

Proposal for the Media and Conflict Memory Workshop (Glasgow, November 2023)

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Título

Anniversary journalism and memory: press coverage of the assassination of Miguel Ángel Blanco in Spain

Abstract

In July 1997, the terrorist organisation ETA kidnapped and murdered the young town councillor Miguel Ángel Blanco (Partido Popular) in Spain. His death provoked an unprecedented public reaction (López Romo, 2014) and marked a turning point in the social response to terrorism throughout Spain. It also brought about a change in the media's treatment of ETA attacks (Caminos, Armentia and Marín, 2013). This change is relevant, among other things, due to the role of the media in constructing memory; they make use of the past to make sense of a changing world through the presentation of connections and inferences between yesterday and today. Journalism is “a key agent of memory work” (Zelizer, 2008: 85).

This journalism-memory relationship is especially palpable in the coverage of anniversaries of key events such as Blanco's murder. When a media outlet decides to cover an anniversary, it is telling citizens what is worth remembering and how it should be remembered. The themes and frames chosen reaffirm certain values and desires for society (Chu, 2021).

In this research, we will observe whether or not, over the years, the national and regional Basque media of different ideologies have remembered the assassination of Miguel Ángel Blanco and in what way they have done so. We will observe if the attention and characteristics of the coverage have evolved, if there are themes and approaches that remain and if there are differences between media of different ideologies. This will allow us to delve into the role of the media, and specifically that of "anniversary" journalism, as builders of collective memory, and to observe what values are reaffirmed in relation to the murder of Blanco, one of the most symbolic victims of terrorism in Spain.

We will carry out a content analysis of the coverage of the assassination's anniversaries in the main Spanish newspapers and in regional Basque press between 1998 -the 1st anniversary- and 2022 -the 25th-. The analysis is inspired by those proposed by Caminos, Armentia and Marín (2013) for the coverage of the attacks before and after the assassination of Miguel Ángel Blanco, by Chu (2021) for the coverage of the anniversary of the incident in Tiananmen Square, Hong Kong, on 4 June 1989, and by Cantero-de-Julián, Sidorenko-Bautista and Herranz-de-la-Casa (2020) for the frame analysis in the journalistic coverage of the Covid-19.

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