

Institution: University of Edinburgh		
Unit of Assessment: 28 (History)		
Title of case study: Paracuellos: the Most Contested Atrocity of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939)		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2004 – 2016		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Julius Ruiz	Senior Lecturer	2004 – present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2015-2019		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>The bitter controversy within Spain about the scale, meaning and legacy of rear-guard executions during the Spanish Civil War shows no sign of abating over eighty years after the conflict began. Research carried out by Ruiz at the University of Edinburgh on Paracuellos, the most contested atrocity of the conflict, has challenged the traditional interpretation that the massacre of 2,400 prisoners in Madrid during the autumn of 1936 took place without the knowledge of the Republican government. Through the publication of a best-selling book (2015) as well as related media interviews, articles and features, Ruiz's findings have entered national consciousness in Spain, shifting the terms of public debate and adding a valuable historical and critical perspective.</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>Since his first appointment as Postdoctoral Fellow at UoE in 2004, Ruiz has investigated Republican terror during the Spanish Civil War, which resulted in approximately 50,000 executions. One element of this broad project, spanning two books published in English and Spanish [3.1 – 3.4], has been an examination of the Paracuellos atrocity of November 1936: the murder of 2,400 'fascist' Madrid prisoners, which took place as General Franco's forces attempted to capture the Spanish capital.</p> <p>Many historians, such as Paul Preston, have claimed that Paracuellos was a Soviet operation. Ruiz's research in Communist archives, including the Russian State Archive and the Spanish Communist Party Archive in Madrid, found that foreign intervention was in fact marginal at best. His work in the Spanish military archives confirmed that the operation was initiated 'from below' by leftist Popular Front militants determined to eliminate a non-existent 'fifth column' in the city. These antifascists had been prominent in the terror of the first three months of the war [3.3, 3.4].</p> <p>A second discovery concerned the complicity of the Republican government in the killings. Using the personal papers and notes of key political figures such as President Manuel Azaña and Manuel de Irujo, available in the State Archive in Salamanca and online, Ruiz was able to demonstrate that the Cabinet met to discuss the executions, but did nothing to stop them because the majority of ministers believed that the 'fifth column' posed an existential threat to the Republic. He found that the government only put an end to the massacres in December 1936 following intense international pressure.</p>		

Ruiz's final major theme concerned the role of Santiago Carrillo, a Communist youth responsible for Madrid's prisons in the autumn of 1936. Carrillo, who as Communist Party leader made a significant contribution to the restoration of Spanish democracy after Franco's death in 1975, always denied any responsibility for Paracuellos. Ruiz's research showed that while Carrillo did not issue the 'order', he was aware of the operation and provided essential political and logistical support to perpetrators of the killings. At the same time, Ruiz made clear that Paracuellos only re-entered public consciousness in the 1970s as a result of the neo-Francoist right's campaign to use the atrocity to discredit Carrillo politically. These findings were published in 2015 and 2016: in a Spanish-language monograph entitled *Paracuellos. Una verdad incómoda* [3.2]; and in an English-language monograph entitled *Paracuellos: The Elimination of the 'Fifth Column' in Republican Madrid during the Spanish Civil War* [3.1].

3. References to the research

3.1. J. Ruiz (2016). *Paracuellos: The Elimination of the 'Fifth Column' in Republican Madrid during the Spanish Civil War*. Sussex Academic Press. ISBN 9781845197872

[[https://www.research.ed.ac.uk/portal/en/publications/paracuellos\(da3890ec-d033-4035-a386-8002466159db\).html](https://www.research.ed.ac.uk/portal/en/publications/paracuellos(da3890ec-d033-4035-a386-8002466159db).html)] (Can be supplied by HEI on request)

3.2. J. Ruiz (2015). *Paracuellos. Una verdad incómoda*. Espasa Libros. ISBN 9788467045581 (Can be supplied by HEI on request)

3.3. J. Ruiz (two editions: 2014 and 2015). *The 'Red Terror' and the Spanish Civil War: Revolutionary Violence in Madrid*. Cambridge University Press. ISBN 9781107682931 (Can be supplied by HEI on request)

3.4 J. Ruiz (three editions: 2012-13). *El terror rojo. Madrid 1936*. Espasa Libros. ISBN 9788467034332. Winner of the Hislibris Prize for Non-Fiction 2013. (Can be supplied by HEI on request)

4. Details of the impact

The passionate and frequently acrimonious public debate about rear-guard executions during the Spanish Civil War goes to the heart of how Spain remembers its recent past and thinks about itself today. Ruiz's work on the 'Red Terror' [3.3, 3.4] established him in Spanish public consciousness as a significant authority on that war. This contributed in turn to substantial public interest in Ruiz's book on the Paracuellos atrocity of November 1936. It has become the most controversial mass killing of the Civil War, due to the involvement of Santiago Carrillo: the Communist leader who played a crucial role in the peaceful transition to democracy in the 1970s. Carrillo died at the age of 97 in September 2012 without accepting any responsibility for the atrocity, and subsequent media coverage of his long political career revealed that many of the myths surrounding the massacres remained firmly in place – in particular the supposed dominant role played by Soviet advisors.

Publication of *Paracuellos* was marked by *El Mundo*, Spain's second largest daily newspaper [14,908,000 unique users across all platforms], with an extended article by Ruiz on the atrocity, headlined 'Carrillo was the 'facilitator' of Paracuellos'. This attracted nearly 200 comments in which contributors debated whether or not, as "Fernando_0" put it, 'it would be better TO MOVE ON'. An accompanying article, by the journalist Julio Martín Alarcón, described the execution site [5.1].

Broad subsequent dissemination throughout Spain was achieved over the following days and weeks via television, radio and print interviews. Television appearances included the popular news and discussion programme *El gato al agua*. Radio contributions included a discussion on Spain's third-largest radio network *Onda cero* [average audience: 2,500,000]. Ruiz also gave an interview to the national daily *La Razón*, alongside a syndicated interview for the regional press: *Norte de Castilla*, *Ideal de Granada* and *Diario de León*. The public awareness thus generated

was reflected in a second printing of the book, ordered little more than two weeks after initial publication [5.2].

Two popular history magazines carried reviews of the book: *Historia de Iberia Vieja* and *Historia y Vida*. The online newspaper *Libertad Digital* hosted a discussion dedicated to it, which has since been viewed 19,217 times and has attracted 232 comments. A common theme among informed observers was that a highly controversial issue had at last been definitively settled. *Historia y Vida* described the book as a ‘fair approach’, going beyond the classic right-left visions in Spanish historiography [5.3].

A reviewer in *El País* [56,600,000 unique users per month] said:

‘[We have waited] Nearly 80 years for a definitive account of part of our history, and now that enormous collection of unfortunate histories we know by the name of Paracuellos can sleep the sleep of the just... Thanks to Ruiz we can today say that Paracuellos was an atrocity committed by Republican leaders, or better put, those on the Republican side who violated the very legal order that they were defending’ [5.4].

A piece in *Revista de Libros*, an influential prize-winning literary magazine, confirmed this view:

‘Ruiz establishes definitively that the crimes [of Paracuellos] were committed by Spaniards and that it is absurd to minimise their responsibility by blaming the Soviets. Also, he ends in establishing – let’s hope forever – that we cannot consider the removal of prisoners and the executions in the Jarama Riverbank as an isolated event. [This] is for the moment the most truthful, rigorous and ordered account of those events, which can be read by the whole world’ [5.5].

Ruiz’s work has since become a reference point in contemporary news stories linked to the civil war, and in historical fiction set in this most contentious of eras. Examples include an article in *El Mundo* in January 2016, reporting the news that Melchor Rodríguez García, the anarchist leader who strove to end the Paracuellos massacres, was going to have a Madrid street named after him [5.6]. Ruiz’s work has been cited as a source in Ignacio Martínez de Pisón’s novel *Filek: El estafador que engañó a Franco* (2018): part of a genre that reaches a wide audience in contemporary Spain, where a novelist examines the life of a controversial historical figure – in this case a scientist who tricked Franco [5.7]. Finally, a November 2019 feature piece in *ABC* (one of Spain’s leading daily newspapers), timed to coincide with the 83rd anniversary of the killings, was based entirely on Ruiz’s research [5.8].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

5.1. Marking of the publication of *Paracuellos* by *El Mundo*.

- a) J. Ruiz (27 October 2015). Carrillo fue el ‘facilitador’ de Paracuellos. *El Mundo*. <https://www.elmundo.es/cronica/2015/10/27/562b6f4ae2704eef1e8b4644.html>
- b) Fernando_0 comment on Ruiz article.
- c) J. M. Alarcón (27 October 2015). Las siete fosas de los fusilados en Paracuellos que narran la matanza. *El Mundo*. <https://www.elmundo.es/la-aventura-de-la-historia/2015/10/27/562e58c122601dbc1e8b460f.html>
- d) Unique user figures for *El Mundo*, December 2016.

5.2. Wider media activity marking the publication of *Paracuellos*.

- a) Interview on *El gato al agua* (3 Nov 2015). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A8y_LCM-hRc
- b) Interview on *Onda Cero* (29 October 2015). https://www.ondacero.es/noticias/cultura/libros/julius-ruiz-todavia-hay-miedo-a-adentrarse-en-temas-tan-polemicos-como-paracuellos_20151029563260776584a89b96714b10.html
- c) Average audience figure for *Onda Cero*, in 2015.

- d) Interview (24 November 2015) in *La Razón*. <https://www.larazon.es/cultura/libros/lo-que-nadie-conto-de-paracuellos-JF11271796/>
- e) Syndicated interview (1 November 2015): *Norte de Castilla*. <https://www.elnortedecastilla.es/culturas/libros/201511/01/julius-ruiz-carrillo-estaba-20151101030327-rc.html?ref=https:%2F%2Fwww.elnortedecastilla.es%2Fculturas%2Flibros%2F201511%2F01%2Fjulius-ruiz-carrillo-estaba-20151101030327-rc.html>
- f) Syndicated interview (1 November 2015): *Ideal de Granada*. <https://www.ideal.es/granada/culturas/libros/201511/01/julius-ruiz-carrillo-estaba-20151101030327-rc.html?ref=https:%2F%2Fwww.ideal.es%2Fgranada%2Fculturas%2Flibros%2F201511%2F01%2Fjulius-ruiz-carrillo-estaba-20151101030327-rc.html>
- g) Syndicated interview (31 October 2015): *Diario de León*. <https://www.diariodeleon.es/articulo/cultura/carrillo-estaba-tanto-matanzas/201510310400021550728.html>
- h) Head of Editions Department, *Espasa* (testimonial email, 10 November 2015). Email correspondence confirming the timing of the second edition of *Paracuellos*.
- 5.3.
- a) F. Franco (17 December 2015). Book review of *Paracuellos. Historia de Iberia Vieja*. <https://www.pressreader.com/spain/historia-de-iberia-vieja/20151217/282505772551004>
- b) F.M. Hoyos (19 November 2015). Book review of *Paracuellos. Historia y Vida*. <https://www.pressreader.com/spain/historia-y-vida/20151119/282269549298563> .
- c) Libertad Digital discussion (2 January 2017). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nnsj3y79Z0s&t=196s>
- 5.4.
- a) J. M. Reverte (2 July 2016). Carpetazo. *El País*. https://elpais.com/elpais/2016/06/17/opinion/1466174288_736675.html
- b) Unique user figures for *El País*.
- 5.5. S. Campos Cacho (18 January 2016). Hombres made in Spain. *Revista de Libros*. <https://www.revistadelibros.com/resenas/paracuellos-una-verdad-incomoda-julius-ruiz?platform=hootsuite>
- 5.6. J. Martín Alarcón (27 January 2016). Melchor Rodríguez. *El Mundo*. <https://www.elmundo.es/la-aventura-de-la-historia/2016/01/27/56a9065422601d3c548b45d6.html>
- 5.7. Ignacio Martínez de Pisón (2018). *Filek. El estafador que engañó a Franco*. Seix Barral. ISBN: 9788432233678
- 5.8. S. Nieto (11 January 2019). Los fusilamientos de Paracuellos, el crimen de los republicanos en la Guerra Civil. *ABC*. https://www.abc.es/historia/abci-fusilamientos-paracuellos-crimen-mas-controvertido-republicanos-guerra-civil-201901110147_noticia.html