly, historians have focused on the development of memories for historical events, in the many ways in which the past is constructed, retrieved, or distorted as part of various identity projects and in particular on the ways in which people associate particular places with particular visions of the historical past” (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 9). In this framework, memory is considered an active process that, over time, is renegotiated by agents to adjust to their present needs and modify or reinterpret particular versions of the past. Given the disputes over how the civil war began, this site of memory is not only controversial for the fallen it is intended to remember, but also because 45 years after the death of the Dictator, there have been very few and weak attempts on the part of the Spanish state to bring justice to the victims of the regime recognised its atrocities (del Moral Salmoral, 2020)

Within the framework of collective memory, as described by Maurice Halbwachs being, the idea that groups and individuals maintain, retrieve and encode events of their past to serve particular goals (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 11). This paper will try to analyse how these collective memories in Spain, although diverse, have been largely influenced and tainted by the 40 years of National Catholicist dictatorship under Francisco Franco. Furthermore, it will

examine how the Spanish transition into democracy was marked by “selective forgetting” (Sevillano Calero, 2003, p. 300) imposed by what became known as the “Pact of Forget”. This pact emphasised that to move on [from the regime], Spaniards would have to focus on the future as one unified body, rather than dwelling on issues that divided them in the past. This “Pact of Forget” was embodied in the 1977 Law of Amnesty, originally intended to protect the victims of the regime. Despite its original efforts, the law resulted in the impunity of all the regime’s members, on the basis of ‘moving forward’. As described by the historian Francisco Sevillano Calero (2003)

“In this sense, the blurred logic of "consensus" in the Spanish transition causes ambiguity over the truth and falsity of its propositions. The process of political change was not based on official knowledge of responsibilities and moral assumption of guilt, as neither repentance nor reconciliation articulated social memory and the reconstruction of national identity during the transition in Spain. Instead, social memory has been shaped by a desire to forget in order to overcome a traumatic past and to favour coexistence in the present, firstly by seeking the greatest political consensus in the process of transition to democracy. The politics of memory has not reconstructed the past on the basis of truth and respect for different collective memories that coexist, but rather from the immediate utility of evasive forgetting, which implies silence in public life about the civil war and, above all, Franco's dictatorship”. (Sevillano Calero, 2003, p. 298)

Taking the example of the Valley of the Fallen as a site of memory, term coined by Pierre Nora in his work *Lieux de Memoires (1984)*, this paper will investigate how the narrative imposed by Franco after the civil war was encompassed in the construction the Valley of the Fallen. Furthermore, through an onsite ethnography, the paper will try to understand the meanings that visitors of the Valley of the Fallen ascribe to the site today, and how these reflect the different collective memories regarding the Civil War and the Regime present in Spain today (Ferrándiz, 2022, p. 213). I argue that due to the process of “forgive and forget” that was central to Spain’s transition into democracy, the meta narrative of imperial, catholic Spain, so closely linked to the Francoist regime, is still today, the main national narrative that Spain holds about itself.

Theoretical framework

In this chapter, I will present the theoretical outline for my ethnographic research and discuss the main concepts regarding social aspects of remembering and forgetting, such as social and cultural memory, processes of collective remembering and sites of memory.

2.1 Social Frames of Memory

Sociologist Maurice Halbwachs has often been credited with being the ‘father’ of Collective Memory due to his extensive work *Les Cadres Sociaux de la Memoire* (The Social Frameworks of Memory, 1925). This work stressed that memory, is a social phenomenon pertinent both to individuals and groups, worthy of study. As a student of Emile Durkheim, Halbwachs established that memory was indeed a social fact, term developed by Durkheim. (Rosa Rivero et al., 2000, p. 123). One of Halbwachs most fundamental findings was that there were connections between social groups and the idea of a collective memory and that a specific social group carries this very memory within a limited space and time (Erll et al., 2008, p. 82). One of the most important contributions made by Halbwachs was the idea that there are many collective memories, per se, available for study within a group.

Albeit flawed, Halbwachs’ work on Collective memory highlighted three important issues for sociologists to focus on in the study of memory. He believed that individuals were ascribed “collective frames of reference”, meaning that people within the same group are exposed to the same “tools of remembering”, highlighting that language was the most important. Secondly, individual and group memory preserve the past through selection and interpretation; thus, memory is considered a re – construction of past events. Finally, he established that the memory of a group “fulfils a function for the identity of a group” both because it “favours integration” within the group but also because it represents elements of the past that are relevant to the identity of a group (Rosa Rivero et al., 2000, p. 123).

Halbwachs also demonstrated the connection between power relations and memory as the means through which group members selected these representations. These representations, according to Halbwachs, served to “legitimise the beliefs of a group”, as well as those who, from their positions of power, imposed them upon others (Rosa Rivero et al., 2000, p. 127). The study of collective memory, according to Roediger et al., takes into account three entities; the body of knowledge (group), an attribute and a process (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 139).

They argue that the collective memory of a group is itself the “holistic image of one past” that the group carries (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 139)

Studying the history of memory and of mentalities is closely linked to the French school of historical thought, Annales. The Annales school was interested in history beyond the political or economic structures that determined it; it focused on what it called *ouillage mental* or mental tools that influenced and existed alongside these structures (Erll et al., 2008, p. 77). These mental tools were what scholars Febvre and Bloch deemed as “a system of beliefs and collective emotions with which people in the past understood and gave meaning to the world” these beliefs were studied through collective representations, images and myths from the past. Studying these collective representations allows us to understand how people see themselves within the greater historical concept but also provides information on why people see themselves the way they do. At a national level, these myths and images are portrayed upon people by elites and, through time, re-interpreted based on the tools and information available in the present. (Rosa Rivero et al., 2000, p. 130)

Memory studies, as a sub-discipline within social sciences, has allowed for unknown parts of our past to become known to the public by often centring on less dominant aspects of national/official history. The experiences of those considered ‘peripheral’ to the main characters of our national histories have served to contest meta-narratives imposed by those in power over their populations (Erll et al., 2008, p. 79). In the Spanish context, Franco’s alignment with Catholic and, by default, imperial Spain would be considered the ‘meta narrative’, and the ‘peripheral’ narrative would be those of the Republican side, or the “anti spain” during the civil war and, subsequently, those of the victims of Franco’s regime. According to Roediger et al., “Memory is social, it is located in institutions rather than individual human minds in the form of rules, laws, standardised procedures, and records, a whole set of cultural practices through which people recognise debt to the past” (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 141).

Before the introduction of the history of mentalities or memory into historical research, society as we understood it was comprised of a linear concept of history, in which it was implied that as groups, we moved forward in a progressive direction. This linear interpretation of history adopted a structural perspective of analysing events and thus prioritised economic or political issues. This structural approach occurred over one temporal timeline, which subsequently allowed for overarching narratives to dominate the historical study of societies.

On the other hand, cultural memory and culture alone operate at a “multi-temporal concept of history where past and present commingle and coalesce, capturing simultaneously different and opposing narratives” (Erll et al., 2008, p. 82). This multi-temporal way of understanding our past allows ‘peripheral’ experiences to be held equal to those at the structural level. It implies that past events are contested and re-interpreted as people learn new information or experience new realities and raises questions about the validity of historical *facts*. Memory studies considers its actors as active agents, rather than as passive in-takers of information, who can negotiate the meanings of events as well as interpret them in contradictory ways than the ones being imposed onto them from a top-down approach.

2.2 Individual vs Collective memory

Many scholars have used biological memory and its functions as a reflection of what could happen at the collective level. They have expressed the biological functions of memories at an individual level in order to explain why as groups, we also have a *need* to remember. When speaking of biological memory, one could assume that memory is a purely functional tool at an individual level. Through the process of remembering, individuals can learn and understand their present situation based on the previous experiences they have been able to recollect. As Pascal Boyer presents it, “memory is certainly not about the past but about the present and future behaviour. Memory has a biological function to the extent that it serves to organise current behaviour” (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 3).

Due to the fact that memory cannot be studied on its own, in isolation from other factors, it is inevitably impossible to study biological memory in an environment of completely controlled variables. Memory is viewed, according to Wertsch, as existing in a “complex setting in the service of providing a ‘usable past’” (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 122). This ‘usable past’ often goes hand in hand with a potential identity with clear ends; in this case, it is assumed that collective memory/remembering forms part of something bigger than itself. This bigger picture is what Wertsch (2009) calls a ‘broader agenda’ and is in and of itself the central element of the discipline. The study of collective memories is always linked to external forces that are bigger than the ideas presented by the group themselves (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 122).

According to Boyer (2009), psychologists have differentiated between three types of (biological) memory; semantic, episodic, and procedural. Each serves different needs that an individual might encounter. Put simply, semantic memory helps us recall what is and is not acceptable in social situations and procedural memory is more of a biological function in which

“fast appropriate responses modelled by past encounters” come into play. (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 4) It has been harder to state their specific function for episodic memories, as they have remained somewhat disputed. According to Boyer, episodic memories are what people usually refer to when speaking of memories. In his words, these are “unique, specific situations that they (one) encountered in the past” (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 4). Though it is agreed that past situations help us understand the present, psychologists do not believe this knowledge is purely based on memories of “particular episodes”. They argue that a much more complex system comes into play, allowing us to use our experiences to our benefit.

Though there have been differences when trying to define the clear function of episodic memory, there is consensus that these are often triggered by sensory perceptions and the necessity of these in order to remember. Episodic memories are essentially autobiographical memories and thus are essential for constituting one’s idea of self. They help us create narratives about our “life story” which, along with “lower lifetime periods”, allow us to have an understanding of who we are and why we are the way we are (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 5). The combination of these two levels of memory is what Conway, according to Boyer, called “phenomenological records” (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 6)

“The combination of semantic memory and phenomenological records would suggest that “memories” of one’s own experience come in a great variety of shapes, from the most specific – the raw record of experience, as it were – to the most abstract – the association of a mere fragment of experience with a lot of knowledge (Schacter et al., this volume)” (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 6)

Recollection involves what Boyer calls “modality-specific stores”, that is, the fact that our process of remembering is always linked to “specific visual, auditory and linguistic information” and a capacity of what he calls “visual imagery” (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 6). These aspects, along with the ability of self-reflection, a sense of personal agency and ownership of these memories, are essential for the act of recollection. Without being able to *relate* to one’s own memories, it is very hard to feel as if they are part of one’s sense of self. Though somewhat contradictory, it has also been found that to understand these episodic memories, one must already have a sense of self to see these as “autobiographical” (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 7).

One's sense of self is highly dependent on the environment surrounding them and, according to Boyer, is thus culturally dependent. Even when speaking of a large-scale narrative, such as the aforementioned *lifestory*, the culture one is exposed to affects our own interpretation and understanding of who we are in relation to those around us (Boyer and Wertsch 2009:9). Values that cultures put at the forefront of their behavioural expectations also largely affect our self-image. Boyer (2009) states a distinction between societies which "interdependent orientations" versus those that value "independent orientation" (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 53). These differences affect our sense of self because they ultimately affect how, who, and what we remember; this is also due to what is culturally considered important or relevant in one's life (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 62). In a culture which values interdependence, we are more likely to remember events involving other actors as well as ourselves, whereas, in a culture that has an independent orientation, one's memories usually involve themselves rather than the group around them (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 54). There is, therefore, an interaction between "culture, the self and autobiographical memory" (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 53)

Our autobiographical memories create what Boyer (2009) calls "the content of the self", allowing us to locate ourselves within the greater sociohistorical time, within our societies and specific groups. They can both constrain and aid our development as individuals and allow us to have a better understanding of ourselves (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 33)

"Because we only live once, the life script is not learned from personal actions in recurrent contexts, in contrast to the event script introduced by Schank and Abelson (1977). Instead, the life script is handed down from older generations, from stories, and from observations of the behavior of other, typically older, people within the same culture" (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 63)

Though much work has been done on the functions and workings of biological memories, due to their intangible nature, they cannot be proven. It is because of this that, much like the work on collective memories, the conclusions surrounding biological memories are more often assumptions or inferences rather than straight facts. Personal memories, it is inferred, influence one's behaviour based on what it is able to recall and collect from previous experiences (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 35)

“a broad review of how cognitive psychology has come to understand the interplay that exists between memory, self, and culture within an individual’s networks of autobiographical memories” (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 36)

A large part of one’s sense of self is not only maintained by episodic memories but by semantic ones. There is clear evidence that shows the necessity of semantic memories, consistent over time, to form one’s sense of self and personal identity. Though one might not remember specific or unique details, the perception they have of themselves is aided by memories which stay true through prolonged periods of time (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 9)

2.3 How are collective memories created/retrieved

Behind a large part of the ‘memory boom’ that occurred in the second half of the twentieth century lies the idea that memory is not only active but also a “goal-driven process” among social groups (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 10). In which certain memories are actively retained or disregarded by groups to fit their current needs. This stems from the idea of nation-states and nationalism that to unify a large group of people, some sense of commonality is needed. And although these assumptions are not wrong, they are also not entirely correct. It might be more accurate to think that if a group already has essentialist tendencies and has created itself in opposition to those groups around them, this group with essentialist tendencies will indeed fall for a narrative about their “ancestral uniqueness”(Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 10). Even speaking of memory as such obscures the fact that there are active actors involved in the process of remembering. These actors have the ability to “listen, select and modify” versions of their pasts in order to fit the needs of the present situation (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 113)

Information that is accessed and presented to the public recurrently is more likely to be remembered and, more importantly, retained by those being exposed to it. This, in turn, affects what people will consider the “generally accepted” version of events, that although they may be historically inaccurate, over time become accepted and understood as real (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 114). Psychological studies have shown how teaching national histories in schools affects people’s individual representations of the past (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 114).

According to Wertsch (2009), collective memory is a term which is widely used but narrowly understood. Due to it being an interdisciplinary field, there are often differences between different disciplines when deciding what it means or represents. To Wertsch, the lack

of a proper definition of the term at the academic level creates confusion and polarisation within the public debate that often surrounds collective memory (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, pp. 117, 118). He Distinguishes between strong vs distributed accounts of collective memory, collective vs individual memory, history vs memory and specific memory vs deep memory. He argues that an individual's memory is "fundamentally influenced by the social context in which they function" (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 118).

Emphasising the power of social organisation, Wertsch states that these structures bear the framework within which recollection occurs and "powerfully influences both the manner and the matter" being recalled (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 118). This implies that there is a *system* within which memories are distributed in two different ways. The social, through interaction with others, and the instrumental; where active agents interact with the *systems* that "mediate remembering" (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 119).

When studying the social distribution of memories, Mary Sue Weldon looked at the way that individuals within groups "collaboratively remember events". She concluded that to instrumentally distribute memories, there must be both active agents and 'cultural tools' available to aid the retrieval process (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 119). These cultural tools can be things such as national holidays or specific symbols that guide people within a group to collectively remember the same stories.

These 'tools' can be divided between two more specific mechanisms of remembrance; explicit linguistic forms of representing the past and those which rely more specifically on embodied practices (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 119). The former uses narratives to portray specific past events, and the latter has its most common embodiment within commemorative ceremonies (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p.120). Though most scholars have focused on the linguistic elements crucial to collective remembering, one must not belittle the ritual and physical practices that strongly influence groups' capability of sharing and recollecting "their" past (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 120).

It is important to not have a reductionist approach to collective memory or remembering; it is not that groups have a shared memory as such but rather that they as individuals have similar memories to each other (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 119). This is true because groups are often exposed to the same "remembering resources", which in turn make it seem like they have the same "memory" when speaking of past events. The linguistic forms of remembering, such as the narrative, are crucial tools for representing the past that "occupy an important place in the 'toolkit' of human cognition [in general]" (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 120).

2.4 Cultural Memory

Astrid Erll, in the introduction of the most recent “Cultural Memory Studies, an International and Interdisciplinary Handbook”, defines the idea of cultural memory as “the interplay of present and past in socio-cultural contexts”. From individual memory to commemorative group practices, cultural memory explores how the past is present in today’s socio-cultural contexts, whether at a national or transnational level (Erll et al., 2008, p. 1). This field also understands memory as subject to the “web of meanings” of the context surrounding it; in this sense, cultural memory adopts an anthropological approach to the study of memory.

Within this approach, then, the cultural memory of a group is seen to be embedded within the structure of norms and values that guide a group and should only be understood through these. Furthermore, this anthropological understanding of culture calls to be understood through a “three-dimensional framework” (Erll et al., 2008, p. 4) within which the social, material and mental aspects of memory are considered. This, in turn, means that the concept of cultural memory could be divided into three subsections understood as social memory, material memory and mental memory (Erll et al., 2008, p. 4).

The emergence of a memory boom in the late 1980s (Erll et al., 2008, p. 1) and early 1990s that has been taken into the first part of the 21st century forms part of the greater structural changes happening during the last years of the 20th century. A decomposition of great historical narratives at the end of the cold war and decolonisation processes made space for the voices of those who had been neglected by these great master narratives at a national level to be elevated and heard for the first time (Erll et al., 2008, p. 9). This ‘memory boom’ created a new interest concerning how the past was (re) presented, constructed or even distorted by people in power for specific identity projects and how physical spaces might be directed related to aspects of one’s personal and in turn, national past (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 9).

Memory as such, and by default, cultural memory occurs at two different levels, the individual and the collective, as mentioned earlier. The idea of a collective memory implies that, like the individual brain, at a collective level, groups of people can extract elements of their past that have been experienced at a personal level but that are embedded and shaped by the general context of the time (Erll et al., 2008, p. 5). The idea that groups can remember is not literal but rather metaphorical; that is, groups are able to “reconstruct a shared past” in a similar way that an individual can reconstruct their personal past (Erll et al., 2008, p. 5). These collective recreations of the past are usually based more on present needs and knowledge rather

than on an accurate depiction of the past being discussed (Erll et al., 2008, p. 5). At a national level, in this sense, historical narratives can be manipulated and changed in order to create a greater hegemonic concept of national history, which aligns with the political needs of the present people in power (Capdepón, 2014, p. 185).

Our individual memories are ultimately bound to those of people around us and the events that occur around us. These memories are bound to the people, objects or intangible elements such as music we are surrounded by when creating such memories. In other words, our individual memory of an event is directly linked to the ‘forces’ moving around us at that time (Erll et al., 2008, p. 5). Despite these differences between the cognitive function of memory and the social, these two cannot be observed as separate forces. Rather, these two forms of remembrance are at a constant interplay with each other (Erll et al., 2008, p. 5).

Elements of cultural memory such as monuments or institutions are constantly being reinterpreted or actualised by the individual within a certain socio-cultural context. That is, without the constant actualization of cultural elements at an individual level, according to Erll, these markers would be “nothing but dead material, failing to have any impact in societies”(Erll et al., 2008, p. 5). This concept is best understood at the level of national memory, where interpretations of the past are instrumentally used to align with a preferred identity project. A nation’s history must correspond with the idea that the nation has of itself in the present. In this sense, past national events are renegotiated and instrumentalised for the purpose of creating a hegemonic version of history (Capdepón, 2014, p. 185).

Contrary to Nora (1984), who situated his book *Les Lieux de Mémoire* as a space between history and remembering, Erll aims to create a distinction between different modes of remembering that exist within culture (Erll et al., 2008, p. 7). Rather than considering history as a purely static practice as considered by Halbwachs, Erll (2008) tries to emphasise the fact that rather than the past being a given fact, it is a process that is in constant negotiation and is actively being “re-constructed and re-presented”, both at an individual and collective level (Erll et al., 2008, p. 7). This implies the idea that with new information, one can look back on an individual memory and understand it differently given the present context. And this is the same for memories at the collective, cultural, or social level. Presented with new socio-cultural contexts, a new understanding of one’s collective past can be created. Erll (2008) lends the example of war as an embodiment of how such grand events can be remembered through different ‘modes’.

“A war, for example, can be remembered as a mythic event (“the war as apocalypse”), as part of political history (the First World War as “the great seminal catastrophe of the twentieth century”), as a traumatic experience (“the horror of the trenches, the shells, the barrage of gunfire,” etc.), as a part of family history (“the war my great-uncle served in”), as focus of bitter contestation (“the war which was waged by the old generation, by the fascists, by men”). Myth, religious memory, political history, trauma, family remembrance, or generational memory are different modes of referring to the past.” (Erl et al., 2008, p. 7)

2.5 Cultural Tools of Remembering

Narratives form a large part of the instrumental distribution of memories across groups; these can be divided into two types of narrative, specific and schematic narratives. These narratives form part of the cultural tools mentioned earlier that aid people into remembering events and have been described as “the stock of stories that shape a society” (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 129). The schematic narratives are usually more generalised and abstract, within which collective memory finds some of its conceptual frameworks (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 129). The details presented in specific narratives through certain characters, where specific values are embodied and reflected within larger schematic narratives. Wertsch (2009) argues that these schematic narratives are “unreflective, unanalytical and unwitting” (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 130) and thus ultimately seem harmless in the eyes of the users. When following the timeline of events presented in certain narratives, he argues that people are unaware of the power the narratives hold in how we shape and represent the past, often due to the fact that these narratives also go hand in hand with “identity commitments” (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 130).

These schematic narratives are usually considered templates, as they often differ in content but not in form. Wertsch (2009) uses the example of the Russian schematic narrative template of “expulsion of foreign enemies” (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 131) to defend his point. Though the enemies differ from given periods, the general justification for action against these *enemies* has been the same throughout history. In the Spanish case, one could argue that the schematic narrative does not differ much from the Russian, as the “reconquering” of Spanish lands against unwanted “foreigners”, in this case, the Moors, has been a recurring theme in the conservative and predominantly Catholic spheres of Spanish society. In Franco’s

case, he reconquered *Spain* from the Republic's "Bolshevism" and, in turn, "saved the soul of the nation" (Ferrándiz, 2022, p. 209).

Furthermore, Werstch (2009) also argues that these schematic narrative templates emphasise a "conservative force" (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 130) on collective memories and that they, in all cases, not just the Russian, promote continuity of their accounts in order to align itself with the given state-sponsored history and identity project at hand. Most importantly, Wertsch highlighted the power of these narratives to prevail despite there being archival evidence that might be contradictory (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 131).

The accuracy of collective memories remains contested in the fields within which it is studied but by analysing the mechanisms that shape our collective memories, one can gain further insight into how they change and are adjusted over time. Roediger, Zaromb and Butler (2009) argue that there are three mechanisms in which the 'implantation of memories', so to say, function. The acts of retrieval, repeated retrieval and feedback and their power in changing the way certain memories are understood (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 138). Understanding collective memories as socially constructed entities, in which we rely on third parties to verify or update our recollections, implies that due to the nature of remembering itself, there is bound to be a *mis* recollection of certain events (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 141).

Trying to understand how memories are maintained and transmitted over time is one of the goals of the discipline, and there is significant evidence, although not total, that the act of retrieval is crucial for the perpetuation of memory. That is to say, if a memory has not been retrieved over a certain period, that memory will cease to exist as such, regardless of the efforts made to do so (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 141). This retrieval process is aided by the previously mentioned cultural tools such as books, songs, or national holidays which shape the orientation of our collective memories. Roediger et al. (2009) present the classroom as one of the key locations in which collective memories are shaped and influenced, arguing that often history classes revolve more around the "aims of collective remembering" rather than providing different historical accounts of marked national events (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 142). The information available to people, in this case, students, often speaks less of the aims of collective remembering than those being actively omitted by these cultural tools (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 144)

A series of psychological investigations have proven the effectiveness of repetition when it comes to retention of information provided to individuals (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 146). Roediger et al.(2009) provide school examinations as examples of forms in which information is actively repeated and retrieved and subsequently have an effect on the shaping

of an individual's collective memory (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 147). Historical facts that at the school level are considered more important than others are often linked to the "aims of collective remembering" mentioned earlier. The hierarchy of importance of historical events presented in school, in combination with other cultural tools, is directly linked with the version of self that the state is trying to provide for its people, that is what *life script* the state is trying to create for itself.

For these retrievals and repetitions to be effective, they must be conducted over long periods of time (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 151). Active feedback on retrieval allows corrections in what Roedigier et al. called the possible 'errors of commission' and 'errors of omission' within a narrative. They argue that individuals can engage in collaborative remembering through the retrieval of memories and subsequent feedback (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 162), in which the most important details and elements of a particular narrative are determined (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 160). Thus, the feedback process can once again influence and shape the present state of a collective memory.

If retrieved over a prolonged period, errors of commission and omissions can become the accepted version of events, despite being catered to align with greater historical, national or social intentions (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 160). The three mechanisms of retrieval, repetition and feedback all affect the level of accuracy or inaccuracy of a given collective memory. If an inaccurate *version of events* is repeated over time and aided by the cultural tools available, this inaccurate version of events is eventually understood as truth. In the Spanish case, the discussion and controversy surrounding the civil war to this day is a perfect example of how inaccurate or skewed versions of events can permeate into the collective memory of a country.

The consistent incorrect retrieval of information in Spanish schools and general public discourse during the years of the dictatorship cemented an inaccuracy in the collective memory of the Spanish people (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 163). Despite the fact that, with time it has been proven through hard and soft facts that the war was caused by an unjustified military coup, this version of events is still present and relevant to some in Spain (Ferrándiz, 2022, p. 225), proving the previously mentioned point that regardless of correction, if incorrect information has been retrieved and agreed upon as true by a majority, over a prolonged period of time, it will continue being considered as such (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 164).

According to Roedigier et al. (2009), feedback and correction of these errors can only be effective if every member of the group agrees that it is, in fact, incorrect. As long as there are members of the group that refuse to accept such corrections, despite there being evidence

against it, the feedback given will only reinforce the retention of the incorrect information (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 165). In the Spanish case, since the conservative spheres within society still ratify and justify Franco's version of events (Menasanch de Tobaruela et al., 2020, p. 656), it is very hard to reach a consensus on the fact that the narrative provided by the regime was in itself, incorrect or biased. On top of the conservative spheres, many of the cultural tools available to subsequent democratic governments have not been utilised to their full potential. For example, only in the 2020 Law of Historical Memory was there a proposal of adding two new days to the national calendar that would make reference to the events of the civil war and Francoist regime, as well as to the victims of both (Decree of Democratic Memory, 2020).

2.6 Sites of Memory

According to Jay Winter (2009), a site of memory is “a place where people go to engage in public activity through which they express ‘a collective shared knowledge (...) of the past, on which a group’s sense of unity and individuality is based’”(Erll et al., 2008, p. 61) . This group inherits meanings and adds new layers of such as time passes. This engagement is crucial for the presentation and preservation of such sites; when groups cease their commemorative activities, these sites of memory usually lose their initial force and fade (Erll et al., 2008, p. 61). “Commemoration serves as an act arising out of conviction, that the moment being recalled is both significant and informed by a moral message, these sites materialise their message” (Erll et al., 2008, p. 62)

Winter (2009) understands the idea of sites of memory as “physical sites where commemorative acts take place” and emphasises the fact that during the twentieth century, these sites were usually related to the loss of life during war. He claims that such sites are exclusive to the nation-state and are thus primarily concerned with the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Erll et al., 2008, p. 61). In this aspect, the Valley of the Fallen is a perfect example of such a site of memory. Though the commemorative practices are increasingly less visible to the public, this site of memory is explicit in its intention of remembering those fallen “for God and for the fatherland” (*Por Dios y por la Patria*). This specific choice of words refers to those who fell on the nationalist side of the war and omit those who fought, resisted and endured tortures to defend democratic values embodied in the Second Republic (Menasanch de Tobaruela et al., 2020, p. 654). Winter argues that such sites undergo several stages in which their significance and acceptance by the public are (re) negotiated. The first stage of such sites could be considered a “creative phase”, in which these sites are “constructed or adapted to

particular commemorative purposes” (Erll et al., 2008, p. 61). In the context of the Valley of the Fallen, this period would last 18 years. From the 1st of April 1940, the day it was commissioned, until the official day of its opening to the public, April 1st, 1959, also known as Victory Day, twenty years after the end of the civil war. The second stage that Winter mentions would be one of “institutionalisation and routinization of their use” these can be used, according to Winter, for periods of time, or they can “be abruptly halted” (Erll et al., 2008, p. 6). From 1958 when it opened, until 1975, when Franco died, the Valley of the Fallen was systematically used by Falangist sympathisers to honour and commemorate their martyr, Jose Antonio Primo de Rivera, as well as by members of the public who wished to honour those fallen “for God and for the fatherland”.

Finally, Winter (2009) argues that the significance of such sites of memory “fades away with the passing of the social groups which initiated the practice” (Erll et al., 2008, p. 61). In the case of the Valley of the Fallen case, the site's initial purpose was *officially* lost in 2007 with the law of historical memory. This law, amongst other things, explicitly stated the prohibition of openly praising the dictatorship and the use of slogans, motifs or symbols that were somehow related to the civil war or regime (BOE, 1940). This, however, is not the case in the Valley of the Fallen because it still holds two large Francoist coats of arms, and it raises questions about the effectiveness of removal without replacement, as no effort has been made to remember the republican side of the war.

According to Winter (2009), sites of national humiliation are rarely erected, despite a few exceptions (Erll et al., 2008, p. 61). One could argue that during the transition into democracy, Spain refused to turn the Valley of the Fallen into a site of national humiliation or shame. On the contrary, instead of trying to (re) signify or (re) interpret such a site through the eyes of democratic values, the Spanish state refused to engage through a pedagogical perspective. This refusal to address the past at both at a material and intangible level, embodied in the abandonment of the Valley of the Fallen, is the *framework of forget* cemented in the Law of amnesty of 1977 that Spain adopted for dealing with the controversies of its 20th-century history (Bernecker, 2011, p. 82).

Winter (2009) argues that after the first world war, Catholic countries in Europe underwent a change in their commemorative practices. He continues by stating that after fighting the world’s first industrialised war, European commemorative sites “adopted medieval notation” (Erll et al., 2008, p. 67).

“Medieval images of heroic and saintly warriors recaptured a time when combat was between individuals, rather than the impersonal and unbalanced duel between artillery and human flesh.” (Erll et al., 2008, p. 67)

Even though the civil war did not occur directly after the first world war, these facts still hold and emphasise that these habits changed with the end of WWII and the inauguration of holocaust memorials (Erll et al., 2008, p. 69). In the case of the Valley of the Fallen, the adoption of medieval motifs is clearly seen within the Basilica, which is adorned, among other things, with the Patron Saints of the different military factions such as the Army and the Navy (Sancho, 1999, p. 27). This idea will be further expanded in the analytical chapter through an in-depth description of both the exterior and interior design of the Basilica’s decorations.

2.7 Valle de Los Caídos as a *Site(s) of Memory(ies)*

This three-stage process by which Winter describes the history of rituals surrounding public commemoration is relevant when speaking of the Valley of the Fallen (Erll et al., 2008, p. 71). The construction of the place, personally commissioned by Franco, the “grounding ritual action in the calendar”, every 1st of April, Victory day in Francoist Spain, was celebrated and finally, probably the most relevant point to my fieldwork; “their transformation or disappearance as active sites of memory” (Erll et al., 2008, p. 71). This last point aims to explain how and why people from and outside of Spain still visit the Valley of the Fallen today. Though it served as a pilgrimage site for far-right and regime sympathizers during the first decades of Spain’s democracy, most of the people I spoke to did not associate themselves *directly* with the regime or its ideals. Though there is no doubt that this is still a site of commemoration for both the dictator and the regime, especially due to Jose Antonio Primo de Rivera still being buried there, this has become somewhat of a historic touristic site, as well as a predominantly religious one.

One of the reasons behind the lack of memory recovered from the Republican victims of the Civil War and the regime is the fact that public commemoration of these people was prohibited and even persecuted; the regime symbolically took over public life (Capdepón, 2014, p. 185). Because of the lack of connection between families of Republican victims and the public sphere, a “powerful prop of remembrance is removed” (Erll et al., 2008, p. 72). The

public sphere was, and I argue still is, dominated by waves of conservative narratives that glorify Spain's imperial and most atrocious parts of history.

It is argued that a site of memory disappears over time, as they become less relevant in the collective imagination of the general public and, more importantly, to those groups who, across generations, held personal ties to them. These sites tend to fade not only in the collective consciousness but also as material elements, often becoming dilapidated or run down. Though this could be argued, due to the dilapidated condition that much of the complex of the Valley is in, there is one element that has and will withstand the test of time. The cross, as Franco intended it to, due to its unbelievable size and architectural dimensions, though in bad condition, serves as a constant reminder of the regime's existence (Erll et al., 2008, p. 72). Furthermore, sites of war memory are as transitory as those who identify with them. But what happens when a whole national identity project is closely linked to such a site? When there has never been an active work to try to repurpose such a site and generations after the war and regime ended, people still feel identified with what it represents?

As opposed to the memory of Republican victims of the Nationalist terror, the Valley of the Fallen has resisted the test of time and forgetting. Such a site will remain engrained in the collective imagination of the Spanish people for decades, as it already has (Sheean, 2019, p. 10). The monument is a perfect example of what Michael Richards coined as "Francoist Liturgy of memory", in other words, "the sacralisation of political discourse and of memory through consecrating heroes" (Sheean, 2019, p. 11). The Valley of the Fallen and the 'heroes' it is intended to remember speaks to a larger issue in present in Spain's democracy today. That of the cultural and institutional legacy of Franco's regime that is ever-present in its political sphere (Menasanch de Tobaruela et al., 2020, p. 640)

According to Sheean (2019), the purpose of monuments is to "compel us to remember" (Sheean, 2019, p. 12). In this sense, it is clear that the Valley of the Fallen is trying to push us to remember is the version of Spanish history that Franco created to cement and legitimise his regime. The discourse around the monument and the fact that bodies of 'both sides' remain entrenched between the rock also pushes the idea that the monument was, in fact, one that symbolised reconciliation between Spaniards, a myth spoken about today. This idea is best reflected in the following passage from the chapter *Ritual violence and rituals of violence of the Franco regime between 1939 and 2019: the Valle de Los Caídos from a historical, archaeological, and forensic perspective*, written by Montserrat Menasanch de Tobaruela, Astrid Menasanch Tobieson, and Roberto Risch.

“The construction that was meant, over time, to enter the collective memory as a national monument to reconciliation between Spaniards, was actually built with the forced labour of hundreds of prisoners of war and thousands of republican political prisoners.” (Menasanch de Tobaruela et al., 2020, p. 651)

These sites are intended to transform time into space by literally engraining them into the material world around people. To build such a monument without an explicit historical and political narrative to accompany it would be, in the eyes of many Spaniards, a waste of money, especially given after the country faced a three-year civil war. It remained generally uncontested and accepted by the public because this mythification of the fallen was a crucial element in the legitimation process of the regime (Bernecker, 2011, p. 67). However, despite its eternal physical state, the memory surrounding such a site is subject to change as time passes. Within the ever-changing socio-cultural context, the way that the public understands this monument is subject to the needs or trends of the present.

“In this sense, the Valley of the Fallen attempts to “defy time” by rendering it into the permanence of stone. Yet memory itself is by no means fixed; it is subjective and variable. Because the site instantiates the cultural memory of the dictatorship, it stands today at the center of Spain’s national and ongoing memory work as it relates to the legacy of the Franco period. In this context, this essay examines how the Valley of the Fallen continues to function as a memorialistic site—that is, how both the structure and its afterimage provoke a continual confrontation with the past, which, in turn, reworks cultural memory in the present.” (Sheean, 2019, p. 12)

3. Methodology

When I first started investigating the Spanish civil war and Francoist regime, I came across many possible topics on which my research could focus. I had always heard about the Valley of the Fallen but personally had never been to the site. When I began further reading about the Valley, I realised that the site itself encapsulated many of the topics that I had been considering during my initial research phases. This site was commissioned by the Francoist state and is the home of the largest mass grave in Spain (Ferrándiz, 2022, p. 219), yet it was and still is funded by public money and receives between 230,000 and 300,000 visitors annually (epData, n.d.). Since the site was both a location of the crimes perpetrated by the

regime, a symbol of its impunity against time and an identity project of the Spain that the regime wanted to create, I decided to focus my research on why its visitors felt the need to visit such a place.

For this, I conducted an on-site ethnography, more specifically through the method of participant observation of visitors (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). During my time there, I wanted to find out the reasons behind their visit and, if possible, opinions over its construction or current condition. Furthermore, I conducted sole observation of the monument itself, in which I looked for symbolism, commemorative plaques, acknowledgement, or possible mentions of the Civil War or regime.

My research includes visual data and field notes of the site and informal semi-structured interviews with visitors gathered through a one-week stay at the monument site from March 27th to April 3rd, 2022. Though the Valley of the Fallen is a complex that includes an Abbey, School, and Crypt (Basilica), my main area of research was conducted in the Crypt (Basilica) and its surrounding areas. This is due to the fact that above the basilica stands the 150mt tall cross, which, together with the basilica, forms the main attraction of the complex. I have covered most of this in my field stay in the place.

3.1 Research Questions

Based on the literature presented in the first chapter, one can understand the relevance of studying a war memorial as an example of how our collective remembering processes are influenced by national or local identity processes (Rosa Rivero et al., 2000, p. 44). Material spaces can become embodiments of ideas and values, which, aided by literary devices such as narratives, create strong senses of self, both at the individual and collective levels. The meanings and the way that such sites of memory are understood constantly change over time, adapting to the needs of the present and emphasizing a sense of continuity. In the case of the Valley of the Fallen, these changes have often happened involuntarily due to the memory laws that were passed in Spain in 2007 and 2020 (del Moral Salmoral, 2020, p. 19). Researching the meanings people ascribe to their visits and to the site itself allowed me to gain further insights into these changes, often imposed by the top down, and how people position themselves with regard to these changes. During my time in the field, my main research question was as follows:

What are the meanings ascribed to the visits of the site and the monument itself by those who attend the place?

Though my aim was to understand the meanings behind visiting such a site of memory, I also tried to investigate to what extent the monument is not only an homage to Franco's regime and what (who) it aimed to eliminate from the collective consciousness of Spanish people, but also an emblem of the impunity he and members of his regime benefitted from (Ferrándiz, 2022, p. 218). Due to the fact that it is also the site of a mass grave, funded by public money, and the tomb of the founder of the Falange, the Valley of the Fallen also serves to highlight greater disputes and points of controversy within Spain (Menasanch de Tobaruela et al., 2020, p. 640). By addressing such issues, this paper hopes to show the effects of dominating, one-sided narratives on the collective consciousness of a nation, specifically when it comes to sites of memory erected after a "victorious" war. For this reason, I formulated additional questions;

What meaning(s) do various groups ascribe to the monument?

How does the monument help perpetuate and solidify myths surrounding the civil war and regime?

What narratives around the monument are being created and circulated?

How are these narratives a product of Spain's, now contested, transition into democracy?

During my visit, I realised that despite being funded by public money and the complex "defying the test of time", the site itself was indeed in a deteriorated state, with visible water damage within the basilica and the prohibition of hiking to the base of the cross due to fear of falling rocks. This made me think that its abandonment was somehow a reflection of the general intentional neglect that this period of Spanish history had received in public discourse and spheres, a neglect that was embodied in the "Pact of Forget" of 1977. In turn, it led me to formulate further questions; based on my experience during the first days of my visit, I decided to incorporate the following question into my research;

What is the perception of the current state of the Basilica?

3.2 Research Strategy and Techniques of Data Collection

Ethnography is a form of qualitative research practice used in social sciences, mainly by anthropologists and sociologists. Qualitative research is focused on "understanding the

nature of phenomena " (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011, p. 2), rather than quantifying the amount or distribution of a given subject. Participant observation is a qualitative method that allows the researcher to take part in "daily activities, rituals, interactions and events of a group of people" (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011, p. 2) and puts the researcher "where the action is" (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011, p. 2). Finally, it allows them to collect any kind of data, be that "narratives or numbers" (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011, p. 2).

Participant observation occurs in the 'natural setting' of a group and is not controlled or influenced by external factors (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 5). Using this method contributed to my research problem because it allowed me to feel part of the group being studied while at the same time maintaining some level of anonymity within the field. Due to the fact that the civil war and the regime are still such controversial discussion topics in Spain (Yusta, 2022, p. 1), I decided not to disclose the purpose of my research to my informants. This was because I did not want my intentions or research direction to affect the responses being given by the visitors of the site.

In order to collect their data, ethnographers use a range of collection tools such as "documents or artefacts" to aid their field research (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 3), though the primary focus is usually on visual or audial data based on observations within the field. Through visual and audial observations, their aim is to understand the daily lives of the group being studied from the perspective held within the group (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 3) rather than imposing external assumptions upon their participants; ethnographers try to understand the 'webs of meanings and significance' of a given group, as understood by them. As the field that I was researching is indeed a touristic attraction, the people there were constantly changing so I did not see my informants on more occasions other than when speaking to them.

Due to the "exploratory orientation" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 4) of ethnographic studies, the research design and questions begin as open-ended and slowly become more structured. Participant observation focuses on building research questions based on observations and data collected from within the field (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011, p. 10). In this sense, this ethnographic method encourages open-ended research questions, formulations and sampling strategies (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 5), refraining from imposing preconceived ideas upon the group being studied. In this field, the researcher progressively structures their work based on the information they are receiving (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011, p. 15). Because of this, participant observation serves both as a research method and an analytic

tool, according to DeWalt; it both “enhances” the data as well as its interpretation of it. (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011, p. 16).

Though it is still often associated with the field of anthropology, ethnographic research allows for an in-depth study of a given group (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 2). The method has undergone structural changes from when it was first developed (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 3) and has been highly influenced by theoretical developments such as post-structuralism and feminism within the social sciences (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 13). Due to its interdisciplinary nature, the method is “by no means unusual in lacking a single, standard meaning. Nor does the uncertainty of sense undermine its value as a label” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 2) according to Atkinson and Hammersley.

DeWalt (2011) emphasised the idea that an ethnographer will gain different access to information based on their race, ethnicity, gender or sexuality is largely agreed upon within the different fields that use ethnography as a research method (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011, p. 99). There is evidence that women have and still do face discrimination from both men within their discipline as well as during their fieldwork from their informants. This has, in turn, affected their ability to collect data as well as gaining access to certain data pertaining to social spheres in which women are not necessarily welcome or that have been assigned to the men of a given research group. Nevertheless, this can hold true in the ‘opposite’ sense, that men are also limited in gaining a certain type of data solely based on the fact that they are men (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011, p. 100).

Through a descriptive analysis of my surroundings, I will try to use Richard Geertz’s idea of thick description, in order to better understand the meaning behind people’s decision to visit such a site. As mentioned in his work, through such a description in which “[acts such as] twitches, winds, fake winks, parodies, rehearsals of parodies are produced, perceived, and interpreted” (Geertz, 1973, p. 3) the analysis must try to understand the “structures of signification” (Geertz, 1973, p. 4) behind them. In other words, to try to understand the symbolic meanings behind people wanting to visit such a monument, and how it might speak of greater issues reflected in the greater scope of Spanish society, as aforementioned.

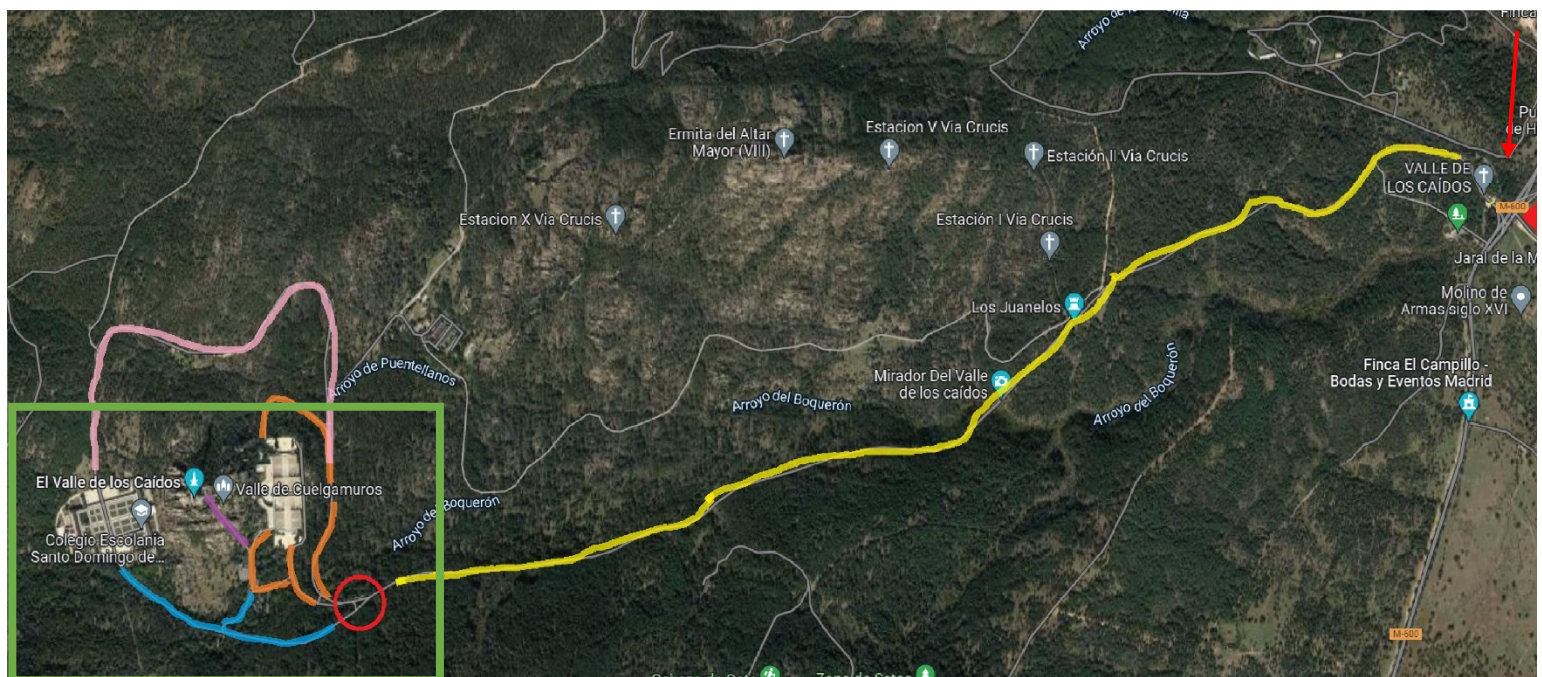
3.3 Sampling Strategy

Given that the Valley of the Fallen is advertised as a touristic site in Madrid (Madrid Destino Cultura Turismo y Negocio S. A., n.d.), the sample of visitors in question was everchanging. For this reason, I chose to use the method of “convenience sampling”, as stated

Kathleen DeWalt’s book (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011, p. 130). This means that as a researcher, I approached people in an unorganized fashion, trying to reach as many people as possible. Since my main research question was regarding the reasons behind their visit, I tried to make my sample as heterogeneous in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, and “style” as possible. My sample of informants ranged from international and national tourists visiting for various purposes and security guards of the site. Moreover, my main sample was the field itself, as I also intended to observe and study the complex in which the monument is located. For this, I spent an extensive amount of time walking around the grounds of the complex but prioritised the areas surrounding the Basilica.

Figure 1

Source: Google Maps



Satellite map of the complex of the Valley of the Fallen. Red arrow on the far right corner indicates the entrance, the yellow lines indicates the road up to the complex, the red circle indicates the fork in the road that leads to the basilica on the right, and the monastery and abbey on the left. Orange lines show the routes around the basilica, the blue lines show the route to the monastery. The pink line shows the road accessible to the public that leads from the monastery to the basilica from the right side. The purple line indicates where the funicular tram is, though it is no longer functional

In the case of international tourists, I encountered both large groups guided by privately organized guides and smaller groups ranging from 2-4 people who were living in Madrid and had heard of the site, either from locals or back home. In the case of national tourists, the range of people visiting was much larger. During my visits, I encountered:

- families with children,
- locally organized hiking excursions
- groups of young people between the ages of 20-30
- couples,
- groups or pairs of male friends
- finally, those who were attending the Via Crucis pilgrimage (DGueB, 2022).

This last group was taking part in the yearly pilgrimage, whose final site is an Ermite Church which is located within the vicinity of the valley.

The biggest distinction I made from the sample I was presented with is the fact that most people, both national and international, seem to visit the site for two main reasons. These two reasons were namely:

1. “to know what should not repeat itself.”
2. “because it is part of our history, and we need to know about it [regardless of the controversy]”.

Though these were the overarching themes of most of the responses I received, every individual had their own justification and reasons that supported their claims.

3.4 Research Boundaries and Ethical Considerations

Due to the fact that the site being studied is located in Madrid, my ethnography was limited in time. I spent eight full days going to the site to gather information; of those eight days, I made sure that at least 4 of them were weekends to ensure as many informants as possible. I visited from the 26th of March until the 3rd of April 2022; this meant that the weather was not ideal because it was still cold. The complex of the Valley of the Fallen is located within the Valley of Cuelgamuros, in the Guadarrama mountains. Due to this, the “attractions” are outdoors, which definitely affected the sample of possible informants. As the site is located on the outskirts of Madrid, most of the people that visited needed to have a car, as access through public transport is limited and scarce. On the last two days of my visit, the weather significantly

improved, reaching 21°C. I immediately saw a change in the amount of people visiting compared to the first weekend when I visited the complex when it was cloudy and roughly 5°C at the location of the site.

In order to make sure that my informants' answers were not influenced by my research intentions, I decided to maintain the purpose of my visit anonymous - thus, I followed the participant observation in its passive form – unless asked directly about it. The reason behind not unveiling the purpose of my study was that I feared that my informants would be reluctant to answering questions if they thought I was investigating *against* the monument. My assumptions about people being reluctant or skeptical to speak to me were proven correct when on different occasions, people's initial answer to my question of “what do you think of the monument” was “well, it should not be toppled!”.

This immediate defensiveness over the monument being toppled refers to the most recent memory law in Spain that was passed in 2020, which makes a specific mention to sites of memory such as the Valley of the Fallen. In article 4 of the law 2020 Decree of Democratic Memory proposal, the following was stated about sites of memory related to the civil war and regime;

“Section 4 regulates the sites of Democratic Memory, which will have a commemorative and didactic function, for which an inventory is created as an instrument of knowledge. As for the Valley of the Fallen, emphasis is placed on its re-signification with a pedagogical purpose and the right of relatives to recover the remains of their ancestors is recognized” (Decree of Democratic Memory, 2020.)

As a woman working in the field, there were several factors that I had to consider while conducting my research. First and foremost, as the place I was studying was originally a pilgrimage site for radical far-right supporters and regime sympathisers, the idea of personal safety was one I had to consider. Though my research there provided me with information that suggests that the location no longer attracts as many people with extremist tendencies, I still felt it was important to not draw attention to myself. In order to keep myself somewhat unnoticed, I wore simple clothes such as jeans, jumper and jacket in order to create any kind of bias on the way that I was dressed. Having said this, due to the fact that I am half Irish, I do not look stereotypically Spanish, this aided me to a certain extent since for the most part, people assumed I was just a foreigner who was asking questions, even though Spanish is my second mother tongue.

Even though I am Spanish in nationality, I only lived in Spain for four years of my life. This in turn has allowed me to understand the controversies surrounding the civil war and the current political climate from somewhat of a “blank slate”. The fact that I have not been socialised in Spain for most of my life has allowed me to escape many of the myths surrounding the civil war and the Francoist regime. My family does not have a specific story or implication during the civil war or regime that might affect my impartiality in this sense. From what I have learned from my grandmother, both her family and the one of my grandfather were monarchical loyalists. This meant that they were neither regime sympathisers nor republicans, though needless to say, those who were in favour of re-establishing the monarchy fought on predominantly on the nationalist side.

Despite not being raised in Spain, I spent four years in Madrid, which had an obvious influence on my process of socialisation. During these four years, I attended a bilingual school that followed the English curriculum. This meant that although most of the students were Spanish, the environment had a high level of international students. Since the school followed the English curriculum, my history classes were concerned with international events from an Anglophone perspective. The Spanish history that we were taught was within a “social science” class that was conducted in the Spanish language; though the republic, civil war, and regime were spoken about in class, we often learnt about them in the last few weeks of June which meant that little attention and importance was given to the subjects at hand.

The second important factor that allowed me to navigate smoothly both in the difficult, controversial topic and in the ethnographic field is my experience of growing up and living in two in post-war countries, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. Living in these environments where post-conflict memories, traumas and collective remembering and forgetting are ever-present allowed me to see the change in how people confront conflict-ridden pasts. In stark difference to the Spanish case, in both Kosovo and Bosnia, the idea of transitional justice has been present since the day that the conflict ended, and those considered victims are at the centre of conversations. Of course, at the time of the Spanish Civil War, there was no notion of such a concept, but precisely because of it, the Spanish case leads by example of what should not have been done.

Having grown up in countries plagued by international presence, where people on different sides are actively being encouraged to speak to one another, made me think of ‘my own’ country; Spain. A *democratic country*, member of the European Union, had a lot to work

on in terms of its own, transitional justice. In Bosnia and Herzegovina at the end of the war there were an estimated 31,500 missing persons, around 70% of these have been found. In Kosovo, in 1999 at the end of the war there was an estimated 4,400-4,500 missing persons, today 1,700 remain to be found. In Spain, due to the fact that the war was followed by a dictatorship and amount of time that has passed, it is harder to enumerate the bodies that are missing. However, in 2007 it was estimated that there are roughly 2,382 mass graves across Spain, with an estimated 45,000 still waiting to be exhumed (International Commission on Missing Persons, 2022).

4. Empirical Chapter

In the empiric section of my bachelor thesis, I will describe my process of semi-participant observation. I will start by describing the ethnographic setting of the site, firstly the geographic details of the Valley of Cuelgamuros, where the Valley of the Fallen is located. I will continue by describing the interior and exterior of the Crypt (Basilica), where my main research was conducted, and I will highlight the religious and political symbolism present in and outside of its structure. The final section of my empiric chapter will consist in the impressions of the people that I spoke to. I divided this section according to common themes that I elicited from the information attained during my semi-structured interviews with visitors of the site.

4.1 Ethnographic Setting

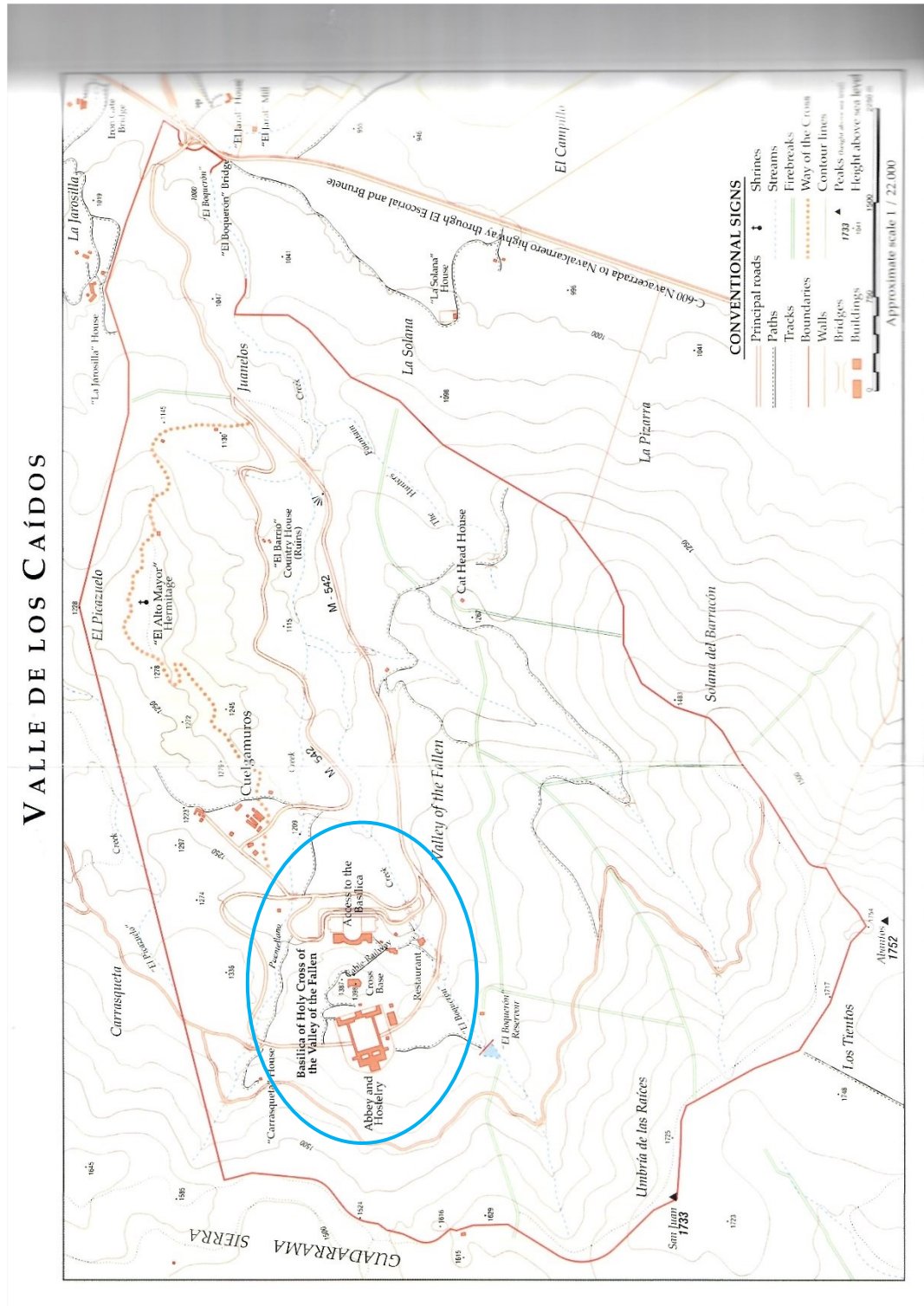
4.1.1 Geographic details of the Valley of Cuelgamuros

The *Valley of the Fallen* is located in the Valley of Cuelgamuros, on the south end of the Guadarrama mountain range, northwest of Madrid. Roughly around 58km from the city centre, the Valley of Cuelgamuros belongs to the municipality of El Escorial and stands 14km from the Royal Monastery located in the area. The monastery of El Escorial was built by King Philip II, at the end of the 16th century after Spanish troops beat French forces in the Battle of Saint Quentin, it is also the resting place of Spanish Monarchs. Many historians believe that in this sense, building the Valley of the Fallen in the Valley of Cuelgamuros was a strategic decision. This would cement the connection to imperial Spain both materially and metaphorically. The Valley of the Fallen has one entrance that stands on the M-572 road, accessible via the AP-6 and N-VI motorways. The Valley of Cuelgamuros is a mountainous region with altitudes ranging from 965mt to 1758mt above sea level, whose enclosure spans roughly 1,377 acres (El Mundo, 2018).

The entrance lies at the lower east-end of the complex, 6km downhill from its main architectural exhibits, the colossal Cross, Crypt (Basilica) and Abbey. Its main features, the Basilica / Crypt and Roman Cross, are located respectively, underneath and on top of what is known as Risco de la Nava (Cliff of the Nava), a natural granite rock formation 1,400mt high from which the Cross arises. The Valley of the Fallen complex could be divided into two sections, firstly the Basilica / Crypt and the Roman Cross, and secondly, roughly 2km further up the road, the Benedictine Abbey and Monastery and the School run by the order. These are both on opposing sides of the hill of Risco de la Nava and are internally connected by a series of underground tunnels. The images below will depict how the two sections are connected underground and how they are accessible to the public.

Figure 2

Source: Santa Cruz del Valle de los Caídos (Sancho, 1999)



Map of the Valley of Cuelgamuros. Blue circle added by me to show the area where the Basilica and Monastery are located

Figure 3

Source: Google Maps



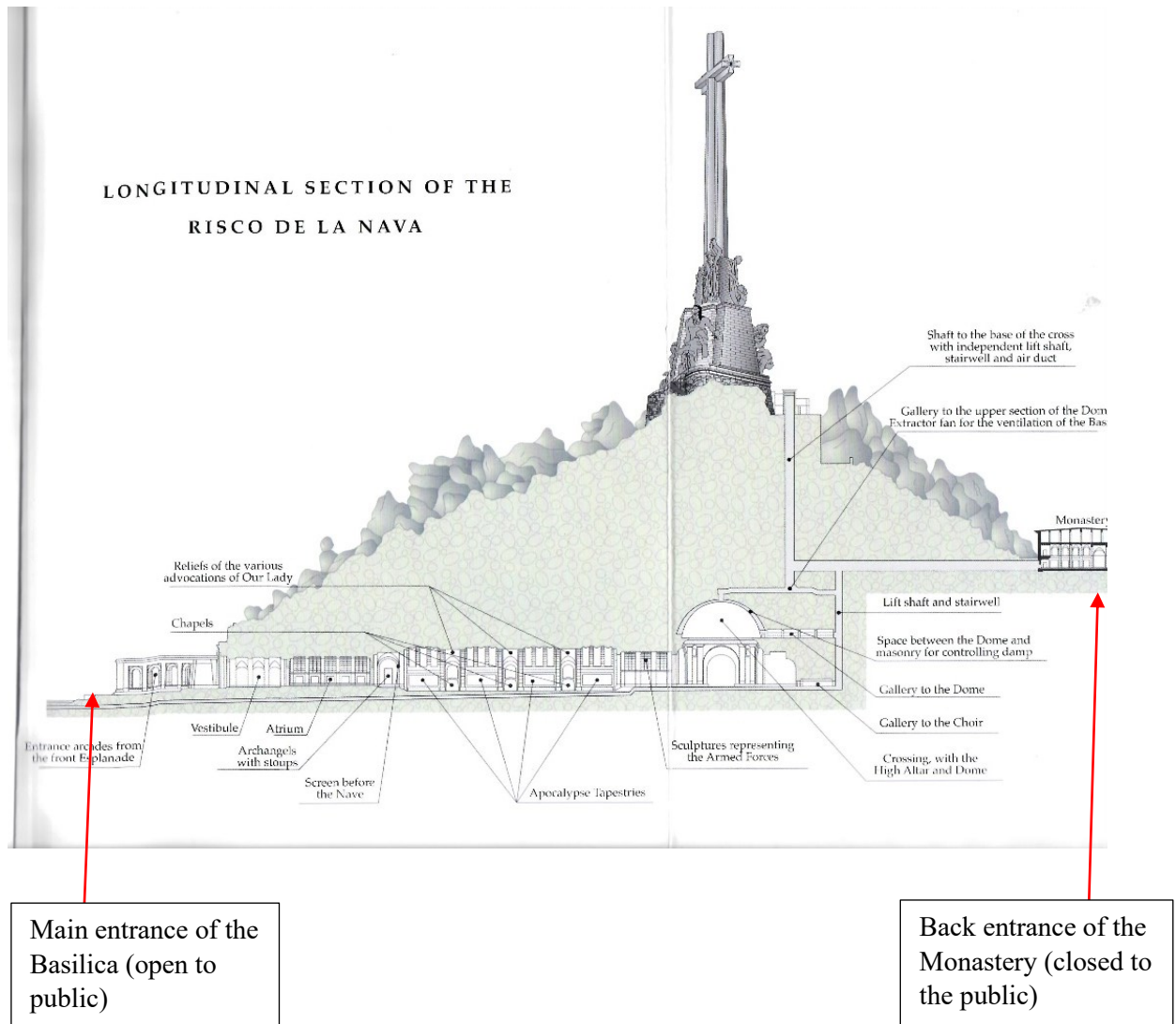
Screenshot from Google maps of the Valley of the Fallen complex from a Satellite perspective. Birdseye view of the architectural components of the complex of the Valley of the Fallen, public access

Figure 3 shows a satellite image of the complex; we can see through this image how the two sections are connected through a series of roads that lead from the entrance to the Abbey. Here it is important to note how the road that leads to the Abbey, also the area furthest from the main entrance, is called “Arriba España” (see Figure 3). This was one of the Francoist Regime’s slogans that could be roughly translated to “Up (lift) Spain”. Figure 3 shows how the

road's name changes from *Calle de Los Camareros*, Road of the Waiters, to *Calle de Arriba España* as one approaches the Abbey

Figure 4

Source: Santa Cruz del Valle de los Caídos (Sancho, 1999)



Digital Scan of the interior architectural structure of the monument

On top of the architectural attractions, the Valley of the Fallen also houses idyllic hiking routes, trails, and natural species and environment. One of the unfinished projects of the Valley of the Fallen complex was creating a whole route of the Via Crucis, or the Way of the Cross. A Christian pilgrimage symbolising the different stations of Christ's Road to death. Though there were plans to complete the route, of the fourteen stations, only the first, second, fifth, eighth and tenth were completed. These stations offer hidden views of the valley and the surrounding city of Madrid, its most notable attraction is that of the Altar Mayor or Main Altar.

Figure 5

Source: Author's own photographic field material



Image of a poster announcing this year's (2022) Via Crucis pilgrimage in the Valley of the Fallen. Poster was hung up at the entrance of the esplanade, close to the parking area.

Maintenance of the Valley of Cuelgamuros

The complex of Cuelgamuros is maintained by *Patrimonio Nacional* (National Patrimony / Heritage), a national institution whose responsibility is to administer properties “at the service of the crown”, such as monasteries, convents, or palaces (Sancho, 1999, p. 7). The basic admission fee is 9€; a reduced admission fee of 4€ applies to Spanish citizens between the ages of 5-16, people over 65 years old and students up to 25 years old. Finally, there is a free entrance to those under 5 years old, members of the international museum council, professors, people with accredited disabilities and members of “large families”, which was my case. Finally, the site is free and open on Wednesdays and Sundays from 15h to 19h for specific groups (*Valley of the Fallen*, 2022)

In the informational guide that I purchased about the Valley of the Fallen, it states that the properties handled by National Patrimony are of “symbolic importance” and as an institution, they have a “specific cultural duty”. Furthermore, according to the informational guide, the amalgamation of these properties, acquired over centuries by the Spanish Crown, have had a “decisive influence” on Spain’s Cultural Identity. It continues by stating the importance of these buildings in “fulfilling a cultural purpose” by helping Spanish citizens to understand their symbolic value and identify with them to, in turn, “feel heir to the immense historical and artistic treasure” of National Patrimony’s possessions (Sancho, 1999, p. 7). This shows the connection of both the site and the Regime to the larger narrative of imperial Spain.

The Valley of the Fallen complex receives around 1,836,325€ annually from the state for its maintenance, security and personnel. Of these 1,836,325€, around 340,000€ are directly assigned to the Benedictine Abbey, located within the complex, through their foundation *Santa Cruz del Valle de Los Caídos* (Holy Cross of the Valley of the Fallen) (El Mundo, 2018). On top of Patrimonio Nacional, there is a private foundation called *Asociacion para la Defensa del Valle de Los Caídos*, *ADVC* in short (Association in defence of the Valley of the Fallen), which defends the relevance and importance both historically and socially of the Valley of the Fallen for Spanish society. On their website, under the subheading “aims of the ADVC) they state that the Valley of the Fallen has been

“forgotten in terms of attention and maintenance by all the governments of democracy and today savagely attacked from the spheres of power, is a monument that we consider we have the obligation to defend on all the fronts that are open against it, and unfortunately, there are many” (ADVC, 2022)

Main research focus – Basilica / Crypt

My main focus during my research was the esplanade in front of the Crypt (Basilica) and the church's interior. The Crypt was officially inaugurated as a Basilica in 1960 by Pope John XXIII. I chose this as the primary research area due to the fact that it is the main “touristic” attraction of the complex, as well as because within the Crypt (Basilica) is where two prominent leaders of the Fascist movement are buried: Francisco Franco (until 2019), and Jose Antonio Primo de Rivera. Furthermore, despite the area of the Abbey, Monastery and School being open to the public, they are somewhat more “private” and run solely by the Benedictine order. Apart from the fact that my research was centred around the public’s perception of the monument, I did not want to frequent the Abbey more than needed as I was afraid that I would draw attention to myself if I went there every day of my visit. For this reason, I only went inside on the first and seventh days of my research.

There are several entrances to the esplanade of the Crypt (Basilica), from three different parking areas located on either side of the Crypt (Basilica). As one approaches the Crypt (Basilica) from any of the parking areas, they are immediately met with staircases leading to the esplanade. Access for wheelchairs is only available from one of the parking areas, through a path that leads from the parking, passed the non-functioning funicular into the arcade gallery. Once arrived to the esplanade, on one side, one can see a picturesque view of the mountain ranges that surround the city of Madrid. And on the other, one is met with two enormous Francoist coats of arms engrained onto either side of the Crypt (Basilica) entrance. Directly above it, looming over them, is the 150mt tall Cross that was erected at the peak of the Cliff of the Nava.

Figure 6

Source: Author's own photographic field material



Image shows the entrance of the Crypt (Basilica), Arcade Gallery and Cross, view from the esplanade.

Figure 7

Source: Author's own photographic field material



Partial view of the esplanade when exiting the Crypt (Basilica). Due to the size of the esplanade, it was impossible to capture it entirely.

Figure 8

Source: Author's own photographic field material



Francoist coat of arms engrained on the exterior of either side of the Crypt (Basilica).

Figure 9

Source: Author's own photographic field material



Sign Reads: Funicular Closed

4.1.2 Religious and Political Symbolism within the Basilica

Leading up to the Crypt (Basilica) from the lower part of the esplanade one is faced with ten 100-meter-wide stairs, each symbolising one of the ten commandments. As one approaches the main entrance, sitting right above the door, lies a twelve-meter long and five-meter high statue of a mother mourning her dead son, depicting the Piety. The ten-and-a-half-meter tall doors of the Basilica contain images of the fifteen mysteries of the rosary, the twelve disciples and the articles of the creed assigned to each disciple engrained underneath each. Finally, the trees planted around the esplanade of the Basilica are Cipres trees, which in Spain are explicitly used to adorn cemeteries. The intentions of connecting the Regime with wider imperial and catholic history in Spain are evident from the moment one enters the esplanade,

due to the large Francoist coat of arms. This emblem uses both the bow and arrows (also used by Falange) and eagle of San Juan that were representative of Catholic Monarchs Isabel and Fernando during their *Reconquista* against the moors in 1492.

Figure 10

Source: Author's own photographic field material



The sculpture of the Piety directly above the main entrance to the Crypt (Basilica).

Directly above the dome of the Basilica, on the peak of the Cliff of La Nava, lies the main attraction of this complex. The 150mt tall and 40mt wide Cross took over six years to build. At the base of the Cross, almost as if to be supporting the structure, are sculptures of the four evangelists, Matthew, Luke, Mark and John, which are all roughly 7mt tall. Between the arms of the Cross, directly above the evangelists, are four sculptures depicting the four Cardinal Virtues; Prudence, Justice, Fortitude and Temperance. Traditionally depicted as women in religious iconography, these virtues figure as men in this monument. Inside the cliff on which the Cross is placed, a shaft and lift leads from within the Basilica to the base of the structure, a feature only accessible to the Benedictine monks.

In her article, Jaqueline Sheean mentions that the regime Regime's intent in "emphasising hierarchy and verticality" is seen in this colossal monument. Sheean argues that this was a direct response to the culture of *el pueblo* or "the people"(Sheean, 2019, p. 13), that had been promoted during the Regime, as a way of bringing the Spanish population closer to the structures of power that surrounded them. Standing in opposing positions, it is clear that

the magnitude of the Valley of the Fallen complex was a calculated measure. When announcing the construction of the monument, Franco himself insisted on the fact that the Valley of the Fallen should represent:

“The magnitude of our Crusade, the heroic sacrifices entailed by our victory and the vital importance this epic feat for the future of Spain cannot be simply perpetuated by the simple monuments with which the outstanding events of our History and the glorious episodes of its sons are usually commemorated. It is necessary for the stones erected to possess the grandeur of ancient monuments, that they defy time and oblivion...” (Menasanch de Tobaruela et al., 2020, p. 642)

Figure 11

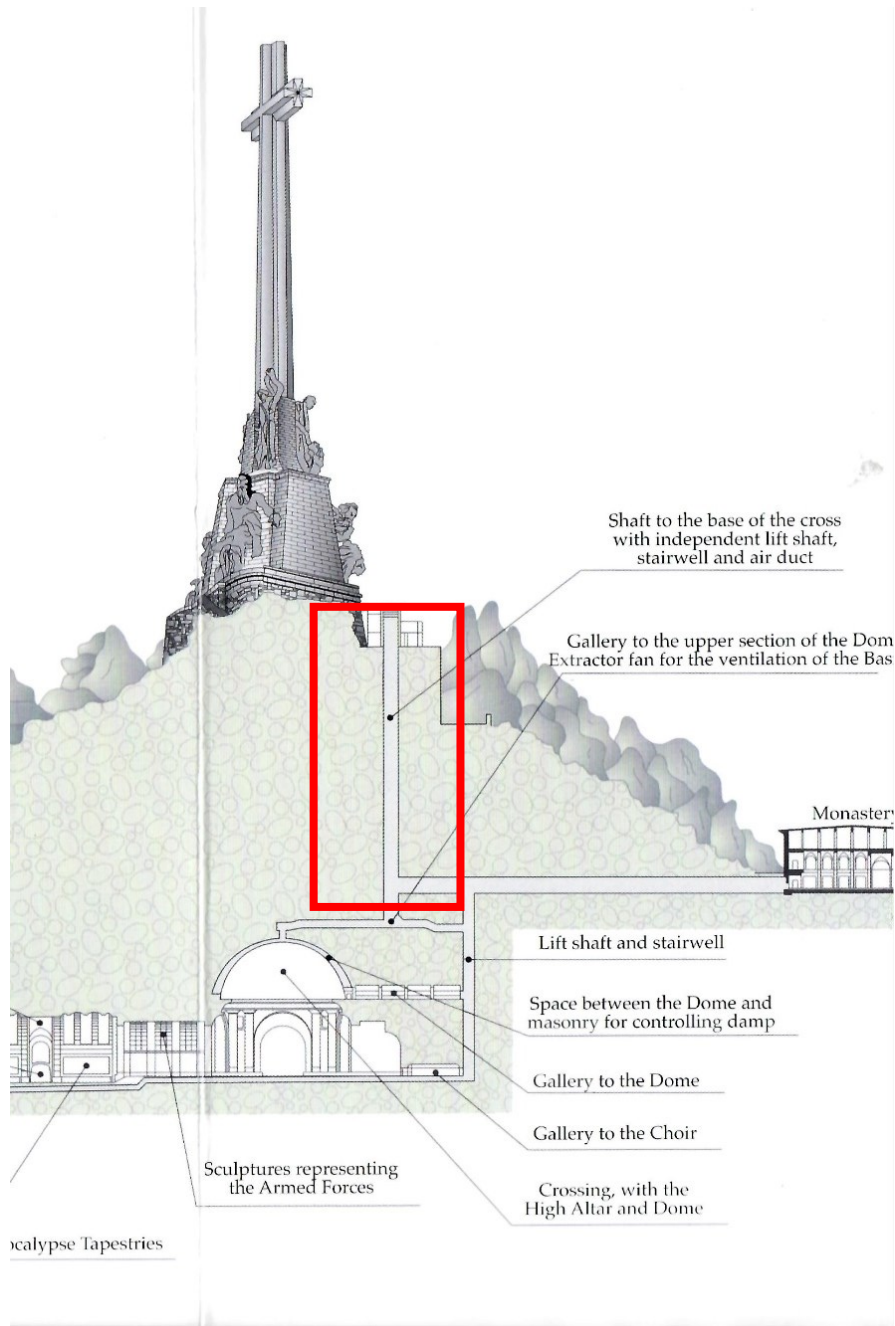
Source: Author’s own photographic field material



View from the road up to the Basilica, already within the complex of the Valley of the Fallen.

Figure 12

Source: Guide Santa Cruz del Valle de los Caídos (Sancho, 1999)



Scan of the architectural drawing taken from the official guidebook, shows how the Basilica, Cross and Monastery are internally connected.

Figure 13

Source: Author's own photographic field material



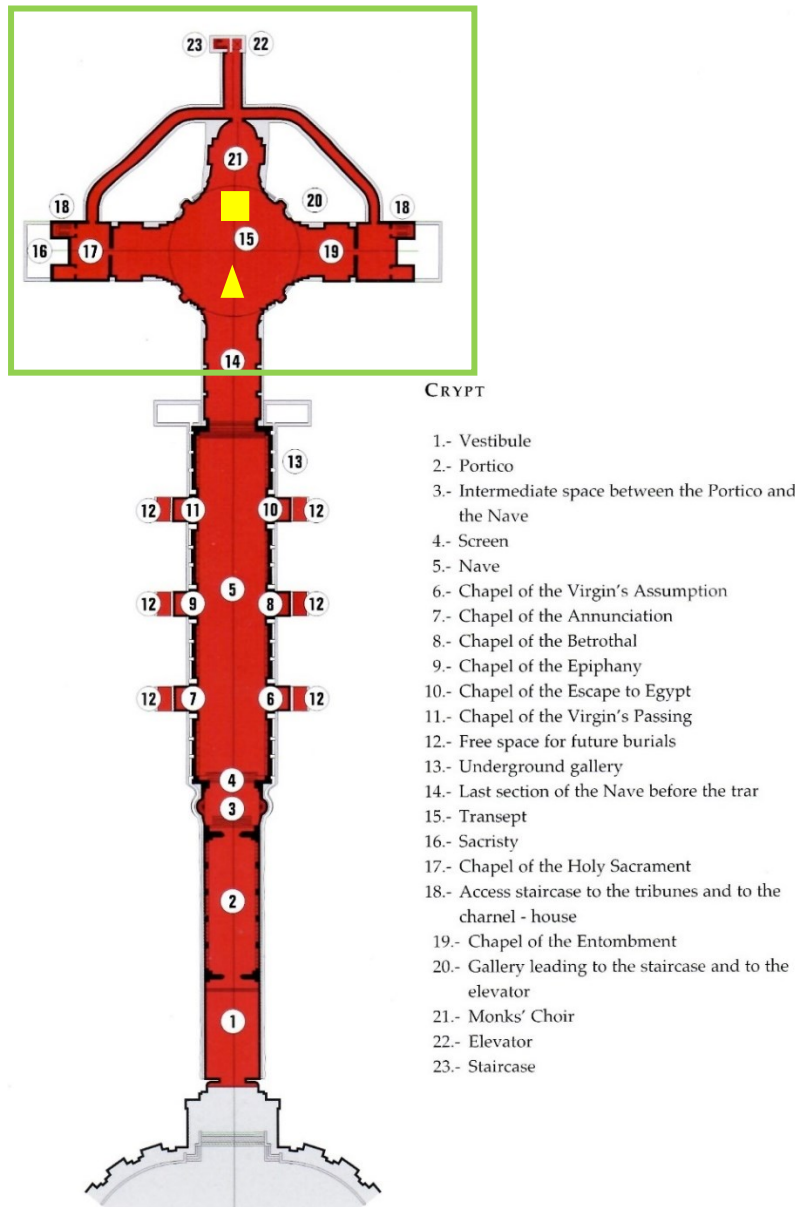
Image of the Cross from outside, notice how it is built as if to be emerging naturally from the rock formation. Exterior image of figure 12.

The interior of the Basilica reflects both the religious and political weight of this monument. In the form of a crypt, the shape of the Basilica reflects that of the Cross that lies above it. The Crypt is divided into two parts, the long hall (nave) that leads from the entrance until the designated seating areas and what could be considered the “arms” of the Cross, also known as the transept. The image below will help with visualising this description. In it we can see the length of the Crypt and the cross-like shape it is intended to represent. The main features are marked with a green square (added by me). I also added a yellow square to mark the former

grave of Francisco Franco and a yellow triangle to mark the grave of Jose Antonio Primo de Rivera, who is still buried in the Crypt.

Figure 14

Source: Guide Santa Cruz del Valle de los Caídos (Sancho, 1999)



Floor plan of the Basilica pointing out the different amenities found within its interior. Yellow triangle shows the place of Jose Antonio Primo de Rivera's grave, yellow square shows the former location of Francisco Franco's grave.

As one enters the Crypt (Basilica), they are faced with a security check to the right and a souvenir shop on their left. The security check is quite relaxed, but visitors are expected to pass their bags and personal belongings through a scanner, similar to those in airports, and pass through a metal detector. The security guards constantly remind visitors it is forbidden to take pictures inside the Crypt and that it is forbidden to enter beyond the church benches during mass. The Crypt entrance can be divided into three main sections; for the sake of clarity, I will be using the exact words used seen in Figure 14, scanned from the guidebook I purchased. The three sections are the vestibule, the atrium, and the screen (metal gate). Once in the atrium, directly after the security check, one is met with two archangels with their heads bowed down to their swords, and on the left wall (if facing the altar), the following message is presented.

“Francisco Franco, Caudillo of Spain, patron and founder, inaugurated this monument on 1st April 1959.

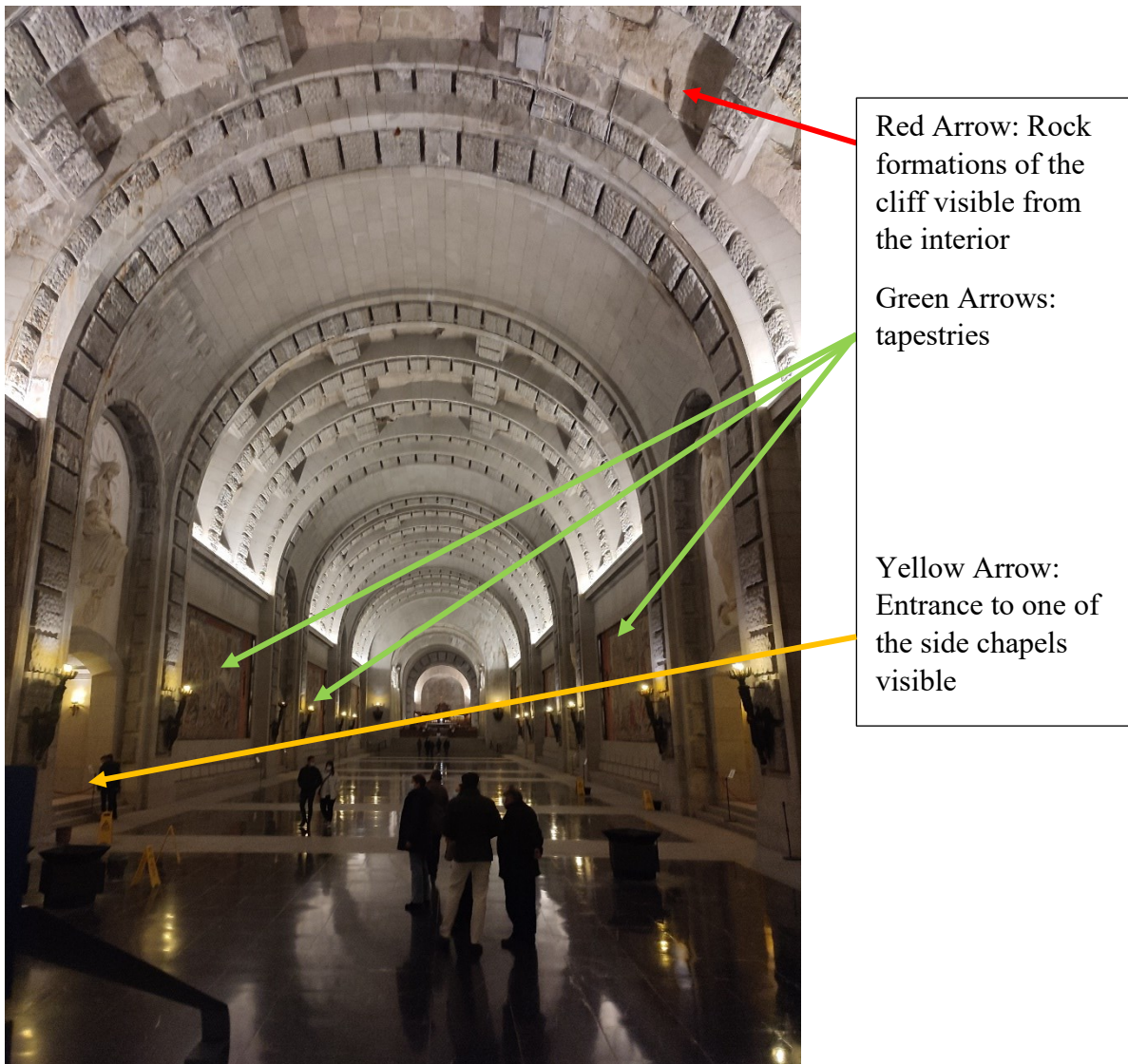
His Holiness John XXIII erected his church as a Basilica by brief of 7 April 1960 and it was consecrated on 4 June of the same year by Cardinal Gaetano Cicograni”

After passing the atrium, within what was referred to earlier as the screen, one is met with giant metal gates that separate the vestibule and the atrium from the rest of the interior. These gates are decorated with gold images of saints; once passed the stairs that lead out of the gate, one enters the nave of the Crypt. The interior of the Crypt is both physically and metaphorically cold. Located within a cave, in the ceiling, one can still see parts of the natural rock formations. The walls are made of the same giant grey granite slabs used in the exterior esplanade, and the floors are made of marble. Small lantern-like lights give indirect lighting along the sides of the walls. The light fixtures are made of dark solid metal and made to look as if two angels are holding them. Due to the position the two angels are in, their wings, along with the details in the light fixture, at first sight, make them look like eagles. Unfortunately, I was not able to take a picture of these.

The long nave leading to the altar is decorated top to bottom with religious iconography in the form of paintings, tapestry and sculptures engrained onto the rock. Of the many biblical figures and moments depicted in the pieces of art, it is essential to note the presence of the patron saints of the army, navy, and air force, as well as those of the Hispanic world and the patron saint of captives. As one walks closer towards the altar, there are eight enormous tapestries each depicting different scenes of the Apocalypse.

Figure 15

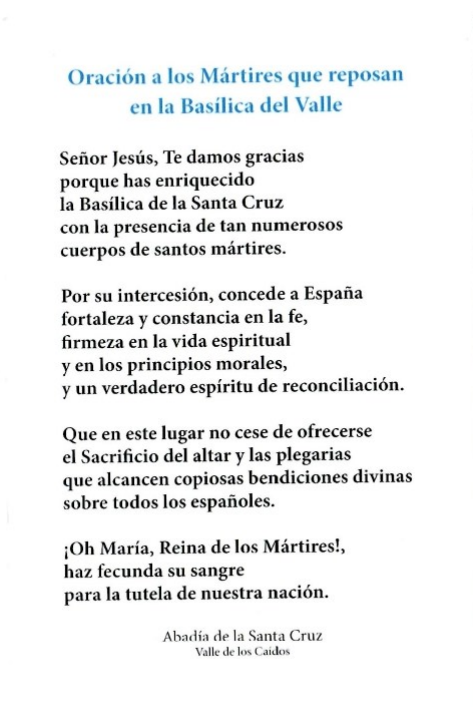
Source: Author's own photographic field material



After passing the tapestries, one is met with another set of stairs which lead to the focal point of the Crypt. They first encounter the church benches, all wooden and without lack of political iconography such as the Francoist eagles engrained into them. Right before the benches, there are two tables, on either aisle of the benches with two automatic “holy water dispensers”, similar to those used for disinfectant gel during the covid19 pandemic, as well as free ‘souvenirs’, shown below.

Figure 16

Source: Author's own field material



Scan of the 'souvenir', taken from the Basilica. Right image of in the altar of the Basilica, left prayer to the martyrs. The written text is translated as follows:

Prayer to the Martyrs who rest in the Basilica of the Valley

Lord Jesus, we thank You that You have enriched the Basilica of the Holy Cross with the presence of so many bodies of holy martyrs.

Through their intercession, grant to Spain strength and constancy in the faith, firmness in spiritual life and moral principles, and a true spirit of reconciliation.

May this place never cease to offer the Sacrifice of the altar and the prayers that you may obtain copious divine blessings on all Spaniards.

O Mary, Queen of Martyrs, make their blood fruitful for the protection of our nation.

Abbey of the Holy Cross

Valley of the Fallen

Once passed the benches before reaching the altar, you are met with the grave of Jose Antonio Primo de Rivera, founder of Falange, every day that I visited, there were flowers on the grave. Placed directly in front of the altar, Primo de Rivera's grave is significantly different from those of the other “fallen” buried within the Crypt. Located directly behind this, between the altar and the boys’ choir, is where Francisco Franco was buried until the 24th of October 2019. This place no longer holds the remains of the dictator’s body, or anything that would refer to him, but the exact location of the former grave is visible due to the new granite slabs that were placed above where his grave formerly stood. This meant that for forty years, Francisco Franco, dictator of Spain from 1939 to 1975, was buried behind the main altar of the church. In the words of Francisco Ferrándiz, forensic anthropologist and expert in the Valley of the Fallen; “Buried in full dress uniform right behind the main altar, he was set in a heroic funerary axis with Primo de Rivera’s tomb” (Ferrándiz, 2022, p. 228)

At the end of Basilica lies the boys’ choir, where the children that attend the school run by the Benedictine order sing the mass. This area consists of wooden benches on the left and right, separated in the middle by a large door. The images carved on the backrest of the benches depict different scenes from the crusades. Here once again, it is clear how Franco’s intention of creating a new national identity based on Spain's imperial history was materialised in the construction of this monument. The Regime tried to equate the nationalist victory against “communism” to the glorious crusades and “expulsion of moors” from the Iberian Peninsula. Through this, they would be able to align themselves with the figures of Isabel and Fernando, Catholic Monarchs of Spain and “spiritual reservoirs of the western world” (Ferrándiz, 2022, p. 223). Entrance to the boys’ choir is prohibited and guarded by a metal gate, similar to the one between the atrium and the interior entrance. The door that separates the benches in the middle leads to the tunnels and back entrance of the monastery, described at the beginning of this section.

Figure 17

Source: Author's own photographic field material



Image of the grave of Jose Antonio Primo de Rivera, located directly in front of the altar. Notice the bouquet of flowers places on in.

Directly above the altar, if one looks up towards the dome of the Crypt, they will see a detailed mosaic painting. The painting can be partitioned into four main sections: the saints, the fallen fighters, the Falangist and Carlist militias, and a battlefield. The latter depicting a tank pointing at observers with the muzzle directed towards them, “encapsulates the lingering threat of Franco’s military rule” (Menasanch de Tobaruela et al., 2020, p. 657). Of those portrayed in the painting, Franco and Jose Antonio Primo de Rivera are notably worth

mentioning, as well as the Falangist and Imperial flags used by the Falangist and Carlist fighters during the civil war. Both Franco and Primo de Rivera and the Falangist and Carlist flags are outlined with a green square in figure 18.

Figure 18

Source: Santa Cruz Valle de los Caídos (Sancho, 1999, p. 40).



Image scanned from the official guidebook.

On either side of the transept, two small chapels are open to the public and with interior access to the monastery through the previously mentioned tunnels. When facing the altar, on one's left stands the Chapel of the Holy Sacrament, and on the right, the chapel of the Entombment, both of these are adorned with an altar and, most importantly, above the doors that lead to the interior tunnels, there is a message that reads "*Caídos por Dios y por España, 1936-1939, RIP*" (Fallen for God and for Spain, 1939-1939, RIP). Here we can see the true

intention of the monument despite efforts to delegitimise these claims, the “fallen for God” referred to those who fought on the nationalist side.

Figure 19

Source: Author’s own photographic field material



Image from the inside of the Chapel of the Holy Sacrament, notice the sign above the door “*caídos por dios y por España 1936-1939 RIP*” (Fallen for God and for Spain 1936-1939 RIP)

4.1.3 Valley of the Fallen as the largest mass grave in Spain

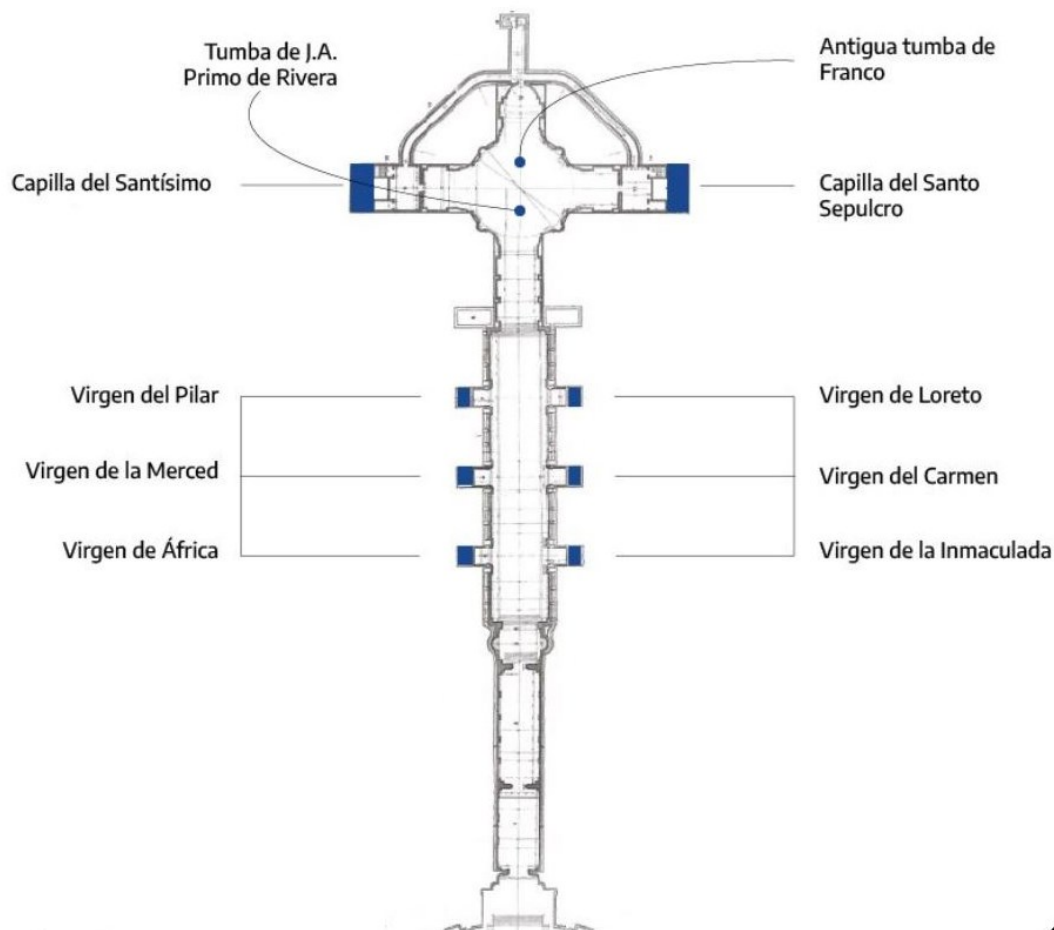
As mentioned in the introduction of this paper, the Valley of the Fallen is the largest mass grave known to this day in Spain. Between the years 1959 and 1983, over 33,000 bodies were transferred and transported from different parts of Spain for the monument dedicated to the *fallen* to house the bodies of those who died in battle. Of these, 12,410 remain unidentified, highlighting a more significant issue in Spain's contemporary democratic system, the amount of unexhumed mass graves. These unidentified bodies are thought to be of people who fought against the Regime and whose remains were transported from across Spain without the consent or knowledge of their family members (del Moral Salmoral, 2020, p. 15).

Entrenched within the architectural structure of the Crypt, within boxes often holding more than one body, lie the remains of those who fought during the civil war and were victims of the first repressive years of the Regime. The bodies transferred from different mass graves were mainly of republican fighters that had remained unexhumed until that point and were transferred without the knowledge or consent of their family members (Sheean, 2019, p. 25). The bodies of the nationalist side were exhumed after being inhumed at the end of the war and given a dignified burial as part of the processes of martyrisation of these men. Furthermore, there was a process by which there would be a culture of worship dedicated to the Fallen of the nationalist side (Bernecker, 2011, p. 67). This active worship to those who fell for God and Spain is maintained to this day by the Benedictine monks living in the complex.

These bodies are located both in the side chapels of the nave and within the two main chapels at the church's transept, the Chapel of the Holy Sacrament, and the Chapel of Entombment. Due to the way in which the bodies were transferred and placed within the coffin-like boxes, the identification processes of the bodies remain a difficult task. Due to the fact that there is severe water damage within the Crypt, many of the boxes have become one with the bodies lying within them, setting obstacles in the much-needed path of forensic work. After several mass graves were exhumed at the start of the 21st century, became known that some of the bodies within the crypts were victims of the Regime, and not of people who died in combat (Menasanch de Tobaruela et al., 2020, p. 654). There is of course, like with the republican victims of the war, no mention at all about the fact that within the structure of the church, lie the bodies of people who were terrorised and executed during the Francoist Regime.

Figure 20

Source: El Diario.es “*Así es la mayor fosa común de España: más de 33.000 restos humanos en ocho capillas del Valle de los Caídos*”. (Velasco & Álvarez, 2021)



Locations of the over 33,000 bodies buried within the structure of the Crypt

As mentioned earlier, these bodies were transferred without the knowledge or consent of the family members, meaning that many families might not even be aware of the fact that their relative's body lies within the crypts of the Valley of the Fallen. The stark difference between the graves of these bodies and those of Primo de Rivera and previously Franco, are telling of the intentions behind the monument itself. It not only solidifies the invisibility of the republican struggle by literally closing them off from the public but also raises questions about the different efforts made since the dictator's death, to honour and commemorate those who fought against fascism.

4.2 Visitor's Impressions

In this subsection of my analytical chapter, I will share the responses of my informants regarding the meanings that they ascribe to the Valley of the Fallen. I have divided it into five thematically organised sub-sections based on the answers people gave me. While looking over my field notes, I realised that many of my informants ascribed similar meanings to the monument; in this sense I have organised the interpretations and meanings in certain typology I discuss below.

4.2.1 A historical site like anyother

During the eight days that I visited the site, I spoke to a range of people of different ages, social backgrounds, and regions of Spain, as well as a few international visitors. Of course, I intended to see how the Spanish public perceived the Valley of the Fallen and what meaning they assigned to it. Overwhelmingly, when answering my questions, most of the people that I spoke to believed that it represented a part of Spanish history that, regardless of the controversy, was worthy of preserving and remembering. As I understood, many people assigned it a historical meaning that, like any other period of history, could be up for debate but in their eyes, required little attention as it is something that remains part of our past. Like other parts of history, to many, the Francoist Regime and the atrocities it perpetrated should “*not be looked at through the eyes of today*”.

Often repeating the discourse of the conservative spheres in Spanish politics, many of the people that saw the Valley of the Fallen as a purely historical and a – political site also repeated the fact that “*the dead should be left to rest, and this government [currently a coalition left-wing parties] should stop digging up the past and start focusing what **really** matters*”. The most prominent voices that repeat these claims in the political sphere in Spain are the traditional (and more moderate) conservative party PP, (established by ministers of Franco, formerly known as Alianza Popular) and secondly the newly established neo-fascist party, VOX (Ferrándiz, 2022, p. 219). This shows us how both the Valley of the Fallen, and the period of history it is associated with, remain a largely taboo topic in current-day Spain, as most people refuse to even engage with it and insist on ‘moving forward’, keeping in line with the narrative promoted by the transition (Ferrándiz, 2022, p. 213).

One of the most surprising encounters that I had in the Valley of the Fallen was with a group of 6 hikers, roughly around 25-35 years old. They were standing on the esplanade of the Basilica taking a selfie, so I approached them and asked them if they wanted me to take a

picture of them; making small talk, I asked them what they thought about the monument. A few of them laughed nervously and stated that they had come on a hiking route and that it was their first time visiting for all except one. The woman who had had the idea of taking her friends to the Valley of the Fallen quickly interjected and stated that she “knew” what I was referring to when asking the question. She noted that it was the second time she had been and that the first time she visited, she was also reluctant to hike around the area because of the obvious connotations that the complex had. After stating that, she went back to my question and very insistently said,

“look, I’m not left-wing or right-wing, this is part of history, like any other, and I don’t know exactly what to think about it, but if there’s one thing I know is that it should not be toppled”.

I thought it was particularly striking that what she knew for sure was that the monument should remain intact, rather than not knowing what to think about the Regime itself. On my first day at the Valley of the Fallen, I overheard another 2 people, from different groups, that also referred to Franco as a person that was not “right wing or left wing”. This resonated with me, and it made me wonder why people still think of Franco as an a- political figure. This represents a part of the Spanish population that understands that there is no place to openly praise a fascist regime in the 21st century but because the regime’s members were never publicly held accountable, find it difficult to express their rejection towards it. The way in which the Spanish transition into democracy happened, embodied in the Law of Amnesty, has allowed for the overarching narrative regarding Spanish history of the 20th to be largely based on actively refusing to speak about the Regime at any level and has resulted in a lack of proper understanding about why the civil war began, and what the regime meant for those who opposed it.

4.2.2 A site to learn what should not be repeated

On the opposite side of the coin lie those who believe the Valley of the Fallen to be the embodiment of the Regime and everything that it was responsible for, from the military coup to Spain’s transition into a parliamentary Monarchy. Although I did not encounter many of these people, two groups (four people) stood out to me in particular. The first group was a father and his 15-year-old son, I approached them as they were leaving, and I was “entering” the esplanade. At first, the father seemed a little reluctant to speak much about his impressions but quickly opened up, though, despite this our conversation was brief due to the cold weather.

When I asked him what he thought of the place, he answered very firmly, *“to show my son the part of our history that should never be repeated”*.

He went on to say that he also wanted to show his son the political intentions that are often ‘hidden’ within architecture and mentioned the clear inspirations of Nazi architecture (Bernecker, 2011, p. 68) in the way that the place *“was intended to be seen, both from afar [because of the cross] but also on television”*. We can see here the idea presented by Sheean (2019) in my theoretical chapter regarding a monument’s purpose being to *“compel us to remember”* (Sheean, 2019, p. 12). He thought it was important to show his son how such an enormous esplanade could be made to look even more extensive and more impressive *“from certain camera angles”* and that there were clear intentions of using the site for *“propagandistic”* purposes. The man finished by expressing the fact that, in general, architectural structures such as the complex of the Valley were also made with the intention of *“making people feel small...not allowing them to forget who is in power”*.

While his father spoke, the son nodded his head as if in agreement with what his father was saying; I asked him what he thought and why he had wanted to come to the Valley of the Fallen. He mentioned that he was learning about the civil war and the Regime in school but that *“they [the school] don’t really go in-depth about this time period, the way we do for others”*. He stated that most of the information he knew both about why the civil war had started and about the Regime was thanks to his father and that he *“wished”* that the period was taught in a more *“interesting”* way at school. He finished off by saying that *“it is often up to the individual teacher to decide how [in depth] they want to teach”* and that this often resulted in teachers giving a generalised overview because they themselves *“didn’t want to put their hands in the fire”*. This last statement left me thinking about the possible pressures that teachers face still today when wanting to engage with this period in a didactic manner.

Here we can see how the father is exercising a form of communicative memory, by personally showing and explaining to his son what the Valley of the Fallen meant to him, and maybe his family. Due to the lack of democratic cultural memory in Spain, much of what is known now about the victims of the Regime comes from oral sources from those who lived the war or the regime first hand, reflecting the silencing process that was imposed during the transition into democracy (Escudero, 2014, p. 137). The laws imposed from above in an attempt to *“democratise”* the memory culture in Spain were only possible due to the work done from

below, on the part of individuals, family members of victims and different associations dedicated to serving these groups justice (Messenger, 2017, p. 54).

The other group were two men, both seemed to be in their early 30s, one who was an architect by profession self-defined “Spanish”, and the other did not mention his profession but did say that he had studied theology in university and emphasised the fact that he was “*not Spanish*”. However, he spoke the language and knew about the history of both the monument and the country. They both said that due to their respective interests, i.e., architecture and theology, the Valley of the Fallen was a particularly unique and interesting site, but they were openly against the fact that it remains a touristic site “*without any context*”. These two people in part due to their age, represent a part of Spanish society that has accepted the transformation of the figure of Franco into one of a “bloody war perpetrator” (Ferrándiz, 2022, p. 213).

The theologian pointed out that despite being an incredibly rich religious site, the church itself was “*very dark both physically and metaphorically because of the time when it was built*”. Building on this point, the architect believed that it was “*shameful*” that there had been no progress on the identification and exhumation process of the bodies beneath the Basilica’s structure. He proceeded to say that “*although they [the government] exhumed Franco [from the valley], they haven’t exhumed Francoism [from the valley]*” while pointing at the Francoist coat of arms. He finished by saying that the current government should take the “*resignification seriously*” and that, in his eyes, the best thing that could be done with the space would be to “*create a historical archive about the civil war and the regime, where professionals of all disciplines can have unlimited access to the documents and artefacts of the time*”.

4.2.3 A site to be proud of

Though I was somewhat pleasantly surprised not to have encountered as many regimes sympathisers as I thought I would, I believe it would have been impossible to have spent eight days there without coming across some of these people. Before I continue, I think it is important to state there were certain groups, particularly of men that I did not approach in part due to fear about their reaction to my questions, especially in the moments where there were not large groups of people, i.e., the only visitors visible at the time on the esplanade were me and them.

The first person who openly praised the Regime to me was a young man, probably in his late 20s or early 30s, who was there with a group of his friends, a mix of males and females. He proudly stated that he couldn’t count how many times he had been but was there on that day to show “*this beauty*” to his friends who had never been. When I asked them as a group

what they thought of the place, a few of them sighed and laughed nervously, and one woman openly said, *“I’m against Franco; I wouldn’t have come if he wasn’t my friend [pointing to the guy that had brought her]”*, to which he laughed and said, *“the reason I’m here is because within that church [pointing] lies the last martyr of our crusade”* (referring to Jose Antonio Primo de Rivera) to which in shock, the woman that had previously said she was against Franco said *“Oh god, here he goes again...how can you openly say that, she’s [pointing at me] going to think you’re being serious”*, to which he replied, *“well I am being serious”*.

I reiterated that it was not a problem, that there wasn’t a right or a specific answer I was looking for, and that I was genuinely interested in hearing his perspective. He continued by saying that it was a *“disgrace that Franco had been removed”* because he had been a man whose sole goal was to *“improve Spain after a tragic civil war”* and that he had achieved it. He also felt it necessary to tell me that *“you know that there are people from all sides of the war buried here”* and that Franco had built it for *“all of us”*.

This last comment is a clear representation of the reconciliatory narrative that the Regime tried to impose by the time it was opened to the public, in the stages when the Regime was opening its doors internationally speaking. It is also representative of the smear campaign initiated by Franco against the Republican struggle by considering Franco’s rule as somehow necessary for the continuation and propagation of Catholic Spain. This is best seen in the man’s use of the worse *“crusade”*, which was the word coined by the Regime to describe the war during its first and most repressive stages (Bernecker, 2011, p. 65)

The last day I visited the complex was Sunday, April 3rd. The weather was much better than it had been the previous seven days, which meant that the esplanade of the Basilica was busier than I had seen it until then. Inside the Crypt, there were more flowers on Primo de Rivera’s grave than the usual single bouquet, and people had placed ribbons with the Spanish flag on it. While I was walking around, trying to listen to people’s conversations and observing those who entered, two young boys caught my eye. Dressed in military green winter coats, these boys, who looked between the ages of 20-25, knelt on Primo de Rivera’s grave, said a prayer, kissed the grave and then proceeded to stand up, raising their right hand in the form of a fascist (roman) salute.

The guards that work in the Crypt to ensure that no one takes pictures or that the grave is not vandalised did not seem surprised at what had just happened. The people within the Crypt continued casually to look at the different religious representations surrounding them. This

might speak largely of both the kind of people that visit the monument and also the general sense of indifference that many Spanish people face in regard to the open praising of a fascist dictator, but also of the symbols and rituals that are connected to it. No one except the previously mentioned architect thought it was a problem that there were two enormous Francoist coat of arms engrained on either side of the exterior of the Crypt.

Although I did not speak to these boys because I did not want to attract attention to myself or start a discussion within the Basilica of which I would have been clearly, outnumbered, I decided to discretely follow them as they walked around in hopes of catching part of their conversations. Seemingly looking up at the mural, I overheard them speaking to an elderly man about the current political climate in Spain. From what I could gather, they did not seem to know each other before this encounter, as the boys used the formal tense of “usted” while referring to the elderly man and his wife. This elderly man was insisting on the fact that the traditional conservative party in Spain, Partido Popular, were the “*derechita cobarde*” or “*coward right wing*”, a term coined and promoted by the neo-fascist party that entered the Spanish parliament in 2019, previously mentioned, VOX.

Due to the fact that I was overhearing the conversation, I don’t know why or how they reached this topic, but they continued discussing the fact that VOX was the only party that would be able to put a stop to “*the reds [socialists] being in power*”. This conversation is very much a product of the Francosist discourse promoted by the Regime and rarely condemned by in political representatives in the present. To this day, the Partido Popular, the more moderate and traditional conservative party, refuses to denounce the coup d’état of 1936 as such (Bernecker, 2011, p. 80). Moreover, during their almost eight years in power from 2011-to 2018, its leader and prime minister of Spain proudly boasted about the fact that they allocated the sum of 0euros to funding the processes promoted in the memory law of 2007 (Ferrándiz, 2022, p. 220). This constant refusal to correct facts leads to the idea presented by Roediger et al. that errors of omission will not be corrected if there are members of the public sphere that actively promote erroneous information (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 163).

The final person that stood out to me because of her open appraisal of both Franco and his Regime was a woman I met on my last day in the Valley of the Fallen, literally minutes before I left. When I asked about her thoughts on the site, she clearly and openly stated, “*this place is a place of peace, it represents it, and when you’re here, you feel at peace, at least I do. Anytime I feel like I’m lacking in faith, I come here, and I immediately feel better*”. She

asked me why I was asking, and I had to tell her that I was working on my final project for university, her friend standing next to her quickly reacted and said, “*she also did her final project on the valley!*”. Immediately intrigued, I asked her if she did not mind telling me what exactly the project was, a question she had no worries about answering.

This woman had studied fashion, and her final project was a dress whose design was “*inspired by the basilica but also by the valley as a whole*”. Genuinely shocked and taken back, she could see my somewhat confused facial reaction and quickly continued, “*the thing is that my brothers went to this school [the one run by the Benedictine monks], so I spent a lot of time here growing up when I would visit them [the children board at the school]*. She went on to say that the monks and their complex had been severely mistreated and abandoned by different Spanish governments and that “*it all started with Zapatero*” (socialist president of Spain from 2004-2011, under which the first law of historical memory was passed (Law of Historical Memory, 2007). She continued by saying that it was his fault that people thought Franco was a bad person when in her eyes, he had helped Spain and was “*a good person*”.

Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero is often credited with being the first one that put an end to the peace and reconciliation that was brought about during the transition. Before crediting him or his government with all the work, I think it is important to say that pressures from within civil society were growing on the socialist government to pass a law that would ensure the removal of Francoist signage and symbols from the Spanish public space as well as some sort of recognition of what had actually happened. So much of the credit should really be given to those associations that, for decades after Spain transitioned into democracy, continued their calls for justice and the right to know where their family members were buried.

This woman seems to represent the part of Spanish society that, although seemingly harmless, pose a constant threat to the nature of the Spanish democracy. Often best reflected in the political party VOX, many people like this woman still believe that Franco and his national Catholicist regime were indeed the ‘saviours’ of Spain. Needless to say, this person was a particular case due to her personal and familial connections to the Valley, she seemed to be a product of the later Francoist discourse. A discourse that positioned Franco that moved away from portraying Franco as a successful army general to one that would see him as a “peacemaker” (Ferrándiz, 2022, p. 212). A peacemaker that was able to reconcile both sides of the civil war and who personally commissioned a monument in memory of them *all*.

4.2.4 A site of pain

For the most part, when people spoke of it as a place full of sadness and pain, they were not only referring to the fact that it was a grave for those who had died during the civil war but mainly because they knew it had been built by political prisoners. The most conservative spheres of Spanish society often try to see this through rose-tinted glasses by stating that they worked in the Valley in exchange for a reduction in their wages. Though this is true, it by no means justifies the fact that these people were imprisoned for political purposes and were forced to work in inhuman conditions. Even the people I spoke to who believed the site should “not be touched” emphasised the pain and struggle it represented for many Spanish families. A few of them emphasised that it is the kind of pain that should never be repeated in the country.

One lady became visibly emotional when speaking of the site as one that evokes pain and sadness. She mentioned the fact that within the Crypt, it is hard to imagine why anyone would wage a war and mentioned the current invasion of Ukraine. I would say that many of the people I spoke to manifested the same emotional ambiguousness; many people were vague when asked about the site, but even when answering shortly, many of them reiterated the words “pain” and “sadness”. I think that for most people in Spain today, this is a genuine feeling, though due to the culture of taboo and forget that surrounds the time period, people are not actively encouraged to engage with this time period, which in turn feeds into its neglect, both at the individual and governmental level.

4.2.5 Final Observations at the Valley of the Fallen

When I attended the mass on Friday the first of April, I noticed that everyone went into confession before it started and that there were three people, two elderly men and a middle-aged woman I had seen previously. Around 15 people were attending the mass, two groups of tourists, one Mexican family of four and the other two middle-aged couples who seemed to be hiking by the way they were dressed. The rest of the people there were middle-aged men and women, as well as a few young people who seemed to be accompanying their parents. The mass was different from other mass that I have been to because it was sung, typical of Benedictine churches.

The mass itself was sung by the priests that led the church; there were six members of the clergy? conducting the mass, they mentioned that it was the anniversary of the opening of the Valley of the Fallen and asked for a prayer for “*those catholic souls who had died during the crusade, for God and for the reconciliatory spirit of Spain*”. What struck me the most was

the fact that during the service, right before the part of the mass in which attendants take the body of Christ – the holy communion, all of the lights of the Basilica were turned off, except those that lit up the crucifix in the centre of the altar. The mass was described by Ferrándiz (2022) as “so conservative that it is almost like being transported back to the heyday of national Catholicism” (Ferrándiz, 2022, p. 230).

This experience was to say the least, unsettling; the Basilica itself is very cold and holds an eerie feeling about it. It is so large that the echo of the voices is inevitable; hearing the priest’s voice repeat itself and slowly fading out whilst only the crucifix was lit up was spine-chilling, to say the least. Once over, people started standing up to get in line to take the mass; the final thing that stood out to me was the fact that all the attendees, except those with visible physical impairments such as a walking stick or extremely old age, kneeled to the monks and took the body of Christ. Despite having been to different church services throughout my life with my devout Catholic grandmother, I had never seen people kneeling down before the priests to take the body of Christ. Many of the visitors were ‘well dressed’ and looked to be of middle to upper-middle-class social backgrounds.

Figure 21

Source: “Ritual violence and rituals of violence of the Franco regime between 1939 and 2019: the Valle de los Caídos from a historical, archaeological, and forensic perspective.” (Menasanch de Tobaruela et al., 2020, p. 658)



Image screen shotted from article written by Mensanch de Tobaruela (2020) et.al, depicting the lit-up crucifix during the mass when all other lights have been turned off.

The few foreign tourists that I spoke to could be divided into two different groups, those who were aware of the historical and political connotations of the monument and those who were generally unaware and had come as part of an organised tour or in the case of a group of French Erasmus students, because they had heard about it from people in their class. Of the latter, two large groups of US Americans had come as part of an organised trip from whom I spoke with three people. They were shocked to know that such a monument could exist after being told that Franco was a dictator.

Of the former, one, in particular, stood out to me, and that was the response of a French couple in their mid-20s. They told me that they had learned about it in high school during their Spanish language classes, in which they also learned the history of Spain. They told me about how they had been told that *“it was commissioned by Franco and that it is also a mass grave and that it had been built with republican prisoners”*.

During my time there, I did not see as many people with flags as I thought; I only saw two individuals from two different groups taking pictures wrapped around the flag or holding it. I did hear one person over looking at one of the people with a flag saying, “Oh, I should’ve brought my flag”, as if in disappointment. I did, however, notice that most of the cars driving to and from the complex had stickers of the Spanish flags on the back of them or ribbons of the Spanish flag hanging from their rear-view mirror inside their car. Many of the vehicles in the parking lot were high-end brands such as Mercedes, BMW or Audi, but there was also a range of different lower-end brands, vans, and motorcycles parked in the area.

When researching further about the site, I was told on site, and at the tourist office in El Escorial (the municipality that the complex belongs to) that there are no official guides for the Valley of the Fallen, as opposed to other sites managed by Patrimonio Nacional. The public transportation to the site is not frequent, which makes me think that despite it being part of the "national heritage" sites of Spain, it is definitely not actively promoted and in the areas that it is, the discourse around it has changed significantly. Speaking to a worker at the tourist office in El Escorial, I was told that in recent years, new pamphlets have been created describing the fact that it was commissioned by a dictator to honour his dead, but that they still fail to mention the fact that political prisoners worked on the site. Nevertheless, this is a sign of a change in the discourse regarding the socio-historic context of when the site was commissioned and built.

Finally, I think what most caught my attention throughout my fieldwork was the condition the entire complex was in. Due to its controversy (I think), different governments

have neglected it, and this has resulted in several structural issues. The Basilica has at least seven leaks in its roof, along with clear signs of humidity, and the surrounding amenities (Cafe and funicular tram) have been closed due to lack of investment. Furthermore, hiking up to the Cross itself has been prohibited due to the bad condition it is in and the fear of concrete falling onto the visitors. It is still possible to access, but the national heritage foundation that is in charge of maintaining the complex has made clear that it will not be responsible for any possible incidents that may occur. A few of the people that I spoke to mentioned their concern regarding the condition that the complex was in (in general), they described it as a “shame” that nothing was being done about it.

This “abandonment” of the complex is best seen in the state of the (few) informational signs that are places around the Valley. These were visibly old and had been damaged over time and with the weather, moreover the only information they displayed were opening and daily mass hours, brief architectural of the structures and predominantly focuses on the natural environment, wildlife and species present in the Valley. There was no mention of the civil war, or the regime, or the fact that the Valley of the Fallen had in part, been built by political prisoners. There were no plaques that made any reference to those fallen on the Republican side of the war or anything that would make reference to the terror the regime’s opponents faced in the years when the Valley of the Fallen was built.

This all, to me, was particularly interesting because it is telling of the taboo that surrounds both the monument and its time period in Spain still today. Such a structure should not be left to become "ruins", but rather, it should be maintained in order to preserve such an emblematic site, albeit with the necessary contextualisation and, most importantly, exhumation of the bodies that remain trapped within the Crypt.

Figure 22

Source: Author's own photographic field material



Image shows the state that one of the informational signs is in, notice that it is upside down. This was taken at the entrance of the complex; the other side of the sign was empty.

Figure 23

Source: Authors own photographic field material



Sign reads: Valley of the Fallen, Mount of Cuelgamuros, area of high ecological value, no passing beyond this point.

Figure 24

Source: Author's own photographic material



Image shows an informational sign located on the that leads from the Basilica up to the Monastery and Abbey. Sign is divided into 4 informational subsections; Orography and Climate, Geology, Vegetation, and Architecture and Environment of the Valley. The latter does not mention anything about it being commissioned during the Francoist Regime.

Figure 25

Source: Author's own photographic material



The image shows the cross in the background and a sign that reads “No entry, risks of rockslides”, referring to the fact that the cross is in such bad condition that it is prohibited to its base.

5. Conclusion

This work tried to understand the meanings that people assign to the monument of the Valley of the Fallen, in an attempt to shine light on the different collective memory narratives present within Spanish society today. It argues that these collective memories have been largely influenced and tainted by the Spanish process of transition into democracy in which several laws imposed a collective forget, regarding the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and Francisco Franco's National Catholicist dictatorship (1939-1975).

The theoretical chapter highlighted the distinct forms of remembering, both individual and collective and how the collective memories of a group serve to legitimise their beliefs. More importantly, the chapter reiterated the significance of cultural memory, and its role in exploring how the past is represented in the presents' socio-cultural context (Erll et al., 2008, p. 1). Furthermore, it emphasised how the "memory boom" that started in the late 1980s played a significant role in understanding the way in which the past was often (re) presented and (re) constructed by those in power for specific identity projects. This idea is closely linked to the material aspect of memory, and how specific sites can be used in order to impose and portray a certain representation or reconstruction of the past (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 9).

In the Spanish case, Francisco Franco tried to equate the nationalist victory to previous historical battles, specifically relying on the crusades as a way of binding his case against the modern "anti-Spain", embodied in the values of the Second Republic. The Valley of the Fallen is representative of how cultural memory is often embedded in the forms and structures that guide a group, by materially portraying its norms and values (Erll et al., 2008, p. 4). Franco's intention to align his regime to the catholic church and imperial Spain is visible in the ornamentation of Basilica's interior, as well as in the symbols he adopted for what would become Spain's coat of arms during his dictatorship. The intention of creating a link between the Spanish monarchy and his regime is also best illustrated in the fact that Franco pronounced Juan Carlos de Borbon I, grandson of Alfonso XIII who was exiled due to popular demand in 1936, head of State in July of 1974. This would result in Spain adopting a parliamentary monarchy during the transition in 1976, rather than returning upon its own democratic tradition of a Republic.

By referring to the civil war as a crusade, Franco not only gave the war historical importance, but more importantly, religious significance. For the nationalist side, the victory against the Republican forces emulated the reconquering of Spain. The second Spanish Republic was established in 1931 by popular demand and would last until 1936 when due to

the victory of a left-wing coalition, the most conservative forces in Spain and specific factions within the Army, revolted and staged coup d'état against the democratically elected government. The republican government was seen as the materialisation of democratic ideals, through which Spain would become an anti-clerical, secular state, where public education and civil rights were put at the forefront (Menasanch de Tobaruela et al., 2020, p. 640,641). With the help of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, the nationalist forces in Spain triumphed in their attempt to put an end to the social progress and reforms made under the Republic.

The Valley of the Fallen is also representative of the change in nature of war memorials in Catholic countries after the first world war. Erected by the “winners” of the Spanish civil war, and proclaimed a National Memorial, this site of memory was intended as a place where Spanish people could honour and commemorate those “fallen for God, and Spain”. During the first three years of Franco’s regime, there was an intense redrawing of remembrance in the public sphere, in which new calendar dates were added, plaques and statues were erected, and imperial symbols were re-appropriated in order to solidify the regime’s intentions (Bernecker, 2011, p. 67). On top of this, on February 9th, 1939, the regime announced what was known as *La Causa General* (The General Cause), a law directed at Political Responsibility. This would last until the late 1950s and would initiate a process eliminating the “red” (communist) presence in Spain. These suspected political opponents, were sentenced to prison or execution by political tribunals of the regime (Messenger, 2017, p. 52)

This meant that eventually, the ‘generally accepted’ view regarding what actually happened was the same view that legitimised and justified the military's ascend to power and their subsequent terrorisation of those parts of society that did not align with their beliefs, as well as their alignment with the great “reconquests” of Spanish history (Ferrándiz, 2022, p. 209). This was done through the retrieval of medieval and imperial figures, myths and events of Spanish history such highlighting the importance of the Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa (1212), when Catholic forces managed to expulse Moors from the Iberian Peninsula. The regime also relied heavily on the figures of Isabel and Fernando, Catholic Monarchs of Spain, known for unifying what is known now as Spain and credited with expulsing the final Moors from the Iberian peninsula in 1492 (Ferrándiz, 2022, p. 223).

Based on the data I have gathered during my one-week ethnographic research at the Valley of the Fallen memorial site, it is clear that although many people do not openly praise Franco, they also do not openly condemn him, the regime or the atrocities they committed. This is largely in part due to a several laws that have tried to redraw the version of history that Spain took from its dictatorship, into its democracy. It is also rooted in the fact that the

conservative spheres of Spanish public discourse, have not only refused to condemn the 1936 military coup, but they actively reiterate the idea of Franco's role in "saving Spain"(Ferrándiz, 2022, p. 220). As mentioned earlier, by not openly correcting the version of events that posed Franco as the "saviour" of Spain, and the Western world, these spheres have managed to prolong the regime's version of events across time.

My field work also elicited the state of judicial and social limbo that the Valley of the Fallen remains in. The complex itself is in dire need of reparations according to the latest maintenance report that was released in 2011. Despite the time that has passed since then, there have been few efforts to act on the findings due to the previously mentioned taboo surrounding the monument and the time period it reflects. In 2020 the second national memory decree was passed, in which it proposed that this monument should be re signified as a place that would not only serve as a reconciliatory site, but also one that honoured and told the stories of the "losers" of the Spanish civil war and victims of the regime (Decree Democratic Memory, 2020). However, no action has been taken to this day regarding this proposal. Nevertheless, the fact that the body of Francisco Franco was exhumed in October of 2019 gave some hope to those who have been waiting for over 40 years for a public recognition of the crimes that their families were subjected to.

Despite these findings, my visits to the Valley of the Fallen also showed the multitude of meanings that people assigned to the monument. Many of the people that I spoke assigned it meanings of sadness and pain and recognised there was no place for an ideology like Franco's in the Spanish context today. A few of them believed that the site had been politicised and often repeated the phrase "the dead must be left to rest". The fact that this statement is so often repeated reflects an unwillingness to engage in this political and historical time period. It could be interpreted as an avoidance strategy that these groups rely on to release them from any feelings of guilt or responsibility. In this work, I have touched on the process of dignification and honour that the nationalist side of the war during the first years of the Francoist regime. This of course, went hand in hand with the subsequent social and political exclusion of anyone who did not conform to the new order. The fact that process of memory retrieval and exhumations of mass graves has happened predominantly from family members and dedicated associations, shows how the memory of the regime's victims has prevailed, despite the efforts of public silencing and neglect (Messenger, 2017, p. 53,54)

Finally, I argue that both based on the conversations with visitors and my own observations, the Valley of the Fallen we know today, is the same Valley of the Fallen that Franco wanted us to see. There is no sign of the work or presence of political prisoners, and no

reference to the fact that the monument was commissioned by a dictator, or that the only person with a dignified burial, in the site that was meant to commemorate *all* of the fallen, is the founder and leader of the Falange movement in Spain. The experience of those in the “peripheral” narratives of Spanish history have remained for the most part underground, along with their bodies. The main meaning of this memory site remains untouched and unaddressed, regardless of the current memory discourses and disputes within Spanish society.

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Figures

Figure 1: Satellite map depicting the entire complex of the Valley of the Fallen, screenshotted from Google Maps.

Figure 2: Map located within the official guidebook *Santa Cruz del Valle de los Caídos* of the Valley of the Fallen, pointing out the area where the basilica and abbey are located.

Figure 3: Close up satellite map of the Basilica and Abbey, screenshotted from Google Maps.

Figure 4: Digital scan of an architectural drawing of the interior structure of the Basilica and Cross, showing how they are internally connected through a series of tunnels and shafts. Found in the official guidebook *Santa Cruz del Valle de los Caídos*.

Figure 5: Image of a poster found in the Valley of the Fallen announcing the annual *Via Crucis*, Way of the Cross pilgrimage. Specifies meeting time and locations for groups to gather at. Found posted on a wall while approaching the basilica, author's personal field material.

Figure 6: Image of the entrance of the basilica and the cross from the esplanade. Author's personal field material.

Figure 7: Image of the esplanade, view from the entrance of the Basilica (back facing the door). Author's own field material.

Figure 8: Francoist Coat of arms, located on each end of the exterior of the Basilica. Author's personal field material.

Figure 9: Sign announcing that the funicular is not working and closed. Located as one approaches the Basilica from the parking area, close to where the café used to be. Author's personal field material.

Figure 10: Image of the sculpture of the Piety located above the entrance of the Basilica. Author's personal field material.

Figure 11: View visible from the road of access to the Basilica, located already within the vicinity of the Valley of the Fallen. Impressive dimensions of the monument are visible from a distance. Author's personal field material.

Figure 12: Close up scan of the interior shaft and lift that connect the Basilica with the Cross located above its structure. Drawing found in the official guidebook *Santa Cruz del Valle de los Caídos*.

Figure 13: Image taken from the same angle as the drawing in figure 12, depicting the exterior of the Basilica (not visible) and the cross. Author's personal field material.

Figure 14: Floor plan of the interior of the Basilica, numerically organised based on the different features located inside. Found in the official guidebook *Santa Cruz del Valle de los Caídos*.

Figure 15: Image shows the interior of the Basilica, specifying the tapestries and side chapels located inside and rock formations visible. Author's personal field material.

Figure 16: Digital scan of a 'souvenir' available for free inside the Basilica, text reads "Prayer to the Martyrs that rest within the Basilica of the Valley". Author's personal field material.

Figure 17: Image of the grave of Jose Antonio Primo de Rivera, founder of Falange. Author's personal field material.

Figure 18: Close up image of the mosaic mural located in the dome of the Basilica. Green squares highlight Francisco Franco, Jose Antonio Primo de Rivera and the imperial and falange flags depicted in the mural. Image scanned from the official guidebook *Santa Cruz del Valle de los Caídos*.

Figure 19: Image shows the fallen the monument is intended to remember with the 'slogan' *Caidos por Dios y por España*, Fallen for God and for Spain, located within the Chapel of the Holy Sacrament. Author's personal field material.

Figure 20: Map of the bodies located within the structure of the Basilica. Retrieved from elDiario.es from the article "*Así es la mayor fosa común de España: más de 33.000 restos humanos en ocho capillas del Valle de los Caídos*", retrieved June 8th 2022.

Figure 21: Image of the lit up crucifix during the daily mass at the Valley of the Fallen. Screenshotted from the article "Ritual violence and rituals of violence of the Franco regime between 1939 and 2019: the Valle de los Caídos from a historical, archaeological, and forensic perspective." Pg 658

Figure 22: Image shows the run-down condition that some of the signs located within and around the vicinity are in. Author's personal field material.

Figure 23: Image showing a sign asking people to refrain from walking along the grass as it is an area with highly protected and valuable natural species. Author's personal field material.

Figure 24: Image shows an informational sign about the Valley of the Fallen, mentions geographic and geological details but fails to mention anything about the historical period when it was commissioned or the social conditions under which it was built.

Figure 25: Image of a sign asking people to not pass further, prohibiting people from accessing the base of the cross due to the risk of rocks falling. Author's personal field material.