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Ignasi Prat: Eichmann in Spain

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"I am not the monster I am made out to be", cried Adolf Eichmann when the court imposed his death sentence. Israel's Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion had located the former SS lieutenant colonel in Argentina, where he had been living in secrecy after fleeing the Nuremberg trials. Eichmann's name has since then been associated with the "Final Solution", but he wasn't sentenced until he was kidnapped by the Israeli Intelligence and brought to Jerusalem for trial. Eichmann was convicted by an exclusively Jewish court in 1961 for causing practically all the deportations and the systematic extermination of millions of Jews during World War II.

Hannah Arendt followed the process closely and, despite the atrocity of the facts, said that "Eichmann was no Iago, and was no Macbeth". He was not even a bloodthirsty psycho or an exceptional case of hatred of the Jews. He was not an anti-Semitic fanatic, or any other kind of fanatic. He was a "normal man", according to the certificate submitted by six court-appointed psychiatrists. "He is certainly more 'normal' than I am after examining him", lamented one of them. In Arendt's words, Eichmann was just one among many Nazi bureaucrats, and if he could be made responsible for a policy of mass murder, it was only due to his efficiency at climbing the pyramid of power in the Third Reich. "It was sheer thoughtlessness that predisposed Eichmann to become one of the greatest criminals of that period".

Eichmann in Jerusalem (1963), Arendt's report on the case, generated widespread controversy when it was published because it was misunderstood as an attempt to exonerate the former commander. Far from that, however, Arendt's intention had been to penetrate the psychological universe hidden behind the face of that individual who was at last in the dock of the accused, so as to finally understand the lesson that a long course in human wickedness could teach us. The lesson of the fearsome "banality of evil", as she came to call it. The Holocaust, although genocide on a massive scale, was both a banal and dehumanised type of evil caused by the emergence of a giant, "word-and-thought-defying" criminal bureaucratic organisation.

The World Of The Victors is an exercise to help us understand the role of evil and power in the case of Spain. Like Arendt's approach in Jerusalem, Ignasi Prat's intention is to face the powerful, to scrutinize the faces of the guilty, and above all, to understand history rather than to carry out an act of justice. However, as in this case those faces can no longer be photographed, Prat has resolved to rescue from anonymity a series of vestiges currently camouflaged within the public sphere that provide information on the daily lives of those who are nowadays regarded as the main figures of the bloody repression employed by the Franco Regime in Spain during and after the Civil War.

Prat's exercise has resulted in a series of portraits of the homes where some of Franco's ministers lived, portraits of the exterior faces that are nevertheless loaded with psychological cues. The photographs show how some facades still reveal efforts to keep up a superb and intimidating appearance, while others prefer to hide behind lush, visually impenetrable gardens. Some facades clearly identify themselves with the power from the distant past and are characterised as Renaissance Palaces or incorporate Medieval elements, while others standing in the middle of a metropolis follow the classicist style put in vogue by the Franco Regime. Some rise up to attics and others rise on rugged peaks, but we have to admit that there is nothing new in all of those faces of Franco as far as clichés go in the representation of power.

The exterior faces in *The World of The Victors* display comfortable, though not at all heroic lives. Even though many of Franco's ministers had a military career, their homes make them seem as "normal" as that "medium-sized, slender, middle-aged, with receding hair, ill-fitting teeth, and near-sighted eyes" Eichmann who sat in the dock of the accused. In that sense, these houses probably contribute to caricature the Spanish Falangist evil as equally "banal".

In any case, it is somewhat disturbing that Prat chose to stop in front of the buildings and capture only their exteriors. His exclusive interest in the facades could be interpreted as a will to formulate a comment on the mechanisms of power: as Michael Foucault demonstrated in his investigations, power does not exist "in itself", instead it consists of a system of relations involving the manipulation of language and images. So just the surface, a mask, would be sufficient to develop the exercise of power, while the possibility of an "interior", is not only exempt in Prat's project, but also suspended as a presumption.

This preference for exteriors could also be the result of a thoughtful reflection on art and historiography themselves: since ancient Greece, the ability to remember has been associated with images, even though nowadays it is hard to find an image that can reconstruct a memory in its entirety, an image that is more like a presence, without a certain degree of deficit and ruin within it. Giorgio Agamben has connected this idea with the question of testimony. Referring to Auschwitz survivors, he wrote "the value of a testimony lies essentially in what it lacks, at its centre it contains something that cannot be borne witness to. The 'true witnesses', the 'complete witnesses', are those who did not bear witness", that is, those who lost their lives in the concentration camps.

But Prat's decision is not only driven by a reflection on power, art or the limits of historiography. It reflects further considerations on human evil and the administration as a criminal apparatus. There have been no Nuremberg trials in Spain, no fascist has ever been called to stand trial like it happened in Jerusalem. The transition to democracy has often been described as amnesiac, and indeed, behind that public policy of oblivion, many detect elements of that terrible 'banality of evil', which was also present in the Franco regime.

The World Of The Victors does not intend to merely map new places for the sake of memory, it is probably urging us to see the homes of those former ministers as a sign of oblivion. If these images bear any memory is that the owners of these houses never sat in the dock of the accused while they were alive. Thus, there has been no State justice in Spain, and in terms of the course of history, it would be useless to minutely reconstruct the facts when they cannot be admitted and have been lost forever.

The World Of The Victors is, therefore, also the world of those who imposed democracy, which, as Paul Ricoeur laments, often wants to forget that it is power: it wants to be forgotten even in victory. Democracy in Spain is a victory which is still effectively the result of that "banality of evil" perpetrated by the Franco regime over fifty years ago. A "banal evil" which today wields a double-edge sword: the continuity that our current government establishes with the Franco administration, and the legitimacy conferred to it by the policy of oblivion regarding the 'administrative slaughter' which prevails at its origin.

The World Of The Victors is no other than our own world. The inexpugnable facades captured by Prat reveal that it has been forged in oblivion, and admitting that is the alternative we need to choose now in order to understand history.

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