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Aleksander Solzhenitsyn Arrives in Spain: The Gulag Debate and the Transition to Democracy

José Luis Aguilar López-Barajas

I still think Solzhenitsyn is a wolf in sheep's clothing. [...] to me, and I say this with the utmost respect for the profession, I thought he was an absolute scoundrel.¹

Aleksander Solzhenitsyn's presence in Spanish cultural life was not a constant during the 1970s. His impact on Spanish public life coincided with the publication of his book *Gulag Archipelago* in 1973 and his visit to Spain in 1976. Spain had never had a powerful tradition of Slavic studies and therefore few Spaniards knew Russian or had an accurate knowledge of what happened beyond the Iron Curtain. This made it difficult for Spanish culture to absorb and be influenced by the works of the Russian writer. At least, not before he passed through the filter of Europe, and above all France, which was the great intermediary between the events of the Eastern Bloc and Spain.

This article analyzes Solzhenitsyn's greatest impact, which took place during the first months of 1976, when he gave an interview on Public Television where he made provocative statements regarding the Franco regime, which sparked heated controversy. My purpose is to use Solzhenitsyn to better understand Spanish political culture and the projects that different political and cultural factions defended shortly after Franco's death. I will contextualize relevant groups and actors to better understand the political process of the Spanish transition to democracy, specifically the politicians and intellectuals engaged in a debate around the scandal provoked by Solzhenitsyn. This methodology helps situate the diverse actors and groups to understand how they positioned themselves in regards to topics such as communism, democracy and freedom of speech. In the last decades, the transition to democracy in Spain has received massive scholarly attention. The lines opened are multiple, but one of the most intense has been devoted to the analysis of culture in (the) Transition. The defenders of the Transition as a successful process have pointed out the smooth and almost inevitable invasion of liberal ideas that even former Franco supporters would adopt.² According to this view, the advent of democracy had been favored by the regime itself as it had provided the means for economic improvement and increasing freedom of expression, the latter promoted by the Press Law passed by Minister Manuel

¹ Juan Marsé, "Solzhenitsyn, chorizo de las letras," *Por Favor*, 92, 5. Apr. 1976, 31.

² José Carlos Mainer and Santos Juliá, *El aprendizaje de la libertad, 1973-1986 (la cultura de la Transición)*, (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2000).

Fraga in 1966.³ This approach has been contested by recent historiography because it does not acknowledge the role of the anti-Francoist organizations that pressured for reform, but, instead, imbues reformers with sincere democratic impulses and worships them for being able to undertake a smooth demolition of Francoism. However, this was not the case and this article aims to further challenge this assumption. Instead, it shows how regime reformers, who advocated for timid reform and limited democracy, expressed themselves similarly, albeit with a slightly lower tone, to other Franco defenders and, ultimately, used the opportunity to oppose the democratic reforms the left defended. On the other hand, the article is set in a specific Cold War moment, namely the Gulag Debate, which triggered an anti-leftist sentiment across Europe. This marked the Spanish context in two senses. Firstly, the Spanish left striving for democracy aimed to avoid entering the game set by the Francoists, which was not always easy, as we will see. Secondly, the Solzhenitsyn effect also paved the way for the rise of a new type of right wing intellectual, that would seize the Gulag categories to attack the left. Although this was not unique to Spain, it acquired a distinct significance given the national context of an uncertain transition to democracy.

The thorough exposition and analysis of the attitudes and articles produced by intellectuals in the main newspapers and magazines of the country is academically relevant given the great importance they had in the Spanish transition. As asserted by several specialists in the field, during the Spanish transition diverse political projects, developed and led by groups of intellectuals and politicians both within the regime and outside of it, collided, occupying the center of the process alongside Spanish civil society.⁴

Another interpretation of the Transition has characterized it as a process guided from above, from reformist politicians that marked the limits and rhythm of the changes. To this framework, the Transition was ultimately flawed, as it paved the way for a falsely consensual process with a limited pluralism and, finally, a “Culture of Transition” that left out the elements that menaced the triumphal narrative of Spanish modernity.⁵ Without detracting from these interpretations, especially in regards to the outcome of the process and the socialist years that followed, I aim to stress that the process was not

³ Cristina Palomares, *Sobrevivir después de Franco. Evolución y triunfo del reformismo, 1964-1977*, (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2006)

⁴ Santos Juliá, *Transición. Historia de una política española (1937-2017)*, (Madrid: Galaxia Gutenberg, 2017); Elías Díaz, “Intelectuales, la oposición a la dictadura, la transición a la democracia,” *Bulletin d’Histoire Contemporaine de L’Espagne*, 50, (2015), 49-62; and Juan Pecourt, *Los intelectuales y la transición política. Un estudio del campo de las revistas políticas en España*, (Madrid: Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, 2008), 9-21.

⁵ Gregorio Morán, *El precio de la transición* (Madrid: Akal, 2015); Guillem Martínez (ed.), *CT o la Cultura de la Transición*, (Barcelona: Debolsillo, 2012); Emmanuel Rodríguez, *Por qué fracasó la democracia en España. La Transición y el Régimen del 78*, (Madrid: Traficantes de Sueños, 2015); Juan Carlos Monedero, *La transición contada a nuestros padres. Nocturno de la democracia española*, (Madrid: Catarata, 2011).

controlled from above. The turmoil of the 1970s and the context of Solzhenitsyn's arrival in March 1976 is beneficial to explore because it happened during a time of uncertainty, when the future was by no means decided; there was political violence in the streets and the highest rate of popular mobilization Spain had ever known. Moreover, his arrival brought some key points to the surface, such as questions about the Spanish Civil War, Socialism and Communism, and violence and freedom. In addition, I argue the debate sparked by Solzhenitsyn paved the way for the rise of a new type of right-wing political culture, which was devoted to pointing out the hypocrisy of the left above all else. Criticism of socialist-oriented models, in a broad sense, had been hitherto latent in right-wing discourse, but in the 1970s, it became a cornerstone that shaped European political debates of the following decades. Here, I try to contrast the Spanish case with the French one to argue there was a common thrust triggered by Solzhenitsyn's presence in Western Europe. To sum up, I will try to cover, in the broadest scope possible, all the political factions in conflict, and to provide nuanced explanations of how they saw Solzhenitsyn's assertions in relation to the broader political environment in Spain during March and April of 1976.

The Prime-Time Interview Scandal and Praise from the Right

There are several factors to consider regarding the context in which Solzhenitsyn became a figure of international prestige. He had become a celebrity in 1962 after the publication of his first novel *A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. The book benefited from the Thaw environment characterized by a relative tolerance and cultural openness. However, this cultural opening soon ended, and the Communist Party torpedoed Solzhenitsyn's subsequent novels, including *Cancer Ward* and *The First Circle*. The West would further lionize Solzhenitsyn in 1970, when he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. He was banned from going to Stockholm to attend the awards ceremony, which intensified both his opposition to the Soviet regime and the perception in the West that Solzhenitsyn was standing up as a defender of freedom against the communist regime's oppression.⁶

In the meantime, he had been working on an ambitious literary essay to document the hardships and cruelty of the Soviet concentration camps. The manuscript was guarded in secret so that the authorities would not requisition it. In 1973 he passed excerpts of the manuscript to France through the Tamizdat and in December of that year it came out under the name *Gulag Archipelago*. The book would become the catalyst that made Soviet authorities rage and take action against Solzhenitsyn. In the 1970s, repressive measures such as direct murder were off the table and the authorities instead opted for

⁶ Michael Scott Christofferson, *French Intellectuals Against the Left: The Antitotalitarian Moment of the 1970s*, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2014).

expulsion. On February 12, 1974, police officers broke into Solzhenitsyn's apartment and arrested the writer. The next day they put him on a plane destined for Frankfurt and stripped him of his Soviet citizenship. Thereafter, Solzhenitsyn pursued a remarkable career as a public intellectual who denounced communist regimes and, more importantly, their western supporters.

Earlier dissidents, such as Boris Pasternak, had produced equally critical books. In the case of Pasternak, *Doctor Zhivago* became a ground-breaking novel, even in Spain, but did not shake the communist world as intensely as *Gulag Archipelago*.⁷ In Italy the novel had been published by a communist-sympathizing publishing house, 'Feltrinelli,' whose editor did not shy away from premiering the polemic novel of the Soviet writer in Western Europe.⁸ However, the case is rather different as Pasternak's novel was published in the late 1950s in Italy, where the role of the robust Italian Communist Party was normalized as a legal element of Italian political life. Moreover, unlike Solzhenitsyn, Pasternak did not have such a combative character. Furthermore, he suddenly perished in 1960, so he did not have time to tour Western Europe as Solzhenitsyn would do some fifteen years later. Solzhenitsyn harbored different values than Pasternak, as he identified himself as a Christian critic of material civilization, which, unlike Pasternak, included a certain element of Western systems too. Last but not least, the context in which Solzhenitsyn came into prominence was much different from the earlier decade. In 1973 the Oil Crisis broke out, which was a symbolic watershed later analyzed as the inception of a new course, characterized by the lack of certainties and stability that had reigned in Postwar Europe. To become a 'Cold War Icon' Solzhenitsyn arrived at the right moment in the right place, and his statements were directed to damage, for instance, Willy Brandt's Ostpolitik in Germany, the very social pact of Britain and, more importantly, France and Spain.⁹

In the summer of 1975, the Helsinki Final Act was approved, which popularized the dissidence of the Eastern Bloc, and Solzhenitsyn became one of the leaders with the clearest presence in the Western world.¹⁰ From this moment on, the issues related to the different Soviet dissidents were much more magnified in European countries and therefore also in Spain. On the other hand, the Spanish context after Franco's death seemed convulsive, and

⁷ Guillermo A. Pérez-Sánchez, "Otros aniversarios, de Pasternak (y su *Doctor Zhivago* -1957/2017-) a Solzhenitsyn (y su *Archipiélago Gulag* -1975/2015): a propósito de la violación de los Derechos Humanos en la Unión Soviética," *Studia historica. Historia Contemporánea*, 36, (2018), 71-90.

⁸ Carlo Feltrinelli, *Senior Service*, (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2001), 123-7.

⁹ Elisa Kriza, *Alexander Solzhenitsyn: Cold War Icon, Gulag Author, Russian Nationalist?* (Stuttgart: Ibidem Verlag, 2014), 113-147.

¹⁰ See, Daniel C. Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect: International Norms, Human Rights, and the Demise of Communism*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 91-120.

the growing popularization of the Spanish communists, protagonists in the opposition to the dictatorship, led to greater attention being paid to the Soviet Union, especially from right-wing sectors, as a means of discrediting the PCE and undermining its social legitimacy. Finally, and more importantly, in March 1976, the writer Aleksander Solzhenitsyn stayed in Spain for almost two weeks, during which, among other things, he gave a controversial interview to Spanish Television.

After his expulsion from the Soviet Union, Aleksander Solzhenitsyn made numerous trips to various European countries.¹¹ The sympathy between the right wing and the Soviet writer was barely disguised and thus, in France, the presence of the author of *Gulag Archipelago* and his statements, meant a hard attack on the French Communist Party, and therefore to the coalition under a common program of the left that the PCF had established with the Socialist Party of François Mitterrand.¹² He would spark a remarkable controversy there when he challenged the Secretary of the French Communist Party, George Marchais, to debate with him about the Soviet Union. What he provoked has been known as the ‘Solzhenitsyn effect’ that, for instance, made the French communists renege on their backing of the Soviet Union. Furthermore, he distinctly influenced a generation of French intellectuals who previously had leaned on leftist ideas, either Maoism, Leninism or any other branch of the fragmented leftist landscape of the epoch. This included Bernard-Henri Lévy, Alain Finkelkraut and André Glucksmann who were known as the ‘new philosophers’ but also as the ‘Solzhenitsyn children.’ According to them, after reading *Gulag Archipelago* they realized how damaging socialist ideas were and became opponents to left-wingers both inside and outside France.¹³

However, the Spanish socio-political context was totally different than that north of the Pyrenees. Far from having a consolidated democracy, during the first months of 1976 there was a period of uncertainty in Spanish life. The dictator had died on November 20, 1975, giving way to his successor Juan Carlos de Borbón as head of state. At the head of the government was a weak Carlos Arias Navarro, who aimed to bring about a rather limited reform that, in practice, did not change anything but the façade of the dictatorship. However, his difficulties in governing were increasing due to the lack of stability of the government, the differences between the diverse factions of the regime and the growing strength of the democratic opposition.¹⁴ The

¹¹ Josep Pearce, *Solzhenitsyn. A Soul in exile*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011), 201-225.

¹² Michel Winock, *Le Siècle des intellectuels*, (Paris: Seuil, 2015), 702-713; Sonja Hauslich, “Propheten oder Störenfriede? Sowjetische Dissidenten in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und Frankreich und ihre Rezeption bei den Intellektuellen (1974—1977),” Thesis, Sarre University, (2005), pp. 92-4.

¹³ Robert Horvath, “The Solzhenitsyn Effect: East European Dissidents and the Demise of the Revolutionary Privilege,” *Human Rights Quarterly*, 28, (2007), 879-907.

¹⁴ Ferrán Gallego, *El mito de la Transición*, (Barcelona: Crítica, 2008), 310-325.

opposition were basically formed by Socialists and Communists striving for the demise of the authoritarian regime but backing different projects. Nevertheless, they would join forces after Franco's death and in March of 1976, parallel to Solzhenitsyn arrival, formed the 'Democratic Coordination,' which also brought together liberals, Catholics and almost any kind of pro-democratic anti-Francoism.¹⁵ Then, they became a severe threat to the advocates of the Franco legacy who would use any means to undermine the increasing legitimacy of progressive forces.

In this troubled context and with considerable attention from the conservative press, Aleksander Solzhenitsyn landed in Barajas in mid-March 1976. The Spanish conservative press had been closely following his journey through France and England in the weeks leading up to his arrival on the Iberian Peninsula. Solzhenitsyn's praise for the Spanish extreme right, which at the time saw its hegemony in jeopardy, had intensified even more after the dictator's death.¹⁶ Prior to 1975, the closeness between the writer and the Spanish right wing had been considerable. In 1970, the conservative newspaper *ABC*, made an open claim against communism when Solzhenitsyn was awarded the Nobel Prize and banned from Stockholm by Soviet authorities.¹⁷ After the triumph of the Portuguese Carnation Revolution in 1974 that frightened Francoists, which had occurred just some months after the publication of *Gulag Archipelago*, some Francoists used Solzhenitsyn to warn the Portuguese that they would become a Gulag if communists continued being preponderant, which implicitly was an inward warning too, as the Spanish Communists grew stronger in those years.¹⁸

From this moment on, they utilized Solzhenitsyn as a moral authority to back their political project. He was undoubtedly seen as a hero "aware of his task, spreader of a faith, an element always uncomfortable because he does not limit himself only to discovering the communist contradictions, but also the capitalist ones."¹⁹ Within the Spanish conservative press, the attack on capitalism was highlighted by newspapers such as *El Alcázar*, which were established in the Falangist orthodoxy that opposed the liberalization that had taken place in Francoist Spain during the 1960s, and that had plans to continue. During the transition to democracy, *El Alcázar*, alongside politicians like José Antonio Girón de Velasco and Camilo Alonso Vega, were referred to as the 'Bunker.'²⁰ The so-called Bunker was an expression coined by *El*

¹⁵ Santos Juliá, *Transición. Historia de una política española*, (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2017), 320-336.

¹⁶ Tristán la Rosa, "Solzenitsin ataca claramente a la URSS y al Mundo Occidental," *La vanguardia española*, 11. Mar. 1976, 28.

¹⁷ "Solzhenitsyn no acudirá a Estocolmo para recibir el Nobel," *ABC*, 28. Dec. 1970, .63.

¹⁸ "Una amenaza comunista: Portugal-Italia," *Fuerza Nueva*, 22-6-1974.

¹⁹ "Occidente al borde del colapso: Solzhenitsyn alerta," *El Alcázar*, 3. Mar. 1976, 14.

²⁰ Anna Catharina Hofmann, *Francos Moderne. Technokratie und Diktatur in Spanien 1956-1973*, (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2019), 7-23.

Alcázar in 1974. It defined the group of politicians led by Girón, who were reluctant to accept any profound changes in the Regime and therefore saw themselves as the last defenders of Spanish essence. Nonetheless, the explicit associations of a Bunker with the place where Hitler spent his last days worked against them and was reappropriated by the democratic opposition. They began to label Francoist hard-liners as the Bunker as well, and the term became a pejorative name to designate those who opposed democracy.²¹

Nevertheless, the Bunker was not much concerned and its newspaper *El Alcázar* gave a lot of relevance to Solzhenitsyn's declarations endorsing dictatorships that were ideologically close to their project. Thus, when the Russian referred, in a more than kind tone, to Pinochet's dictatorship in Chile, the Falangists of *El Alcázar* did not miss the opportunity to make this clear. "One hears much more about Chile than about the Berlin Wall . . . if Chile did not exist, it would have to be invented for the communists."²²

Solzhenitsyn's first activities upon his arrival in Spain, such as attending a bullfight in Madrid's Plaza de las Ventas, were featured on the front page of the conservative newspaper *ABC*, as if they were singularly important events.²³ However, it was the night of Saturday 20 March 1976 that put the Soviet writer on the front page of public debate in Spain. Just a few hours in advance, it was announced that Solzhenitsyn would be interviewed during prime time on Spanish Television's *Directísimo*, hosted by the popular radio and television broadcaster José María Íñigo. *Directísimo* was one of the stars of the TVE— Spanish National Television—programming, and such illustrious characters as Johnny Weissmuller, Alain Delon and Rita Hayworth passed through its set. In 1976, on television sets in Spain, it was only possible to tune in to the first channel of Spanish Television, or the second, as private channels were not yet allowed. Because of this, the audiences were huge. A program like *Directísimo* had a potential audience of several million people.²⁴

The interview with the Soviet writer took place, as agreed, on the night of 20 March. It lasted about an hour and in that time the Russian writer's statements could not have been more inflammatory. For the left, Solzhenitsyn's attack on the Soviet regime, the communists and, in general, any progressive tendency in the West, was more than expected. More surprising for the left, Solzhenitsyn denied that there was any kind of dictatorship in Spain, and that the only real dictatorship was the one that took

²¹ To a broad perspective of the Extreme Right in the Spanish Transition to democracy see, José Luis Rodríguez Jiménez, *La extrema derecha en España: del tardofranquismo a la consolidación de la democracia (1967-1982)*, (Madrid: Universidad Complutense, 2001) and Ferrán Gallego, *Una patria imaginaria. La extrema derecha española (1973-2005)*, (Barcelona: Síntesis, 2006).

²² Marcelo Arroita Amestoy, "Entrevista en Francia," *El Alcázar*, 13. Mar. 1976, 2.

²³ "Solzhenitsyn quiso ir a los toros," *ABC*, 21. Mar. 1976, 1.

²⁴ Francisco José Montes Fernández, "Historia de Televisión Española," *Anuario jurídico y económico escorialense*, 29, (2006), 637-696.

place behind the Iron Curtain. He also stated that Spaniards enjoyed all kinds of freedoms, such as the freedom to travel, the freedom of expression and the freedom of assembly, and that, in those circumstances, no one could call the regime that prevailed in Spain a dictatorship as such:

Your progressive circles are pleased to call the existing regime a dictatorship. I, on the other hand, have been travelling around Spain for ten days, travelling strictly incognito. I observe how people live, I look at them with my own astonished eyes and I ask: do you know what this word means, do you know what is hidden behind this term?²⁵

The polemic gauntlet had been thrown down. In the weeks following Solzhenitsyn's interview on *Directísimo*, practically the entirety of Spanish public opinion pronounced itself for or against Solzhenitsyn's statements, and the political project they implicitly favored. It was during the months of March and April 1976, when the Russian writer had the greatest impact on Spanish culture, within the context of a still undefined political transition. President Arias Navarro did not show clear gestures of openness, and his mandate did not seem to have sufficient strength to lead the political process, nor the approval of King Juan Carlos.²⁶ That is why, in such an open context, the controversy over Solzhenitsyn was more relevant, since it was not only a matter of the writer's stature at stake, but also a deeper debate about the political regime that was in dispute.

The reactions therefore were not slow in coming. The country's leading newspapers, according to their ideological bias, highlighted one thing or another from the already famous interview with the Russian Nobel Prize laureate. Thus, *El Alcázar* reserved the cover for Solzhenitsyn, and on its inner pages highlighted the praises to the prevailing regime and to the Spaniards as a people, besides criticizing the abandonment into which the western world had fallen. "The western world has weakened its defense (...) Spain, with its national originality, may contribute that Spanish spirit to solve the crisis that encompasses all the countries of the world, and that will eliminate us all."²⁷ Next, they pointed out in bold the phrase "we have never had amnesty" pronounced by Solzhenitsyn on *Directísimo*. In a context like that of 1976, it can only be understood as a plea against the voices that were beginning to sound from the opposition asking for amnesty. Amnesty was by that time considered as one key measure to advance towards a real democracy both by

²⁵ The full text of the interview in Aleksander Solzhenitsyn, *Alerta a Occidente*, (Barcelona: Acervo, 1978).

²⁶ Javier Tusell and Genoveva García Queipo de Llano, *Tiempo de incertidumbre. Carlos Arias Navarro entre el franquismo y la Transición (1973-1976)*, (Barcelona: Crítica, 2003), 329-349.

²⁷ "La gran lección de Solzhenitsyn: apasionante intervención del premio Nobel ruso en la RTVE," *EL Alcázar*, 21. Mar. 1976, 1-3.

the left and by the former Franco supporters who had turned to democratic positions.²⁸ Thus, underlying that phrase of Solzhenitsyn had a clear political purpose, and the right would hold on to that to support a political line contrary to any kind of political opening.

The identification of *El Alcázar* with the opinions and what Solzhenitsyn represented made it possible that his presence in the newspaper during 1976 was excessive: from appearing on the front page, to occupying the center pages and opinion pieces of the newspaper's most prominent columnists.²⁹ His statements were published in foreign countries alluding to Spain, which he not infrequently tended to praise. Such is the case regarding his statements to the BBC in which he criticized the moral relaxation and complicity with the left in Western Europe. Regarding the assassination of the Spanish president Carrero Blanco in December 1973 by a commando of the terrorist group ETA he stated: 'the president of the Spanish government was assassinated (by the left) and all civilized Europe was delighted', which was greeted with joy by the Falangists of *El Alcázar*.³⁰

One of the politicians who represented the ideas of the Falangist newspaper was the already mentioned José Antonio Girón de Velasco, Franco's former labor minister who was loyal to the dictator until his death. His political position was one of absolute immobility, being contrary to the government of Carlos Arias Navarro, and to any opening that the Arias government established. Even *El Alcázar* used Solzhenitsyn to shore up the political prerogatives of Girón, knowing the prestige of the Soviet writer on the right and to gain followers among the supporters of political immobilism, which in mid-1976 were becoming smaller and smaller. In an article in March of that year, the journalist Antonio Izquierdo, a fervent supporter of Girón, wrote,

"Solzhenitsyn's opinion on Europe coincides with the political report of the National Confederation of Spain" in short, with the postulates of Girón de Velasco.³¹ In this way, *El Alcázar* aligned the Nobel Prize for literature with his political friends.

Another conservative newspaper, *Arriba*, which belonged to the Falangist Movimiento also published some of Solzhenitsyn's statements, alluding to the fact that according to Solzhenitsyn, Spaniards did not know what a dictatorship was and pointing out that "the solution to the world crisis

²⁸ Carlota Álvarez Maylin and David Martínez Vilches, "La amnistía en la literatura clandestina del Partido Comunista de España (Madrid, 1973-1977)," *Nuestra Historia: Revista de Historia de la FIM*, 6, (2018), 55-68 and Santos Juliá, "Echar al olvido: memoria y amnistía en la transición a la democracia," *Claves de razón práctica*, 243, (2015), 248-269.

²⁹ Examples of this in: "Solzhenitsyn," *El Alcázar*, 10. Apr. 1976, 1 and "Unas notas sobre Solzhenitsyn," *El Alcázar*, 10. Apr. 1976, 8-9.

³⁰ "Solzhenitsyn hace una apasionada defensa de España en la televisión inglesa," *El Alcázar*, 26. Mar. 1976, 2.

³¹ Antonio Izquierdo, "Testigo de cargo," *El Alcázar*, 23. Mar. 1976, .3.

seems to come from Spain.”³² A few days later the following was highlighted on the front pages: “Aleksander Solzhenitsyn’s appearance on the TVE screen has had [...] the virtue of opportunity. His description, not theoretical but from experience of what a dictatorship is, can serve us Spaniards as a point of meditation.”³³ It also included all kinds of articles flattering Solzhenitsyn.

More moderate newspapers, such as *ABC*, were not as lighthearted as *El Alcázar* or *Arriba* regarding the Solzhenitsyn interview, even though the coverage of the interview was entitled “One hundred and ten million Russians have died victims of socialism.”³⁴ *ABC* was a purely conservative newspaper, which had always supported the dictator Francisco Franco but which, unlike the Falangist newspapers such as *El Alcázar*, did not take such a strong position on the right that it opposed any openness. Its roots in monarchical traditionalism allowed it to align itself with the postulates of the newly appointed king Juan Carlos de Borbón, although we can in no way think of the *ABC* of 1976 as a liberal newspaper that was willing, for example, to accept a possible legalization of the Communist Party.³⁵

In this way, the attacks on the left by the Russian writer had been highlighted, but without making such a conscious appropriation of the message as that made by the Falangist newspapers. The *ABC* columnist Carlos Argos published, as did other newspapers, direct statements from the interview, especially those aimed at comparing the communist regime in Solzhenitsyn’s country with the Spanish one, and even bringing in the Spanish Civil War. ‘During the [Spanish] Civil War, one or two million people a year were shot in my country, and another twelve or fifteen million rotted in concentration camps.’³⁶ *ABC* advocated for the Reform, but they did not shy away from using Solzhenitsyn to bring up the phantom of the Civil War and close the way to the opposition, especially the Communist Party whom they did not intend to integrate into the Spanish system.

Other conservative newspapers such as the Catalan *La Vanguardia española* did approach the topic in a more democratic fashion. Its editorial “The free speech of a Russian writer” praised, albeit timidly, the *Directísimo* interview, referring more to the aspects of the Soviet Union that Solzhenitsyn mentioned than to the inflammatory statements he had made about Spain. In addition to this, they added “the warning to reformists and democrats about the dangers of the weakness of a liberal system is not superfluous either. The warning is timely and gives reason to those who hope that this time we will go to a strong democratic monarchy; to a democracy that totalitarian currents

³² “Solzhenitsyn,” *Arriba*, 23. Mar. 1976, 5.

³³ José Juan del Solar Ordóñez, “Un aviso,” *Arriba*, 23. Mar. 1976, 7.

³⁴ “Ciento diez millones de rusos han muerto víctimas del socialismo,” *ABC*, 21 de marzo de 1976, 88.

³⁵ María Luisa Humanes and Manuel Martínez Nicolás, “La cobertura de la política durante la Transición en los diarios El País y ABC,” *Periodística*, 16, (2015), 71-89.

³⁶ Carlos Argos, “Aleksander Solzhenitsyn ha dicho,” *ABC*, 23. Mar. 1976, 31.

cannot overthrow.”³⁷ This was a highly significant editorial of the pro-democracy political position adopted by *La Vanguardia* in March 1976. The newspaper was a conservative Catalanist-oriented publication owned by the rich Godó family of Barcelona.³⁸ After the Civil War they strictly followed Franco’s dictates, but since the 1960s had allowed coverage of liberal and Marxist figures even some who were close to peripheral nationalisms such as the economist Fabian Estapé, the painter Antoni Tapies and the Valencian nationalist Joan Fuster. In comparison to the daily newspapers of Madrid, it represented a press less identified with the regime that could turn Solzhenitsyn’s statements into a clear advocacy for democracy.

But there would be other reactions much less kind to Solzhenitsyn. The Communist Party’s still clandestine daily *Mundo Obrero* attacked the writer virulently. They described as pathetic the “mental process that metamorphosed Solzhenitsyn into a Slavic reincarnation of Torquemada [...] hired by the Spanish government to put forward a policy of denial of human rights.”³⁹ This type of angry expression was going to be a constant in the Spanish left, since there was too much at stake politically to allow Solzhenitsyn’s interview to consolidate the legitimacy of the dictatorial regime still in force. The positions in which the Russian writer ascribed to were totally unacceptable to all factions of Spanish progressivism. By 1976, the vast majority of sectors of the Spanish left were no longer taking the position of unambiguous justification of Moscow’s dictates. His criticism of the repressive aspects of the Soviet regime and his willingness to build an alternative model of socialism away from the hermetic bureaucratism of the USSR was a hallmark of the Communist Party.⁴⁰

Unlike the French Communist Party, in which Solzhenitsyn’s work represented a before and after in the very constitution of the party and its statutes, the PCE had undertaken this process of reflection after the Prague Spring of 1968, and since then its General Secretary Santiago Carrillo had explored new ways of constructing socialism, which materialized shortly afterwards in the so-called Eurocommunism.⁴¹ In this way, the attack by the right wing was indiscriminate and did not take into account the evolution of

³⁷ “El libre discurso de un escritor ruso,” *La Vanguardia Española*, 23. Mar. 1976, 3.

³⁸ Pol Dalmau, *Press, Politics and National Identity in Catalonia: The Transformation of La Vanguardia, 1881-1939*, (Sussex: Sussex University Press, 2017).

³⁹ Tomas de Torquemada (1420-1498), one of the most infamous Inquisitors General of the 15th century, represented reactionaries and the prosecution of free thought. “Siniestro espectáculo,” *Mundo Obrero*, 24. Mar. 1976, 2.

⁴⁰ Carme Molinero and Pere Ysàs, *De la Hegemonía a la autodestrucción. El Partido Comunista de España (1956-1982)*, (Barcelona: Crítica, 2017), 23-45.

⁴¹ José M. Faraldo, “Entangled Eurocommunism: Santiago Carrillo, the Spanish Communist Party and the Eastern Block during the Spanish Transition to democracy, 1968-1982,” *Contemporary European History*, 26, 4 (2017), 647-68; Emanuele Treglia, “El PCE y el movimiento comunista internacional (1969-1977),” *Cuadernos de Historia Contemporánea*, 37 (2015), 225-256.

the Communist Party, which they continued to deal with within the civil war dialectic, largely to hinder the growing prestige that the PCE had acquired as an opposition party to the dictatorship.

However, the communists were in those months of 1976 looking to expand their social acceptance in society. Still clandestine, the PCE had pursued, at least since the late 1950s, a rather moderate strategy that consisted of progressively conquering societal spaces to undermine the legitimacy of Francoism from within. Besides, they had advocated for total amnesty to advance towards a reconciled Spain looking forwards instead of backwards. Therefore, the PCE would not protagonize, beyond the quoted article, the struggle proposed by Solzhenitsyn, as they felt intimidated by how he had affected their French counterparts. Carrillo had learnt the lesson and, unlike his colleague George Marchais, he refused to confront Solzhenitsyn, along with other Soviet dissidents such as Andrei Amalrik, in public debates, as he had nothing to win from it.⁴² Therefore, it would be other parts of the Spanish opposition to set the debate, which shows that the stakes went far beyond the debate about the Soviet Union as the Spanish right-wing aimed to convey.

The Magazine *Cuadernos para el diálogo* and the Attack on Solzhenitsyn

It would be a Catholic-inspired albeit pro-democrat journal where the most heated version of the debate took place. Although most of the daily newspapers sold in Spain were right wing— *El Alcázar*, *Arriba*, *La Vanguardia Española*, *ABC*— we cannot say the same about cultural-political magazines. The great attack against Solzhenitsyn and therefore against Franco's right-wing came from the pages of the most important progressive Spanish magazines of the time. The article that set off the exchange of verbal hostilities between intellectuals of different persuasions was written in *Cuadernos para el diálogo*.

Cuadernos para el diálogo was a magazine founded by Joaquín Ruiz-Giménez, who had been Minister of National Education from 1951 to 1956. After leaving the ministry, he turned to positions close to Christian democracy, and founded the magazine in 1963, with progressive intentions, which caused him, not infrequently, problems with the censorship of the regime. The wide range of contributors to the magazine came from a large group of young people born during the Civil War or the postwar period, with a broad intellectual training and who had also lived or studied in countries with consolidated democracies.⁴³ *Cuadernos* was not close to any specific progressive ideology in direct opposition to Franco's regime but they hosted all factions, from members of the Christian *Frente de Liberación Popular*—

⁴² José L. Aguilar López-Barajas, *Los intelectuales y el Gulag. Aleksander Solzhenitsyn en la cultura española (1973-1982)*, (Madrid: Apeiron, 2017), 107-19.

⁴³ M^o Paz Pando Ballesteros, *Ruiz-Giménez y Cuadernos para el diálogo, Historia de una vida y de una Revista*, (Salamanca: Librería Cervantes D.L, 2009), 15-41.

better known as *FELIPE* — to members of the Socialist and the Communist Party, passing through dissident intellectuals of the regime such as José Luis López Aranguren and Enrique Tierno Galván.⁴⁴

The week after the interview on *Directísimo*, the magazine *Cuadernos para el diálogo* showed on the frontpage a photo of Aleksander Solzhenitsyn and a headline that read: “TVE on the witch hunt: The best Solzhenitsyn manufacturer of communists.”⁴⁵ The political chronicle inside denounced the maneuver orchestrated by the most conservative sectors of the regime, which had not only made possible without almost any prior notice the interview with the Russian Nobel Prize winner on prime time on TVE, but had also agreed to the *Directísimo* interview of Solzhenitsyn two days later, something certainly unusual.⁴⁶

But without a doubt, it was the article by the writer Juan Benet in this issue of *Cuadernos* that had the greatest impact. Benet began with an attack on Solzhenitsyn as a novelist, and on his last four works which, according to Benet, were “the most insulting, fossil and literally decadent and puerile of the last few years.”⁴⁷ He then made his sharpest statement against the author of *Gulag Archipelago*: “I firmly believe that as long as there are people like Aleksander Solzhenitsyn, the concentration camps will and must endure.”⁴⁸ Juan Benet had cultivated political activism since the 1950s. First in the University Socialist Association (ASU) and later using his pen in Spanish progressive magazines, but he had never been part of the Communist Party.

Another article, this time by the journalist Eduardo Barrenechea, followed Benet’s in similar terms. “A man with a beard accused Soviet socialism of the death of 44 million Russians in the Second World War alone [...] I don’t know if I would also add in Russian some Heil Hitler!” Barrenechea concluded, “I am 39 years old, I have never voted, I have never been able to express my opinion,” in response to Solzhenitsyn’s words against those who called the Spanish regime a dictatorship. In general, his article pointed out that the aesthetics of the Russian writer and his message would have a rebound effect, and would serve to add adepts to the cause of the Communist Party in Spain, since its tone was so pamphlet like that it was hardly likely to have credibility for even a minority, not in vain it was entitled “how to make communists.”⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Javier Muñoz Soro, *Cuadernos para el diálogo (1963-1976): una historia cultural del segundo franquismo*, (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2006), 74-6.

⁴⁵ “TVE a la caza de brujas: El mejor Solzhenitsyn fabricante de comunistas,” *Cuadernos para el diálogo*, 27. Mar. 1976, 152, 1.

⁴⁶ “Crónica política,” *Cuadernos para el diálogo*, 27. Mar. 1976, 152, 15.

⁴⁷ He meant *The Cancer Ward*, *Matriona’s House*, *In the first Circle* and *Gulag Archipelago*.

⁴⁸ Juan Benet, “El hermano Solzhenitsyn,” *Cuadernos para el diálogo*, 27. Mar. 1976, 152, 26.

⁴⁹ Eduardo Barrenechea, “Cómo fabricar comunistas,” *Cuadernos para el diálogo*, 27. Mar. 1976, 152, 26.

Neither Benet nor Barrenechea were communists or advocates of what was happening in the Soviet Union. Both fought with their incisive articles against what the Soviet writer represented and what the extreme right wanted to extract from the figure of Solzhenitsyn. Ultimately, in March 1976 it can be said that despite not being communists, figures such as Benet and Barrenechea were in the same vein as the PCE, since their objectives— although with nuances, of course— coincided to a large extent, in the matter of achieving democracy in Spain.

The counterattack of the extreme right to what Juan Benet and Eduardo Barrenechea had written was not long in coming. *El Alcázar* ran an editorial article entitled “Marching a Chekist” that criticized Juan Benet and that, with the denomination of *Chekista*, did nothing but connect the verbal excesses of the novelist, with the everlasting reference to the Civil War, a sign of identity of the Bunker in the transition.⁵⁰ The right-wing attacks did not acquire too many nuances and their position on the Solzhenitsyn affair was rather monolithic. However, it was also used to attack Joaquín Ruiz-Giménez. In 1976, the Christian Democrat was already very far from his beginnings under the orders of Ángel Herrera Oria in Acción Nacional, a Catholic organization which, during the 1930s and following the precepts of the French extreme right with similar roots, proposed an incursion by Catholics into active politics.⁵¹ In the 1950s Ruiz-Giménez was part of the so-called *comprehensives*, a faction within the regime that had sought without success to make the regime more tolerant. They ultimately lost the political quarrel against the *exclusives*, a contrary group who did not want to introduce any significant change and thought the Civil War had already solved all the problems of Spain.⁵² But after the *comprehensives*’ failed attempt of reform, Ruiz-Giménez realized the regime could not be reformed and adopted positions of a strong liberal nature and in tune with the most progressive of the European Christian-Democracy. Proof of this is the richness of nuances that existed in his magazine and that it was possible for such forceful and radical articles as that of Juan Benet to be published in it.

Then in *El Alcázar*, columnist Alfonso Paso reminded Joaquín Ruiz-Giménez of his role in the Spanish Civil War, in which he fought on Franco’s side and had contributed to helping people fleeing from “Carrillo’s

⁵⁰ “Marchando un chekista,” *El Alcázar*, 28. Mar. 1976, 3.

⁵¹ Muñoz Soro, *Cuadernos*, 363-6.

⁵² “Comprehensivos” (Comprehensives) label is based on an article by the Falangist Dionisio Ridruejo entitled, “Excluyentes y comprensivos” (Exclusives and comprehensives). If among the sympathetic were Falangists such as Ridruejo himself, Antonio Tovar and Catholics such as Ruiz-Giménez, among the exclusives there was a large group of members of the religious organization Opus Dei and other pro-Franco tendencies, with names such as Florentino Pérez Embid or Rafael Calvo Serer. Santos JULIÁ, *Historias de las dos Españas*, (Madrid: Taurus, 2006), 200-224.

justice, which he is now supporting.”⁵³ Attacks on Ruiz-Giménez from Falangist circles had been a constant since the founding of *Cuadernos para el diálogo* in 1963 and had intensified at the death of the dictator in November 1975, due to the magazine’s clear alignment with democratic positions, to which the Bunker members were fully opposed.

Benet’s article crossed the country’s border and reverberated in France. From the ranks of the progressive daily *Le quotidien de Paris*, columnist Philippe Marcovici personally attacked Ruiz-Giménez for allowing the publication of such barbarity as Benet had denounced. *Le quotidien* was founded by Philippe Tesson in 1974 with the aim of following in the footsteps of the mythical *Combat*, founded during the resistance of the Second World War.⁵⁴ Marcovici, the author of the article in question, regularly wrote about Spain in *Le quotidien*, and despite being critical of Francoist Spain, his critiques of Ruiz-Giménez were devoid of any nuance, largely because of the brutality of Benet’s assertions, for which he found no justification.

The issue of *Cuadernos para el diálogo* that appeared at the newsstands on April 3, 1976 included an editorial containing the response of TVE’s management to the articles by Benet and Barrenechea. Far from being an aseptic communiqué denouncing Benet’s verbal excesses, the communiqué went much further and became a strong political argument. Regarding Benet’s article, it was said that “it expresses, perhaps unwittingly, the dream of being an authority in a system like the Soviet [...] rather than a bound dialogue, Benet’s article has been resolved in an inadmissible totalitarian monologue.”⁵⁵ The mood of the magazine and the spirit of dialogue and harmony with which it had been founded explain why an article such as that of the management of TVE, so critical of one of its collaborators, was published. However, the issue of *Cuadernos* on April 3 itself, although critical of Benet’s violent rhetoric in a certain sense, also contained other articles that were harshly critical of both TVE and Solzhenitsyn.

Indeed, those responses glossed over the unsettling remark of Benet, but the right-wing made use of the latter to extend it to the whole. This shows the democratic bias of the Spanish left-wing opposition who, in those months were aware of the importance of the situation. Therefore, some of them provided very calculated responses to the government maneuver, balancing their liberal and open tone with a frontal critique. Thus, the Catalan intellectual Mateo Maciá entitled his column “Against Solzhenitsyn’s show’ and the young philosopher Fernando Savater, in his article “Against Benet’s invective,” in addition to pointing out the unpleasantness of Benet’s words,

⁵³ Alfonso Paso, “Digo yo que...,” *El Alcázar*, 2. Apr. 1976, 3

⁵⁴ Henry Chapier, *Crée ou Crève*, (Paris: Editions Grasset et Fraguère, 1978), 78-90.

⁵⁵ “Por RNE y TVE,” *Cuadernos para el diálogo*, 3. Apr. 1976, 153, 20.

condemned as “shameful” the appearance of Solzhenitsyn on *Directísimo*.⁵⁶ The magazine’s own editorial expressed in a very representative way the factors that had come into play in the dispute over Benet’s article. On the one hand, they pointed out, following the famous quotation, “we would give our lives so that Benet could express himself, even if (what he says) we do not agree with,” which represented, as mentioned above, the values that governed *Cuadernos para el diálogo*. On the other hand, they entered the political game that was, according to the circumstances, the main thing: “It is strange that the newspaper *Arriba*, RNE and TVE, have become defenders of human rights regarding an article by Benet about Solzhenitsyn when in reality they had never had any respect either for human rights or for the presumption of innocence.”⁵⁷

The intellectual Gregorio Peces-Barba also wrote about it in the following issue of *Cuadernos*. He had been one of those trained under the auspices of Ruiz-Giménez and who at that time was already linked to the Spanish Socialist Party and would become one of the drafters of the democratic constitution of 1978. His position was in a sense similar to the magazine’s editorial, stating that “we left-wing wing men cannot ask for concentration camps for anyone, because in doing so we justify them being applied to us,” as a criticism of Benet’s harshness. After this, he pointed to TVE and the pro-Franco media and their position that had been based on “pharisaically tearing one’s clothes, placing oneself as vestals of human rights and democracy,” which for Peces-Barba was, with an ironic tone, “funny in some sense.”⁵⁸

From the left, criticism of Spanish Television was constant and even more so after Íñigo’s interview with Solzhenitsyn, where the opposition to the regime was practically unanimous in discrediting the maneuver. In the leftist magazine *Triunfo*, it was called ‘Operation Solzhenitsyn,’ and the criticisms were very harsh concerning Spanish Television. “The undemocratic propaganda operation that has been used in TVE is too ostensible,” read the column of the progressive magazine. The attacks on the writer, although not with Benet’s vehemence, were equally forceful. Solzhenitsyn was spoken of as that “professional of anti-communism, an important instrument of the new cold war.” If for *Triunfo*, Solzhenitsyn was going with a ‘Cold War of delay,’ in reference to the detente that was going on in Europe, the TVE on the contrary was in a ‘renewed Civil War.’ In addition, episodes were recounted such as the suspension of the interview with the liberal writer Antonio Gala by the order of Spanish Television, which contrasted sharply with the double

⁵⁶ Mateo Maciá, “Contra el show de Soljenitsin,” *Cuadernos para el diálogo*, 3. Apr. 1976, 153, 3; Fernando Savater, “Contra la requisitoria de Benet,” *Cuaderno para el diálogo*, 3. Apr. 1976, 153, 20.

⁵⁷ “La libertad de expresión en Cuadernos,” *Cuadernos para el diálogo*, 3. Apr. 1976, 153, 20.

⁵⁸ Gregorio Peces-Barba, “No a los campos de concentración,” *Cuadernos para el diálogo*, 10. Apr. 1976, 154, 5.

broadcast of Solzhenitsyn's interview, both on Saturday 20 March and the replay on Monday 22 March.⁵⁹ This appealing to the Cold War moment, showed to what extent the Spanish opposition aimed to dodge the type of debate the pro-Franco alliance was fostering. The quest for democracy was in the fore and in this context Cold War-oriented approaches lacked importance for them.

Articles against TVE continued to be extensive in the April and May 1976 issues.⁶⁰ The response of Benet made a flight forward, without the slightest trace of repentance in his ink. He stated that he had written his article "Brother Solzhenitsyn" even before the interview took place because "it did not take great prophetic endowments to guess that a Solzhenitsyn would come (or be brought) to this country that so well accommodated his tastes."⁶¹ A few weeks later, in a statement to the recently inaugurated newspaper *El País*, which was to be a reference during the transition to democracy, he confirmed what he had said about Solzhenitsyn and even stated that in view of the reactions he had even been reticent regarding the Russian writer.⁶²

Solzhenitsyn Children: The Lasting Aftermath of the Gulag Debate

Defending democracy would also lead Spanish progressive intellectuals to confront those 'Solzhenitsyn children' as the French new philosophers were called. In the following months and the next year, some of the aforementioned, such as Fernando Savater defended the left-wing political project from the attacks of Bernard-Henri Levy or André Glucksmann, who, in his philosophical fashion, aimed to compare leftist projects with the Gulag altogether. Commenting on one book by Glucksmann, Savater highlighted the French writer's hypocrisy to condemn the Gulag and not say much about Pinochet's Chile or the Francoist leftovers in Spain.⁶³ Other strictly Marxists journals such as *Viejo Topo* made a similar reception of the new philosophers, which showed at the same time the critique of the Soviet Union, "we all know the USSR is not a socialist society" said one of the writers of *Viejo Topo*, with the robust defense of democracy, liberty and the progressive ideas.⁶⁴ The disconformity with the model represented by the French, though, was broadly manifested as, for instance, in an interview that *Viejo Topo* did with Bernard-Henri Levy. In the interview, Levy described the line that, according to him, linked the philosophy of Karl Marx and the Soviet concentration camps. The two interviewers, the young philosophers Josep Sarret and Miguel

⁵⁹ "Operación Solyenitsin," *Triunfo*, 27. Mar. 1976, 687,17.

⁶⁰ "RTVE: abuso de poder," *Cuadernos para el diálogo*, 10. Apr. 1976, 154, 5.

⁶¹ Juan Benet, "Las hermanitas de la caridad," *Cuadernos para el diálogo*, 10. Apr.1976, 154, 5.

⁶² Ángel Harguindey, "Me ratifico en lo que dije sobre Solzhenitsyn," *El País*, 5. May. 1976.

⁶³ Fernando Savater, "El gulag y la revolución," *Triunfo*, 17. 12. 1977, 777, 28.

⁶⁴ Miguel Morey, "Glucksmann. Para una crítica del pensamiento cómplice," *El viejo topo*, 15, Dec. 1977 60-1.

Morey, responded by questioning and quarrelling with Levy, turning what was meant to be an interview into a debate.

However, if the western successors of Solzhenitsyn were attacked for the sake of defending the young democracy Spain was heading to, their intellectual heritage was taken advantage of by other Spanish right-wing intellectuals who, from that moment forward, adopted the intellectual vein of the new philosophers and aimed to pull out the leftist elements from Spanish public life, since they led to the Gulag. The most representative example is the polemicist Federico Jiménez Losantos, who in those years was doing his personal trip from Maoism to conservatism. In 1975 he travelled to China having read the two first volumes of *Gulag Archipelago*, which was a decisive experience to him. After the Gulag debate and the nuanced positions we have shown, Losantos wrote “the silence on Solzhenitsyn proves the extent to which communism, including here, is the Gulag.”⁶⁵ Losantos did not come from a pro-Franco environment, but he represented a more modern right after the Transition to democracy that took the lead of attacking leftism. This type of right had a baptism with the Gulag debate, and they mingled classic conservative approaches with the new postmodern intellectual style captained by the French ‘Gulag children.’

Indeed, Carrillo was confronted by Bernard-Henri Levy in a TV debate of 1979, two years after the PCE had been legalized, where the French philosopher again brought up the Gulag question to attack its General Secretary.⁶⁶ Levy’s attacks on Carrillo were praised by these new right-wingers, who, despite not defending Francoism, celebrated those who dared to uncover the miseries of the left-wing which, more or less overtly, did end up in the Gulag.⁶⁷ Notwithstanding, the presence of Solzhenitsyn in Spain faded away after the political scandal. It left a long-lasting trace as the Soviet writer’s presence in Western Europe had given birth to, or at least paved the way for, a new type of right-winger, who would gain importance in the next decades, with the new escalation of the Cold War, and in Spain, arguably, have relevance up to the present day.

Jiménez Losantos was joined by others such as Félix de Azúa and Gabriel Albiac. Similar to the French case, these trajectories stemmed from a hard-core leftist’s bias to a conservative one with anticommunism as the core. Interestingly enough, Albiac had ruthlessly attacked the new philosophers, labelled as new inquisitors, during the Solzhenitsyn debate; however, some

⁶⁵ Federico Jiménez Losantos, *Lo que queda de España: una política de lecturas*, (Zaragoza: Alcrudo, 1979), 362-365.

⁶⁶ Full debate in <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VLo9LajdKnQ> (consulted 14.4.2021).

⁶⁷ Manuel Palacio and Carmen Ciller, “La Clave de TVE, un programa de debate en la historia de la televisión española (1976-1985),” *Estudios sobre el mensaje periodístico*, 20, (2014), 227-241.

years later his arguments were indistinguishable from theirs.⁶⁸ Once democracy was established in Spain, the only dimension left from Solzhenitsyn's debate was that of anticommunism. The reference to the *Gulag Archipelago* became ubiquitous even after the Cold War was over. This generation of 'Solzhenitsyn children' has vastly shaped Spanish political and historical debates in the last decades. As the debate on the Spanish Civil War was re-opened in the turn of the 21st century, Losantos and others appealed to Solzhenitsyn's categories to hinder the attempts of mass graves' exhumations. According to him, the leftists launched the debate on the Civil War to whitewash their own past of Gulag-like slaughters, such as the one in Paracuellos, where in November 1936 some 2000 civilians were killed by anarchists and communists. As the new left-wing party Podemos rose in 2014, Losantos sharpened his references to the Gulag. In 2018 he wrote a thick book on communism, which became a best-seller, *From Lenin to Podemos* in which he deployed a free and rigor-absent usage of Solzhenitsyn and demonized any deviation from a conservative-oriented approach to politics.⁶⁹ In the occasion of the coalition government, formed by Podemos and the Socialists, he wrote "both of them have already made their case to Podemos to form part of this government of concentration (read Gulag) against Spain and Freedom."⁷⁰

Spain and France followed similar trajectories in general terms, for instance none of them was ever ruled by a communist party; however, the Spanish case has some peculiarities that mark the significance of right wingers of this new type. Firstly, unlike the French Communist Party, whose Stalinist framework lasted much longer, the Spanish communists, at least from the 1960s, oriented themselves to democracy straightforwardly. Moreover, the clandestine organization of the Spanish Communists helped undermine Francoism, so they could present themselves as democracy bearers. Secondly, shortly after the death of Franco, the Spanish Communist party was clearly surpassed by the Socialists, and the following decades was almost marginal. And yet, the presence of the Gulag's phantom never faded away. Solzhenitsyn alone does not explain this but has to be complemented by the anti-communist bias of Franco's forty-year dictatorship. However, how the Gulag is approached is incomprehensible without resorting to the formative role Solzhenitsyn's presence had. Especially in the form rather than in the content. What Jiménez Losantos and others put forward does not differ much from arguments sustained by conservative historians such as Richard Pipes or Robert Conquest. What distinguishes the Spanish polemicists from these historians is instead the aggressive tone, sensationalist presentation and the

⁶⁸ Gabriel Albiac, "Por una pneumatología de los nuevos inquisidores," *El viejo topo*, 1978, 19, 22-27.

⁶⁹ Federico Jiménez Losantos, *Memoria del comunismo. De Lenin a Podemos*, (Madrid: Espasa, 2018).

⁷⁰ Federico Jiménez Losantos, *La vuelta del comunismo*, (Madrid: Espasa, 2020), 40.

wide range of Gulag's applications, which can be virtually applied to whatever they consider to be totalitarian. This style, partially deployed by Solzhenitsyn in his TV interview of 1976 and clearly by Bernard-Henri Levy's public appearances, has shaped, not for the good, Spanish public culture since.

Conclusion

The Solzhenitsyn theme, as we have tried to demonstrate, was, in the months of March and April 1976, a heated topic to which all prestigious intellectuals had to go and pronounce themselves on the pages of some newspaper or magazine. The Solzhenitsyn scandal allowed us to outline the politic-intellectual panorama of some meaningful months in the Spanish transition to democracy and show democracy is what was at stake, and the opposition balanced between criticizing both Solzhenitsyn's statements and the Gulag but having in mind the path to democracy should be secured.

Beyond Juan Benet's article, which was contested by the leftists themselves, the opposition deployed a robust open and democratic will, which was combined with responses to the regime's advocates whose only purpose was to use Solzhenitsyn to guarantee the jeopardized survival of the Regime. The Spanish Communist Party was not in the fore, but other democratic oppositionists ranging from Christian-Democrats to Socialists engaged in quarrels. They, with their arguments, showed to what extent there was a common program in the opposition advocating for adopting a democratic path, which contrasted with the right wingers, who either wanted to bring about timid democratic measures or did not want democracy at all.

In addition, as it was said in the introduction, the article has tried to cope with the political culture from a non-determinist perspective. Unlike some all-encompassing interpretations of the Transition to democracy, the role of contingency has been in the fore. There were no straight guidelines, but the actors had to adapt to the changing circumstances. Given many of the participants were remarkably relevant political figures, what I have tried to demonstrate is that the Gulag debate made them aware they shared an orientation towards democracy which, arguably, helped them set common goals and be conscious of who was on their side. Solzhenitsyn does not suffice to explain the whole democratic transition but the exposition of the debate helps to comprehend how sensitive political actors were and to what extent side-debates contributed to reinforce, or nuance, political positions.

The Gulag debate has been contextualized in its European dimension, showing how France and Spain were more affected by it as their political circumstances promoted it. However, in Spain's turmoil it did not just affect the Communist, but many political factions felt interpellated by it, which is a difference easily explainable by the common anti-dictatorship front being formed in those months. Lastly, the effects of the debate in France, the rise of the new philosophers, was also contested in Spain. The left confronted them

and aimed to turn down their easy equations between left and Gulag. However, interestingly enough, there was also another type of emerging right, represented, amongst others, by Jiménez Losantos, who inherited the French new philosophers' intellectual style and maintained it to attack the left in the following decades.