



Research Article

# LOS GALINDOS: ANATOMY OF AN INSTITUTIONAL FAILURE. CRIMINOLOGICAL, JUDICIAL AND VICTIMOLOGICAL LESSONS HALF A CENTURY LATER

*English translation with AI assistance (DeepL)*

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## LOS GALINDOS: ANATOMY OF AN INSTITUTIONAL FAILURE. CRIMINOLOGICAL, JUDICIAL AND VICTIMOLOGICAL LESSONS HALF A CENTURY LATER

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**Abstract:** The quintuple murder at the Los Galindos farmhouse (Paradas, Seville, 1975) is one of the most paradigmatic cases of institutional failure in criminal investigations during the late Franco era. Beyond its media notoriety and the enduring mystery it holds in the collective imagination, the case offers an exceptional example of how the convergence of structural shortcomings (police, judicial, forensic and administrative) can completely undermine the possibility of establishing a sound procedural truth. This article analyses, from a multidisciplinary perspective, the root causes of this failure: the early contamination of the crime scene, the absence of forensic protocols, discontinuity in the preliminary investigation, discrepancies between autopsy reports, weaknesses in the chain of custody, and the proliferation of hypotheses that were not subject to progressive vetting. At the same time, it examines the political and institutional context of the period, characterised by outdated structures, the politicisation of the judiciary and a policing model still rooted in antiquated approaches, as well as the impact of media hype, which helped to cement contradictory narratives and generate lasting social stigmas. Furthermore, the study addresses the victimological and sociological dimensions of the case, demonstrating how the public narrative—fuelled for decades by media coverage, fictionalised accounts and anniversary commemorations—replaced the lost case file itself, thereby cementing exaggerated interpretations that affected families and communities. Based on a technical and comparative analysis, a series of lessons are drawn that are applicable to contemporary criminal investigations, particularly regarding the initial preservation of evidence, inter-agency coordination and the responsible management of information.

**Resumen:** El quintuple homicidio del cortijo Los Galindos (Paradas, Sevilla, 1975) constituye uno de los casos más paradigmáticos del fracaso institucional en la investigación criminal durante el tardofranquismo. Más allá de su notoriedad mediática y de la persistencia del enigma en el imaginario colectivo, el caso ofrece un ejemplo excepcional de cómo la convergencia de déficits estructurales (policiales, judiciales, forenses y administrativos) puede desarticular por completo la posibilidad de generar una verdad procesal sólida. Este artículo analiza, desde una perspectiva multidisciplinar, las causas profundas de dicho fracaso: la contaminación temprana de la escena, la ausencia de protocolos criminalísticos, la discontinuidad instructora, la ruptura pericial entre autopsias, la debilidad de la cadena de custodia y la hiperinflación de hipótesis no sometidas a filtrado progresivo. En paralelo, se examina el contexto político-institucional del periodo, marcado por la desactualización de estructuras, la politización judicial y un modelo policial todavía anclado en lógicas anticuadas, así como el impacto del ruido mediático que contribuyó a fijar narrativas contradictorias y a generar estigmas sociales duraderos. Asimismo, el trabajo aborda la dimensión victimológica y sociológica del caso, mostrando cómo el relato público, alimentado durante décadas por coberturas periodísticas, ficciones narrativas y balances de efeméride, sustituyó al propio sumario perdido, consolidando interpretaciones inflacionarias que afectaron a familias y

comunidades. A partir del análisis técnico-comparado, se extraen una serie de lecciones aplicables a la investigación criminal contemporánea, especialmente en materia de preservación inicial de la prueba, coordinación interinstitucional y gestión responsable de la información.

**Keywords:** The “Los Galindos” case; Criminal investigation; Forensic shortcomings; Institutional dysfunction; Media narratives.

**Palabras clave:** Caso “Los Galindos”; Investigación criminal; Deficiencias forenses; Disfunciones institucionales; Narrativas mediáticas.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The notorious quintuple murder committed at the Los Galindos farmhouse (Paradas, Seville) (Figure 1) on 22 July 1975 took place at a particularly unique moment in Spanish history: the twilight of the Franco regime. Over the years, this has made it not only one of the recurring narratives of the Transition, but also the end of a way of understanding police action and judicial investigations – linked to reasons of state – which was undoubtedly far removed from today’s standards of objectivity, quality and meticulousness. It is a well-established fact in contemporary historiography that, in those days, the regime’s institutions showed visible signs of fatigue and maladjustment in the face of a society undergoing transformation (Sánchez Recio, 2017).

**Figure 1**

*View of the Los Galindos farmhouse, situated two kilometres from the town of Paradas (Seville), where the five murders were committed on 22 July 1975 (El País), and courtyards and dwellings inside the farmhouse (Nius Diario).*



The public resonance of the case – widely covered by the national media and evoked in an endless string of anniversaries, TV series and reports in the mainstream media – has established it as one of the emblems of the traditional and clichéd ‘dark side of Spain’, which the country was then trying to leave behind, whilst at the same time becoming a symbol of institutional failure when it came to solving complex crimes in rural settings. It is no surprise, then, that the most significant aspect of the case at the time was not the

constant delay in reaching a satisfactory resolution, but rather that it clearly demonstrated to the emerging public opinion the shortcomings of the policing and judicial systems of the era, which were primarily focused on controlling the population. In this context, the uniqueness of the case went beyond the brutality of the events that took place, insofar as—having gone beyond the limits traditionally imposed by government censorship—it laid bare the investigators’ missteps, the inefficiency in the processing and handling of evidence, legal bureaucratisation and procedural delays, as well as the consequent deterioration of the evidence. All of this, taken together and viewed in perspective, contributed to the impossibility of identifying those responsible and explains the outcome of the case—the expiry of the limitation period—without any need to resort to the usual sensationalist conjectures or peculiar conspiracy theories (Chinchón Álvarez, 2012; Aguilar Fernández, 2013). In short: everything that could go wrong did go wrong.

### 1.1. GENERAL OVERVIEW

An examination of the historiography of Francoism during the period 1969–1975 reveals the institutional crisis of an exhausted regime. Fuelled by the leader’s physical decline, which already foreshadowed the end of an era, internal rifts had emerged amongst the regime’s elites, whilst a policy of political immobility was adopted in the face of growing social modernisation, pressure from an increasingly organised opposition and international isolation (Notario & Corrales Díaz-Pavón, 2025). There was a progressive and increasingly pronounced tension between the socio-economic advances of the technocrats and the institutional deadlock, a contradiction that shaped the functioning of the state apparatus in the final phase of the dictatorship and hindered the development of consistent technical responses to complex problems, including criminal investigations. In this context, the administration of justice and its bureaucratic ecosystem were burdened by long-standing inertia – such as special jurisdictions, a heavily politicised legal culture, and severe organisational shortcomings – all of which were well documented and irreparably hampered their effectiveness (Carrillo, 2023).

In the field of police investigation, the responsibility for solving violent crimes in rural areas fell predominantly to Guardia Civil. Some relevant details will be discussed later, but it is worth noting now that, in the 1970s, still steeped in many of the old traditions that had seen it come into being, the Guardia Civil was a highly militarised force that built its professional identity around discipline, strict command structures, close-knit camaraderie and a strong *esprit de corps*, rather than on the competence and professionalisation of its members. Qualitative studies based on the life stories of guards from that era, such as that by Quesada Aguilar (2021), have interpreted this institutional socialisation using analytical categories such as that of the ‘total institution’ (Goffman, 1961)<sup>1</sup>, highlighting how the training of officers, characterised by indoctrination, shaped

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<sup>1</sup> This concept, which Goffmann developed in relation to the *modus vivendi* of mental institutions, refers to a type of closed, highly regimented and strictly hierarchical social organisation, in which members live, work and carry out all their activities under centralised authority, to a certain extent isolated from the wider social environment. This leads to a blurring of the lines between professional and private life, which become indistinguishable.

their day-to-day practice and the scope of technical autonomy available to frontline personnel. Admittedly, this model proved functional when it was designed in the nineteenth century for the execution of public order tasks and the necessary increase in institutional presence in rural areas and livestock trails, but it exhibited serious limitations when it came to investigating complex crime scenes (Quesada Aguilar, 2024). This shortcoming persisted into the 1970s, insofar as procedures such as the preservation and cordoning off of crime scenes, structured interviews, coordination with forensic specialists, maintaining the chain of custody and other forensic protocols—which were already beginning to be standardised in other contexts—were not an intrinsic part of officers' training or remit.

At the same time, the judicial system had been shaped for decades by a culture of politicisation and control that undermined the professional independence and organisational capacity of the ordinary courts. The Spanish judiciary was marked by post-war purges and exceptional courts, as well as by practices geared towards maintaining the political order rather than the effective protection of rights. The repercussions of all this persisted right up until the final years of the regime. This institutional legacy, combined with inevitable logistical shortcomings – such as a lack of resources, poor document management and the dispersal of archives – as well as procedural routines incompatible with the preservation of physical evidence, helps to explain why particularly complex investigations – and the Los Galindos case was one such example – could easily unravel over time. The loss and contamination of evidence was a common occurrence that arose naturally as circumstances became more complex, without any need for special external interventions aimed at obstructing the investigation (García Valdés, 1975; Chinchón Álvarez, 2012; Carrillo, 2023).

The media coverage of the case – which is perhaps perceived as more of a 'mystery' by the general public due to its 'unsolved' label, rather than , because of any particular criminal interest – serves to reinforce this framing. Striking a balance between public interest in so-called 'crime reporting' and a critical review of the investigation, the accumulation of interlinked errors has been highlighted ad nauseam as more than sufficient cause to explain the impunity surrounding the crime, without the need to invoke conspiracies which, today, would even be pointless to keep alive, since, as far as is known, they would no longer benefit anyone in particular<sup>2</sup>. Half a century after the event took place, news reports and interviews have focused on three factors explaining the police failure: chance, the silence of witnesses and the lack of documentary evidence, and failures in coordination between different institutional actors who operated without a single chain of command or a consistent protocol. All of this resulted in a compromised

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Corroto, P. (2024). The Galindos: a sordid crime in Franco's Spain that still raises questions 50 years on. *El Confidencial* (7 September) [at: [https://www.elconfidencial.com/cultura/2024-09-07/el-crimen-de-los-galindos-50-anos\\_3955151/](https://www.elconfidencial.com/cultura/2024-09-07/el-crimen-de-los-galindos-50-anos_3955151/) , accessed in February 2026]; RTVE. (2025). Five murders, no one found guilty: 50 years since the massacre at the Los Galindos farmhouse in Seville. *RTVE News* (22 July) [at: <https://www.rtve.es/noticias/20250722/cinco-asesinatos-ningun-culpable-aniversario-crimen-galindos/16673146.shtml> , retrieved in February 2026]; Cabrera, E. (2025). The Los Galindos murder: Unresolved questions half a century on. *La Voz del Sur (Seville)* (23 July) [at: [https://www.lavozdelsur.es/ediciones/sevilla/cinco-muertes-ningun-culpable-todas-incognitas-nunca-vamos-encontrar-testimonio-aclare\\_338643\\_102.html](https://www.lavozdelsur.es/ediciones/sevilla/cinco-muertes-ningun-culpable-todas-incognitas-nunca-vamos-encontrar-testimonio-aclare_338643_102.html) , accessed in February 2026].

investigation – which was ultimately lost – and a procedural truth that remained elusive. The truth is that all this is better understood if one considers the two ‘simultaneous transitions’ that revolve around the case:

1. The socio-legal and criminological transition. In the mid-1970s, the social and forensic sciences were experiencing a period of increasing modernisation and standardisation of investigative processes – the autopsy revolution, the nascent use of instrumental techniques, novel criteria for sample traceability, the emergence of psychosocial studies – which were not uniformly incorporated across all jurisdictions, let alone in rural areas with obvious resource shortages and a lack of specialisation among officers.

2. The political and institutional transition. The democratic reform following the end of the Franco regime gradually and completely redefined police and judicial powers, created new legal frameworks and professionalised training. In fact, in 1975, the operational framework of the Guardia Civil remained rooted in outdated protocols and practices .

In light of this combination of factors, it makes sense to re-examine the Los Galindos case as a paradigmatic example of the systemic risk that arises when first-response officers lack sufficient up-to-date training and protocols, and when the judge–investigating magistrate–police–forensic scientists chain lacks synergies and shared standards for preserving physical and documentary evidence (Carrillo, 2023). For this reason, this study, deliberately distancing itself from the ‘mystery’ narrative or outlandish conspiracy theories, focuses on a detailed analysis of ‘lessons learnt’. The reconstruction and technical classification of the police, judicial, forensic and administrative errors identified in the case, cross-referenced with current methodological frameworks for criminal investigation and with comparative literature on systemic organisational failures, enables an understanding of the importance of constant monitoring of protocols, as well as the need for quality standards to ensure sound training and policing practices. Indeed, it is through this process analysis that we see how an accumulation of minor failures—seemingly irrelevant at first—can snowball and intensify when exacerbated by training deficits among front-line officers and their superiors, organisational weaknesses inherent in the judicial system and, of course, the absence of concrete and robust protocols for inter-institutional coordination.

Consequently, more than half a century on, the Los Galindos case remains a first-rate educational opportunity for criminology, procedural law and police science: it is an iconic event, but also a major opportunity from which to conduct an operational analysis of what went wrong and why, under the specific conditions fostered by a declining socio-political model and an inefficient organisational structure. In fact, there is no need for a conspiracy to explain a failed investigation when what exists is the direct manifestation of a dysfunctional system incapable of properly locating, preserving, processing and adjudicating evidence. Methodologically, on the other hand, and in order to ensure the achievement of its proposed objectives, this study is based on a documentary analysis of

primary and secondary sources, complemented by a conceptual review of police investigation models.

## **2. FROM CRIME TO EVIDENCE**

It would serve little purpose to dwell on the account of a crime that has been amply illustrated, recounted and is well known, even down to its most trivial details, such as the Los Galindos case (Figure 2), on which there is also literature – and press coverage – that has been widely read, studied and referenced (e.g. Pérez Abellán, 1976; Gil Chaparro, 1999; Fernández de Córdova, 2024). We shall therefore confine ourselves to presenting an outline of the main events (Table 1) to enable the prospective reader to piece together the various elements discussed and analysed here .

**Figure 2**

*The five people murdered in the Los Galindos crime: Manuel Zapata, Juana Martín, José González, Asunción Peralta and Ramón Parrilla (La Vanguardia)*



**Table 1.**  
*General timeline of the Los Galindos case (1975–2026)*

DATE	EVENT	DESCRIPTION
22 July 1975	Quintuple murder	-Five people were found murdered at the Los Galindos farmhouse (Paradas, Seville): Manuel Zapata, Juana Martín, Ramón Parrilla, José González and Asunción Peralta. -At the time of the crime, the post of presiding judge at the Marchena Judicial District Court was vacant, so the preliminary investigation was provisionally assigned to the judge at the Carmona Court, who was the first to take charge of the case. He arrived at the scene 24 hours after the crime was committed. -The deaths involved three <i>different methods</i> : bludgeoning, gunshots and burning of the bodies.
22–30 July 1975, * *	Initial investigations and confusion	-It was initially believed that the foreman, Manuel Zapata, was the murderer, as his body had not been found; it turned up a week later. -The post-mortem revealed that Zapata was the first victim. -The police investigation was closed without any clear conclusions.
1975–1983	Irregular investigation	-The case is being transferred to a second investigating judge, now within the ordinary jurisdiction of the competent court (Marchena), once the vacancy has been filled. The exact dates are unknown, but sources suggest an early rotation due to initial instability within the court. -Contradictions in police accounts, errors in the handling of evidence, the omission of key clues and numerous rumours about possible suspects. -Various hypotheses are being considered, but no conclusions have been reached. The case has stalled.
1980–1983	Third judge	-A third judge takes charge, reopening the case and initiating proceedings for a second post-mortem to address the shortcomings of the first.
1983	Second post-mortem	-A full second post-mortem is carried out using new forensic techniques. An expanded report reveals serious flaws in the first post-mortem and the initial investigation. -The case is reopened, but again to no avail.
1995	Statute of limitations	-Under the Criminal Code in force (1973), the statute of limitations for the crime is 20 years. Even if the culprit were to come forward, they could not be prosecuted. -Reports and investigations are published to coincide with this date.
2015	Disappearance of the case file	-The case file was lost during an incident involving either a collapse or structural problems in the court buildings (this was not clarified). -Other sources merely state that the disappearance was officially recorded in 2015, which surprised legal practitioners themselves and sparked fierce controversy.

The initial errors in the investigation of the crime, once it had been brought to the attention of officers at the post of Guardia Civil in Paradas, began with the handling and securing of the crime scene. Certainly, from the usual retrospective analyses of the case – which tend to categorise and judge past situations with excessive levity – it must be understood that the conduct of the officers dispatched to the scene at that time may well

seem absurd and nonsensical from today's perspective of a technologically advanced police force, but it makes perfect sense in the Spain of 1975. Whilst in complex investigations the primary criterion is to guarantee the 'quality at source' of all evidence, in the rural context of the late Franco era many stations lacked standardised protocols for cordoning off areas, controlling access, recording entries and exits, or segregating 'hot', 'warm' and 'cold' zones (Ortiz Heras, 2019). Thus, the initial preservation of evidence depended excessively on the theoretical and/or empirical experience – whether extensive or limited – that the officers on duty might have.

It should be borne in mind that, during the Franco regime, the Guardia Civil was a military corps fully integrated into the Army, in accordance with the structure laid down by the 1942 Military Regulations. This determined entry requirements that not only differed significantly from the current ones—which followed the major reforms of the period 1978–1986—but also meant that the Guardia Civil was, essentially, previously a force dedicated to the maintenance of public order rather than the proactive management of complex police investigations. The institutional culture of the Guardia Civil, which was highly disciplinary and military in character, prioritised the fulfilment of general duties over crime scene investigation techniques or other alternative police expertise, which were often even unknown to the officers, explaining why early decisions that were poorly aligned with modern evidential standards undermined the case from the outset (González Martínez & Ortiz Heras, 2007). The press coverage of the time (Figure 3) documents countless instances of unnecessary movements by officers, unintentional contamination, the presence of countless onlookers wandering around the farmhouse, significant disturbances and even the cleaning of the crime scene, the absence of a well-established initial chain of custody, and so on.

**Figure 3**

*Some photographs from the first report drawn up by the Guardia Civil and published in the numerous media outlets covering the case (ABC). On the left, one can see the trail of blood left by one of the victims whilst being moved, and on the right, placed on the bed, a part of a baler, commonly known as 'el pajarito', one of the instruments used in the murders.*



It is worth noting that, at that time, joining the Guardia Civil did not require exceptional abilities or extensive training. Generally speaking, it was sufficient to be a Spanish national, a man aged between 18 and 25 – equivalent to enlisted personnel in the Army – as well as passing the medical and physical examinations, having no criminal record and holding a 'good conduct' certificate issued by the relevant municipal and military authorities. As for the academic requirements for enlistment as a rank-and-file

soldier, these were limited to holding the Certificate of Primary Education<sup>3</sup>, although in practice many command posts required only the ability to read and write correctly, in accordance with the ‘minimum military requirements’. Furthermore, only those officers who distinguished themselves in service for any reason could seek to enter the non-commissioned officers’ ranks, where progression was usually achieved through years of service—a practice later recognised and formally regularised in Royal Decree 1970/1983 (Quesada Aguilar, 2021).

Meanwhile, from 1942 onwards, Regional Academies began to appear, created to train newly recruited constables. The training provided there was a far cry from anything related to modern forensic techniques, as it consisted of strictly military training: weapons, drill, discipline, physical training, rural patrol tactics, and a militarised barracks regime. Police training was restricted to arrest procedures, the drafting of police reports, regulations governing the surveillance of roads and rural areas, and the basic criminal legislation in force during the Franco regime. It was only in the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s that a process of gradual specialisation by unit began, such as the Traffic Police or the Mountain Service, a development which helped to raise the force’s technical competence. It should be borne in mind that the training period for constables ranged from 3 to 6 months, followed by a period of practical training at police stations. This resulted in the average officer being trained for very specific duties, such as: rural and road patrols, security and public order, checking people’s identification documents, guarding public buildings and town halls, carrying out basic judicial procedures, protecting crops, preventing common crimes – such as brawls, agricultural theft or domestic violence – and monitoring population movements. As can be seen, therefore, the vast majority of officers were generalists – not specialists – and the success of their duties depended as much on their individual intelligence as on their ability to get to know the local population, become familiar with the local courts, receive good practical training in the use of weapons, and acquire a thorough knowledge of the terrain that would enable them to move effectively through the countryside, whether on horseback, by motorbike or on foot. Bearing in mind that roughly half of Spain’s population at the time lived in rural areas, and that in many places the Guardia Civil was the only police force available, it is understandable that it had an extensive jurisdictional reach and a wide range of powers (Quesada Aguilar, 2021; Lara Lara, 2024).

The foregoing leads us to identify the second major problem in the Los Galindos investigation during its initial stages. It appears that countless people were interviewed, yet this did not seem to serve much practical purpose, as no one provided information that could be considered relevant. It is a well-established fact that the interviewing of key witnesses requires structure, neutrality, documentation and the management of bias. By the end of 1975, as might be expected, specific training in investigative interviewing techniques was patchy and often left to the officer’s intuition and the urgency to produce reports that would fill bureaucratic gaps. The judicial framework of the Franco regime – always geared towards stability and order – did not favour systematic evidential safeguards in interview procedures, which ultimately led to a multitude of inconsistent accounts, exacerbated by several inevitable secondary factors: the complexity of giving evidence within a narrow socio-cultural context and regarding people one knew<sup>4</sup>; a high

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<sup>3</sup> Equivalent to the 6th year of primary education at the time, or, in other words, schooling up to the age of 12.

<sup>4</sup> The population of Paradas in Seville and its surrounding area stood at around 5,800 registered inhabitants at that time.

concentration of rumours and local accounts; the oppressive context of the era, which may have instilled a fear of speaking out; the inevitable contamination of testimonies; and the loss of memory or the inability to locate key witnesses. All of this increased the difficulty of conducting follow-up interviews with care and efficiency in later stages of the investigation (Alcántara Pérez, 2020). Furthermore, historiography and police and legal studies on the late Franco era repeatedly document the presence of procedural practices that failed to safeguard due process and a legal culture that prioritised social control and denunciation over evidential rigour, and in which training in the psychology of witness testimony among the authorities was virtually non-existent (Carrillo, 2023).

Furthermore, although Spanish forensic medicine was already making progress at that time, the regional implementation of modern techniques and resources was uneven. The standardisation of post-mortem examinations, the collection and labelling of samples, and their storage and transport with traceability were not guaranteed in all judicial districts during the 1970s. In a judicial environment that offered little protection of rights and was poorly resourced, expert validation and the preservation of documentary and material evidence could fail, leading to subsequent inconsistencies. Similarly, and as can be inferred from the foregoing, as regards the modernisation of police techniques, basic training did not include modules on field criminalistics – contamination-proof packaging, numbered seals, cross-signatures, dual-control custody – meaning that the chain of custody and the quality of evidence preservation were often compromised from the very early stages of the investigation (Jamardo Lorenzo, 2024). The barracks culture and the priority given to operational duty meant that forensic techniques were subordinated to routines of availability and territorial presence (Quesada Aguilar, 2021). Let us consider an example relating to the case at hand: although the literature on the subject refers to a ‘first post-mortem examination’, there is no record whatsoever that this was carried out in the strict sense – or where – on the victims of the Los Galindos crime, beyond the initial post-mortem examinations conducted by the Marchena coroner. In fact, the existing literature is generally inconsistent and vague on this matter.

This leads us to the following problem, as the issue was often not so much what actions were or were not taken, but rather the deterioration of case files and the loss and/or dispersal of procedural documents in older cases. This is a phenomenon described in the literature on the judicial history of the Franco regime, in that, beyond any explicit or implicit desire to conceal information, the reality is that special jurisdictions coexisted alongside archives with inconsistent criteria and a justice system with very few operational resources—a fact that greatly increased the risk of gaps and distortions in the documentation (Aguilar Fernández, 2002). Furthermore, in terms of training, police forces did not always incorporate content relating to archival management and evidential documentation – such as inventories, secure pagination and certified referrals – into their training programmes; as a result, the flow of information between police stations, courts and experts could be subject to unsound local practices that often led to the loss, theft and/or misplacement of information. The absence of preservation and transfer protocols exacerbated the fragility of a documentary trail whose traceability already was inherently unclear.

Bearing in mind that the late Franco era, due to its conservative nature, entailed a structural tension between social modernisation and institutional stagnation, it is understandable that the Guardia Civil operated – to a large extent – with the aforementioned characteristics of a ‘total institution’: discipline, indoctrination, the merging of personal life and duty, and a closed corporate identity. Given the absence of

specific technical training and inter-institutional protocols aligned with sound practices that are now undisputed standards, the professional *habitus* tended to reproduce established routines rather than incorporate new police and forensic techniques, as well as rigorous coordination strategies (Quesada Aguilar, 2021). At a systemic level, was there significant strain on institutional structures and a marked mismatch between the state apparatus and a society undergoing transformation, a situation that permeated both the courts and the police forces, leading to strong procedural inertia, regulatory obsolescence and inevitable organisational stagnation (Aguilar Fernández, 2002).

This leads us to an initial set of lessons learnt that highlight the importance of maintaining strict oversight of processes, procedures, standards and initial management, without which it is literally impossible to build a solid police-judicial case (Table 2) and which, evidently, makes the study of this police failure a key point of pedagogical importance. The fact that half a century has passed since these errors were committed does not in any way imply that they can continue to be made; for just as science and technology advance practically on a daily basis, the review of mechanisms for updating and procedures for implementing best practice must also continue to do so, in order to prevent a chain reaction of errors that could derail ongoing investigations.

**Table 2.**  
*Educational and procedural lessons derived from the Los Galindos case*

AREA	CONTENT
<b>Updating and ongoing training in protocols</b>	Cordoning off the scene, access control, recording of footprints and vehicle tracks, scene log and initial evidence handling as part of basic training and periodic refresher courses.
<b>Structured interviews and standardised recording</b>	Training modules on bias, open-ended questions, re-interviewing and documentation (audio–video), with guidelines compatible with judicial instructions.
<b>Interoperability and systemic working</b>	Joint training for police, forensic experts and investigating magistrates on information flow, chain of custody forms, packaging and transport.
<b>Continuing training in field forensic science</b>	Minimum equipment requirements and accessible procedural manuals (seals, envelopes/bags categorised by type, labelling and cross-signing).
<b>Robust and well-established document archiving and custody</b>	Training in inventorying, pagination, certified dispatch and backup systems; appointment of archive managers with cross-checks and rigorous operating protocols.
<b>An organisational culture of improvement</b>	A shift from a general service <i>mindset</i> towards an evidence-based, technical culture; democratic reform professionalised teaching and frameworks, but progress requires ongoing training, standards and evaluation.

### 3. EXCESSIVE NUMBER OF HYPOTHESES

The investigation into the quintuple homicide was characterised, from its very outset, by a disorderly proliferation of investigative hypotheses which, far from guiding the investigators’ analytical process, generated a chaotic structure of mutually incompatible narratives that the subsequent investigation—given the shortcomings described above—was no longer able to un . To understand this phenomenon and draw the necessary lessons from it that are applicable to police investigations, it is necessary to examine the main theories put forward (Table 3), the reasons why none of them could be ruled out on the basis of the available evidence, and to attempt to understand the distorting effect that this interpretative hyperinflation had on the preliminary inquiry.

**Table 3**  
*Comparative summary of the main hypotheses in the Los Galindos case*

HYPOTHESIS	FOR	AGAINST
<b>Internal economic conflict (co-operative fraud)</b> <b>[Best supported]</b>	-Clear motive (financial fraud uncovered by the foreman). -Explains the elimination of potential witnesses. -Consistent with multiple perpetrators and a variety of weapons.	-Based on retrospective reconstructions and indirect testimony. -Lack of material evidence. -Possible <i>ad hoc</i> hypothesis.
<b>Sole perpetrator: a farm worker</b> <b>[Inconsistent]</b>	-Consistent with access to heavy tools and common weapons on the estate.	-It was established that the foreman (the initial suspect) was the first victim of the crime. -Difficult to reconcile with three distinct <i>modus operandi</i> .
<b>Involvement of intruders (multiple assailants)</b> <b>[Less well-supported]</b>	-Explains the variety of murder methods (blows, shotgun, rifle butt, arson). -Consistent with an attack carried out by more than one person.	-No signs of forced entry were found, nor was there an identifiable motive. -Lack of physical evidence linking third parties from outside the farmhouse.
<b>Sociopolitical hypothesis (institutional cover-up)</b> <b>[Contextual, but not material]</b>	-Consistent with the late Francoist context and the local patronage system. -Explains the flawed investigation, the media hype, the contradictory testimonies and the confusion in the line of argument.	-It does not explain who actually committed the crime (it is a theory about the handling of the case, not about the facts). -Lacks documentary evidence to confirm interference. -Lack of motive: if there was something to hide, what was it?

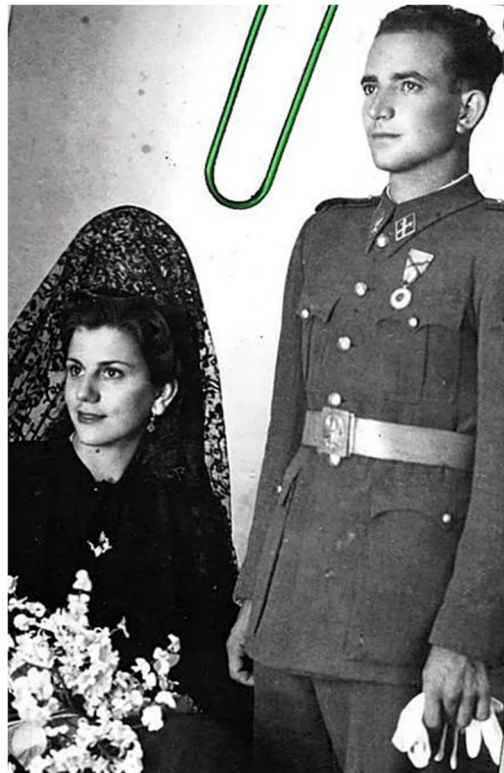
Another added problem was the lack of control over the flow of information that occurred from the very outset, which overwhelmed the authorities . L The scale of the leaked information due to a lack of efficient protocols exceeded all expectations . There was an almost complete lack of control , a fact that led to the immediate emergence of various interpretative narratives running in parallel, in which police sources, witness accounts and media speculation merged seamlessly (A.G.R., 2025). Of these, the hypothesis with the greatest internal consistency was the one linking the events to an economic conflict – fraud linked to agricultural subsidies – within the estate. This theory essentially held that the farm’s foreman and right-hand man, Manuel Zapata Villanueva (1916–1975)—who, incidentally, was a former legionnaire and former Guardia Civil officer—(Figure 4) had uncovered an accounting fraud relating to the management of the Coduva cooperative. This discovery is said to have led to a confrontation with the estate’s owner, the Marquis of Grañina, as well as with his steward, triggering a series of murders intended to eliminate both direct and circumstantial witnesses<sup>5</sup> .

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<sup>5</sup> This interpretation always hovered over the case without ever being conclusively proven. The journalist from the newspaper *\*El País\**, Ismael Fuente Lafuente (1951–1994), was one of the first to explore it in detail [see ‘Más tierra encima del sumario’ (*\*El País\**, 21 October 1986. Available at: [https://elpais.com/diario/1986/10/21/sociedad/530233201\\_850215.html](https://elpais.com/diario/1986/10/21/sociedad/530233201_850215.html) , accessed in February 2026]. It was developed decades later by Juan Mateo Fernández de Córdova (b. 1960), the owner’s son, who pieced together a reconstruction of the events based on family testimonies and other contextual documentation (Fernández de Córdova, 2024).

**Figure 4.**

*Wedding photograph of two of those murdered in the Los Galindos case: the foreman Manuel Zapata, wearing a uniform of Guardia Civil, and his wife, Juana Martín (L as Provincias)*



A second hypothesis, initially favoured by Guardia Civil investigators, drew on experience and posited the crime as the work of a single perpetrator from within the farmstead itself. The foreman was, in fact, considered a suspect because his body was the last to be found; however, when forensic examinations determined that he had been the first victim, thereby completely ruling out his involvement, the plausibility of the single-perpetrator theory began to wane, although speculation continued regarding the involvement of other victims – such as the tractor driver José González Jiménez (1948–1975). Nevertheless, and particularly due to the differences in the weapons and methods used to murder the employees, the hypothesis was called into question (Pérez Abellán, 1976).

A third line of inquiry, based on the diversity of the criminal *modus operandi* employed – bruises caused by a metal object, shotgun shots and blows with the butt of a firearm – as well as on the possibility that there were multiple assailants, suggested that the crime involved individuals from outside the estate who had arrived there for a purpose that was never fully clarified<sup>6</sup>. However, this theory lacked physical evidence, as no strangers could be confirmed to have been in the vicinity on the day in question, there was no evidence of forced entry, and no identifiable motives were presented. Thus, its explanatory power was limited until it was reduced to a mere theory. Why, then, maintain it? Well, in response to the information overload and the tensions this was generating

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<sup>6</sup> There was even talk of drug trafficking, which went on to inspire a rather famous novel of the time (*Los invitados*, a finalist for the Planeta Prize in 1978 and written by the Seville-born author Alfonso Grosso (1928–1995)), but such a claim could never be substantiated.

within the community—tensions which could lead to undesirable consequences such as stigmatisation and public order issues: the crime was so shocking that a small community such as Paradas (Figure 5), completely unaccustomed to events of this nature, could not accept without distress the idea that the criminal – or criminals – might have come from within it and be living among them with impunity (A.G.R., 2025).

**Figure 5.**

*Residents of the municipality of Paradas gathered at the local cemetery during the funeral of four of the crime's victims (ABC)*



Finally, a more structural interpretative approach – akin to conspiracy theory, if you will – emphasised the socio-political context of the late Franco era and the possibility of institutional irregularities or a bias towards protecting influential figures implicated in shady dealings linked to the farmhouse. From this perspective, the shortcomings of the investigation were highlighted, as was the existence of biased media coverage that contributed to framing the case within an atmosphere of rumour and ambiguity. Be that as it may, the problem with this ‘suspicion-based’ approach is that it neither explains the crime – it merely shapes the context – nor did it ever clarify exactly what was being concealed, who was being protected by the alleged cover-up, or to what end (Gil Chaparro, 2024).

What is interesting is that the convergence of all these hypotheses – all of which were possible and all of which were mutually inconsistent – stemmed less from the quality of the inferences made by the investigators than from the extreme fragility of the available evidence. From a criminological point of view, in fact, the case presents several factors that increased the uncertainty and, consequently, the difficulty of the investigation following a clear path:

1. The crime scene was contaminated even before it was formally secured. The farmhouse was an agricultural workplace with a high volume of foot traffic, and the initial handling of the bodies – which took place even before the investigators arrived, who were never able to determine to what extent the scenes had been disturbed – seriously compromised elements critical to the sequential reconstruction of events. These initial shortcomings structurally limited the ability to distinguish between different alternative

scenarios and, consequently, prevented the collection and analysis of information that might have ruled out certain hypotheses.

2. The inconsistency between the forensic examinations carried out in 1975 and the second post-mortems performed in 1983 introduced significant—and never considered during the preliminary investigation—contradictions regarding the order and nature of the deaths. The existence of two divergent expert reports prevented the establishment of a single forensic account and left open interpretations which, in most ordinary, methodical and well-coordinated expert contexts, would have been ruled out.

3. The variety of methods used in the killings presented a complication that neither the police nor the judiciary were able to resolve. Comparative criminology shows that the combination of improvised bladed weapons, firearms and blows with a rifle butt – plus an unnecessary attempt to burn some of the bodies, the motive for which was also not fully understood – may point either to multiple perpetrators or to a single assailant acting under severe personal and situational loss of control. The scarcity of evidence made it impossible to favour either of these possibilities, thereby contributing to the persistence of mutually exclusive scenarios.

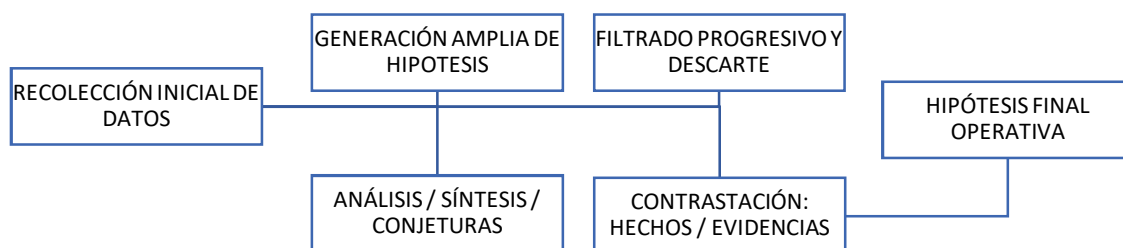
The truth is that, of all the theories that have been put forward regarding the Los Galindos case, the theory of internal economic conflict appears to be the one that best integrates motive, sequence of events and victimological profile, as it provides a clear motive, explains the need to eliminate collateral witnesses and is consistent with the variety of injuries if the involvement of more than one assailant is posited. Although it cannot be fully verified, the comparative robustness of its narrative structure makes it the hypothesis with the greatest forensic coherence. By contrast, the theory of external intruders lacks objective evidential support, whilst the hypothesis of a single perpetrator is hardly compatible with the spatial distribution of the victims and the variety of weapons used; in other words, it runs counter to the vast majority of the behavioural evidence present at the crime scene itself.

The coexistence of multiple hypotheses, without a reasonable operational hierarchy, did little to help solve the case, in so far as it led to an ‘epistemological collapse’ of the investigation (McIntyre, 2006) . Firstly, the cognitive overload experienced by the investigators, given the absence of a basic sequential narrative grounded in solid evidence, prevented the progressive filtering of facts that characterises efficient criminal investigations (Figure 6). This was exacerbated by media pressure and the mass dissemination of contradictory accounts which, at the local level, contributed to increasing information noise and conferring the status of operational plausibility on narratives that were nothing more than rumours and slander, and were therefore completely unverifiable. The consequences of this extended far beyond the crime itself, insofar as the small community of Parada, caught up in this whirlwind of information, was scarred by communal stigmas, false attributions, biases and narratives of wrongful guilt which not only shaped its future in the years that followed, but also, as highly disruptive factors, indirectly influenced the institutional perception of the case, as disjointed testimonies, tall tales, rumours and so on proliferated. And this is the crux of the matter: the investigation into the Los Galindos crime never managed to progress from the stage of proposing scenarios to that of systematically testing hypotheses, which ruled out any possibility of analytical clarification. This methodological shortcoming largely explains why the case was shelved in 1988 and definitively time-barred in 1995, whilst

also allowing us to draw a wide range of operational conclusions regarding what should – or should not – be done in the context of a criminal investigation.

**Figure 6**

*Standard procedure for the progressive filtering of information during the investigation*



#### 4. DEFICIENT PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION AND CRIMINOLOGICAL DISASTER

It is true that the preliminary investigation into the Los Galindos case constitutes a paradigmatic example of the structural weaknesses of the Spanish judicial system in the final months of the Franco regime and the early stages of the Transition, but not only that. It is also an ideal educational example of the chain of legal errors that can derail a preliminary investigation. When analysed from a strictly legal-procedural perspective, the course of the preliminary investigation into the Los Galindos crime presents three fundamental problems: discontinuity in the investigation, evidential deficiencies and the consequent expiry of the limitation periods.

To begin with, the fact that the investigation was marked by successive changes of judge, unjustified delays and a notable lack of coordination between the police and judicial authorities did little to help the case. The extensive journalistic analysis of the time insists that the first judge in charge of the investigation did not arrive at the farmhouse until 24 hours after the crime, an unacceptable delay which had irreversible effects on the chain of custody and the reliability of the initial forensic findings. Similarly, the forensic evidence suffered an internal inconsistency arising from the existence of two rounds of post-mortem examinations: the initial ones, deemed deficient, and the second set, carried out eight years later, which yielded contradictory conclusions regarding the sequence of events, injuries and *post-mortem* movements of the bodies. These discrepancies undermined the validity of the biomedical evidence and made it impossible to establish a legally valid hypothesis based on forensic evidence. It was now pointless to debate – despite the controversy that arose amongst specialists – whether the first or the second post-mortem examination was ‘the correct one’, as so much time had elapsed between them that the new information was of little use<sup>7</sup>. In this context, the case being shelved in 1988 – and its definitive expiry of the limitation period in 1995 – served as a formal closure of the case, but was not conclusive from an epistemic point of view, a fact that can only be regarded as a complete legal failure.

<sup>7</sup> Occasional public debates still take place on this subject, such as the one held at the Royal Academy of Medicine and Surgery of Seville (RAMSE), as part of the ‘Medicine and Cinema’ series: ‘Controversies in legal and forensic medicine: 40 years since the Galindos murder’, published in *Memorias Académicas de la Real Academia de Medicina y Cirugía de Sevilla*\*, 2015, 171–172.

The combination of these elements places the Los Galindos investigation within what legal literature considers a ‘structural failure’, which is usually linked more to systemic dysfunctions in the process than to individual errors on the part of the investigating judge (Aguilar Fernández, 2002). In fact, from a legal-doctrinal perspective, the Los Galindos case is of great educational value, as it illustrates the difficulty of sustaining a viable charge when the following factors occur simultaneously: 1) a contaminated crime scene; 2) a breakdown in forensic analysis; 3) disjointed witness statements; 4) delays in the preliminary investigation; and 5) the expiry of the limitation period. From a purely criminological perspective, this led to failures in four fundamental areas: crime scene management, hypothesis modelling, the use of forensic evidence, and contextual interference.

The delayed arrival of the judicial authorities and the permissive attitude towards access by workers, neighbours, onlookers and journalists resulted in a degree of contamination that was as extraordinary as it was irreversible. The news archive highlights how the property remained open for hours and how numerous people handled objects, furniture and bodies without any police supervision. These events not only compromised the chain of custody but also prevented the reconstruction of blood trails and fingerprints or the clarification of initial positions. It is possible that this, compounded by inadequate preparation, led to inefficient hypothesis modelling (Gómez, 2025). From the outset, the Guardia Civil accumulated an excessive number of possible scenarios that could not be systematically prioritised or ruled out. The absence of progressive filtering – a central element of modern methodologies – contributed to an analytical breakdown, in which the multitude of theories supplanted inductive analysis based on verifiable evidence. Subsequently, despite attempts to steer the investigation back on track by bringing in new and better-trained professionals, this served little purpose, as the damage had already been done. To paraphrase Edmond Locard’s (1877–1966) famous assertion that ‘time passing is truth fleeing’, in this case—given the methodological and investigative difficulties described—the statement ‘ ’ is paradigmatic (Saferstein, 2011).

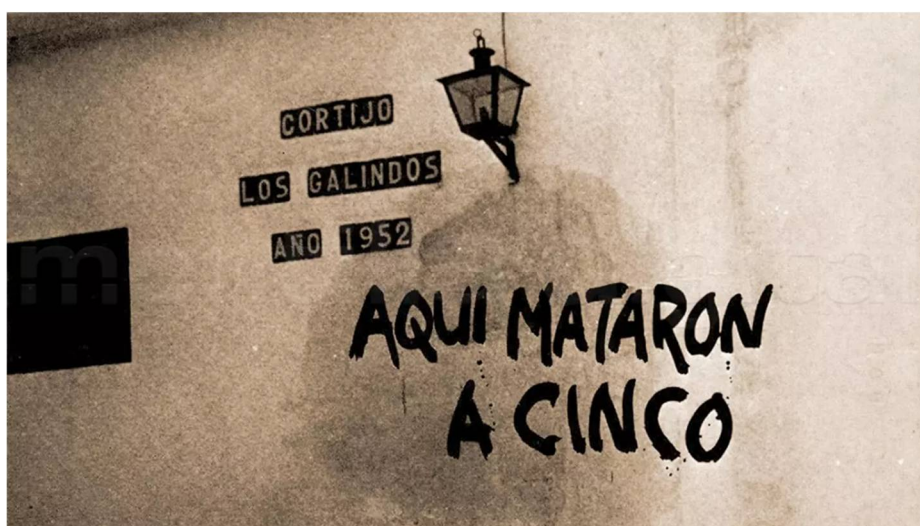
With regard to the forensic evidence itself, it seems obvious to point out—as it is a well-established fact—that it can both solve a case and, ultimately, contribute to general confusion, as it is of little use when there is no adequate narrative timeline into which to fit it. The inadequacy of the initial post-mortems and the contradictions introduced by the subsequent ones resulted in an evidential structure that could not be consolidated. Whilst contemporary criminalistics emphasises that expert consistency is essential to underpin operational hypotheses, the Los Galindos case stands as a clear example of inefficiency: the divergence in expert opinions acted precisely as an epistemic barrier, insofar as it failed to curb contextual interference. Furthermore, the media hype and the patronage-based structure of rural Andalusia in 1975, as well as the institutional biases of the final phase of Franco’s dying regime, created a perverse ecosystem that was highly unsuitable for fostering a rigorous and well-systematised investigation. Thus, viewed from a general perspective, the famous Los Galindos case can be interpreted as a textbook example of systemic criminological failure, in which an accumulation of methodological and structural errors—rather than a single critical failure—led to the establishment of a ‘poisoned tree’ that prevented the production of a valid inference regarding the perpetrator that was not already contaminated.

## 5. FINAL REFLECTIONS: THE CONSTRUCTION OF A NARRATIVE

Ever since it took place, the Los Galindos murder has become a case that has received significant media attention and has traditionally been viewed – depending on the context – either as the last major crime of the twilight years of the Franco regime, or as the first major crime of the Transition. In retrospect, the reports and successive anniversary reviews consistently highlight two fundamental features: 1) the extraordinary diversity of accounts regarding motives and perpetrators; and 2) the case's enduring status as a symbol of unresolved issues in the public memory, both in Andalusia and across Spain, a fact that may well be the reason for its continued relevance and almost constant resurgence (Corroto, 2024). The reconstruction of the crime, summarising decades of coverage, emphasises the coexistence of three different *modus operandi* and the impossibility of attributing responsibility, a fact that has fuelled open-ended narratives and speculation of all kinds. This open-ended narrative, reinforced by summaries that consistently highlight the same central idea – five murders and no culprit – (Figure 7), has cemented the case's media status more as an 'enigma' typical of mystery programmes or suitable for amateur detectives, rather than as an unsolved legal case. This has facilitated its transition from the purely police, judicial, educational and investigative spheres into popular culture and fiction. An unjust situation for the victims, who have never received justice and have instead been subjected to much questionable treatment, whilst being of little use to criminological studies

**Figure 7**

*Iconic photograph of the façade of the Los Galindos farmhouse with the graffiti 'Five were killed here', which drew attention to what had happened (La Vanguardia). Although it appears that this anonymous graffiti did exist, it was immediately removed by the farmhouse's owners (the effects of the cleaning in the photograph) can be seen. The widely circulated photograph, which is not authentic, shows a reconstruction created for the cover of the book \*Orgía de sangre\* (1976) by Francisco Pérez Abellán.*



Journalistic literature and publishing have contributed decisively to this perception (Figure 8). The idea has been repeatedly put forward that the Los Galindos crime was a 'crude and perfect' one – crude in its execution, perfect because it was never solved – (Gil Chaparro, 1999), a phrase that the press has repeated ad nauseam as an iconic, albeit insufficient, summary of the case. On the other hand, in what is nothing more than the

manifestation of a trend inherent to the changing times, the revival of the tragedy’s memory has reintroduced and popularised the conspiracy theory positing economic fraud as the motive and the subsequent self-serving cover-up as the aim. This has led to a ‘structural’ reinterpretation of the case within the media sphere, which has gradually distanced it from the original explanations—centred on crime of passion and the ‘dark side of Spain’—and moved it into the realm of conspiracy theories.

**Figure 8**

*Covers of investigative books (Orgía de sangre, 1976; El crimen de los Galindos, 1999; El crimen de Los Galindos, 2024) and novels (Los invitados, 1978; Inocentes, 2025) on the Los Galindos case.*



The fact is that the case’s reception by society cannot be separated from its initial fictionalisation. The novel *\*Los invitados\** (Grosso, 1978) offered a highly evocative narrative framework that interwove procedural elements, intrigue and social allegory, thereby establishing a literary poetics of the rural enigma that has had a ripple effect on the collective imagination. The widespread circulation of this work, its reissues and reinterpretations have reinforced the transition from the ‘case’ to the ‘story’, thereby fostering the consolidation of quasi-serialised interpretative frameworks – intruders, crimes of passion, cannabis trafficking, settling of scores – which the formal investigation was never able to confirm or refute, but which popular culture institutionalised as a repertoire of possibilities, even giving rise to films that were highly controversial in their day and which bear only a purely incidental resemblance to the known and verified facts<sup>8</sup>. Grosso’s novel, written in the accusatory narrative style directed at the authorities that was characteristic – and indeed logical – of the time in which it was written, contributed greatly to the spread of the conspiracy theory:

“It has been proven, by irrefutable testimony, that Manuel Zapata Villanueva made more than one conference call in the first few days of July 1975. However, the official investigators did not appear to be interested in getting to the bottom of these matters. It was not just this, but many other possible threads of the plot that were inexplicably ignored; for example, neither the idiosyncrasies of those murdered nor their social and emotional relationships were studied from a psychological perspective, as they should have been. According to the reports we have been

<sup>8</sup> There was a 1987 film adaptation of Grosso’s novel of the same name, directed by the filmmaker Víctor Barrera Rodríguez (b. 1933), which was of questionable quality and caused a great public stir. There was even a silent protest organised by Paradas Town Council on the grounds that the film ‘morally degraded’ the families of two of the victims of the quintuple murder. The González family formally lodged a complaint the film against for alleged slander and defamation, on the grounds that it linked the murdered José González Jiménez—whom the film even ridiculed—to fictional events. The town’s mayor even called for a court injunction to ban the film [see “Demonstration in Paradas against the film ‘Los invitados’”, *El País*, 26 February 1987. Available at: [https://elpais.com/diario/1987/02/26/cultura/541292412\\_850215.html](https://elpais.com/diario/1987/02/26/cultura/541292412_850215.html), accessed in March 2026].

able to obtain thanks to the cooperation of residents of Paradas, who finally decided to break their long silence, the simplicity of the characters involved in the tragedy that ravaged the farmhouse is highly debatable, to the extent that, before we knew whether we were finally on the right track, we came to question whether this could be a rural tragedy or an act of revenge, precisely because of the complexity of the characters” (Grosso, 1978: 207–208).

At a local level, the emerging narrative has sought to destigmatise the victims and the municipality of Paradas – which has been marred by a troubling historical stain – by highlighting the severe impact that the initial sensationalist media coverage, as well as decades of rumours, have had on the community and its people. For example, the novel *\*Inocentes\** (Pastor Rodríguez, 2025) – which includes an official statement issued by the Town Council – emphasises this idea: dignity must be restored to the murdered workers, and the ‘erroneous accusations’ and ‘stigmas’ that the media narrative has ingrained in the town’s collective memory must be corrected. This tension between external mythologisation and local redress illustrates the extent to which the dissemination and reception of the crime have been a struggle over the framing of the case, and offers a perfect example of the socio-political damage – and even public order issues – that can arise from a poor police investigation and a flawed judicial inquiry (Anrango Narváez, 2023; Tuesta Castro, 2024).

The ‘fraud hypothesis’ – perhaps because its intricacies link it to the frequent cases of institutional corruption in the waning days of the Franco regime and largely aligns with the element of ‘third-party intervention’ in the events – has been the one that has gradually gained greater interest in the public sphere. This reinterpretation is evident in key media reports that have brought the possible economic and administrative motives and their link to the Coduva cooperative back into the spotlight, whilst emphasising the shortcomings of the initial investigation, which they portray as perhaps ‘biased’ (Fernández de Córdova, 2024). This interpretative shift does not close the case, and in fact does not even fully explain it, but it serves perfectly to reshape the media agenda: rather than the questions relating to the psychology of the individuals that Grosso demanded, or delving into a muddled examination of possible domestic tensions and quarrels, it presents a suggestive framework of organised crime – estate management, money flows, loyalties and silences – very much in line with current journalistic narratives. Undoubtedly, as has already been said, this theory could be the most coherent of those available, but it must be emphasised that it was never proven in court, nor is there – or at least none has been found – any document or evidence that could corroborate it.

The sociology and psychology of communication explain the enduring presence of certain cases in the collective imagination due to their heuristic capacity to speak in the present of past times and institutions, as well as their symbolic power (Dittus, 2006; Martínez Posada & Muñoz Gaviria, 2009). The Galindos case met the perfect conditions for this, as it not only occurred at a moment of historical significance but also served as a symptomatic event for a country in transition: residual political patronage, weak safeguards, outdated institutions and a justice system caught between the practices of a sclerotic regime and emerging democratic demands. Hence, reinterpretations of the narrative emphasise the statute of limitations and the failure to bring the case to light as the ultimate core of the case’s meaning: what society remembers is no longer so much the ‘who’ or the ‘why’, but the failure itself. This collective memory is fuelled by media rituals – anniversaries, documentaries, TV series – which revive the enigma and, at the same time, reproduce the noise, insofar as each retelling introduces slight variations on previous perspectives. Thus, new testimonies and updates to the hypotheses emerge

which, without a solid expert filter, serve only to expand the range of narrative possibilities.

The problem inherent in this dynamic – and this would now take the debate into the realm of a pertinent victimological reflection – is that this noise had – and continues to have – a social cost: it cemented labels and suspicions that had such a profound impact on families and professions, as is expressly denounced today by those who demand a dignified remembrance for the victims, since the valid point of reference for the case is no longer the investigation itself – which does not even exist – but rather an inflated, und public narrative inherited from decades of more or less questionable media coverage (Maiorano, Travers & Vallières, 2023). Furthermore, processes of local symbolic reparation, as the comparative literature on memory management suggests, are necessary insofar as they fulfil functions of community restoration even when criminal justice has failed.

The truth of the matter—and let this serve as a key pedagogical conclusion—is that the media and social narrative surrounding the events at Los Galindos reinforces the central thesis of this article: the failure of the investigation cannot be reduced to isolated or specific errors, as it is the result of a dysfunctional interplay between four levels of analysis that would require a detailed study and which, in reality, can be applied to countless failed police investigations and ineffective judicial inquiries; as such, they may inspire a review of protocols, as well as ongoing efforts to update ‘best practices’, beginning with well-established controls over information flows and leaks:

1. Serious initial investigative shortcomings – a contaminated crime scene, the judge’s late arrival, and a breakdown in the expert assessment – which prevented the production of sufficient conclusive evidence and, consequently, the formulation of hypotheses with probative value.

2. A proliferation of theories fuelled by intense media coverage, fictionalised retellings and anniversary round-ups, which have turned the case into an open ‘cultural asset’ rather than a judicial file, shifting the focus from the testing of hypotheses to narrative consumption.

3. Long-standing hypothetical and novelistic reframings – from the incident itself to a financial motive – which have enhanced the analytical coherence of the public narrative, but which lack the capacity to remedy the original evidential deficit, as they are nothing more than *ad hoc* reconstructions without an empirical basis.

4. Dynamics of social memory – particularly at the local level – which have sought to satisfy a demand for symbolic redress in the face of inherited stigmas, demonstrating that ‘the case’ has shifted from the police and judicial sphere to that of sociology and criminal policy. As a result, it is now firmly established within the realm of actions linked to the management of memory rather than within the context of criminal justice.

From an academic perspective, the Los Galindos crime constitutes a borderline case in which the ideal model of progressive filtering that should guide a criminal investigation has been supplanted by a contest of narratives with scant evidential support. As a result, the system failed insofar as it did not achieve the desired transition from the formulation of scenarios to the systematic testing of hypotheses, and the media amplified the

analytical noise that the – already weakened – investigation was unable to absorb. Admittedly, this implies that the available evidence does not allow for a definitive conclusion regarding the perpetrator, but it does, nevertheless, allow for a conclusion regarding the assessment of the process: Los Galindos exemplifies an epistemological collapse brought about by the convergence of judicial shortcomings, a proliferation of hypotheses and media coverage which, by turning the case into a ‘criminal myth’, reinforced its unresolved nature as its defining characteristic. That is why, more than half a century on, it survives less as a crime than as a narrative, and this is precisely the great lesson it offers; it has become an uncomfortable mirror of institutional fragility in situations of political tension and of the ambivalences of the public sphere when the truth established by evidence cannot be restored. Indeed, this is its greatest lesson: the ambiguous terrain in which conspiracy theories about the events take root so readily.

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