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Rethinking collective trauma in the 20th century: Memory, victimhood and the temporality of the Spanish Civil War

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Abstract This paper aims to address the conceptual and ethical problems that arise when scholars of contemporary European history resort to the notion of collective trauma. Different historical works on the reconstruction of Europe in the second half of the 20th century have relied on the notion of trauma to grasp the evolution of the memory of violence. More specifically, however, this paper focuses on the problems that arise from defining the Spanish Civil War as a collective trauma by examining the antagonistic ways in which the traumas derived from this conflict have been embodied.

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Introduction: Conceptual Problems Concerning Collective Trauma

The historian Ernst Nolte (1993) describes the aftermath of the Holocaust for German society as a 'past that will not pass' (p. 18). In contrast to Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich (1975), who asserted that, two decades after the Second World War, Germany was unable to acknowledge its responsibility for the crimes committed, Nolte argued that the burden of collective guilt derived from Nazi crimes fell strongly upon the shoulders of Germans in the 1960s and 1970s. From his point of view, German culture

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and historiography had been depicted through the lens of the memory of the Shoah, a memory full of shame and guilt that 'seems to be becoming more vital and more powerful […] as a past that is in the process of establishing itself in the present or that is suspended above the present like an executioner's sword' (Nolte, 1993, p. 18). Nolte's interpretation is based on the assumption that the past usually simply passes, which implies a linear temporality according to which, in normal circumstances, it is just remembered, retold, and, with the passing of centuries, forgotten. In contrast, Nolte's analysis of the memory of the Shoah highlights its exceptionality. It reveals the unconformable presence of this *haunting* past in the decades after the conflict. Therefore, post-Holocaust Germany undoubtedly became a breeding ground for historians and other scholars to discuss the embedding of complex historical processes via the notion of trauma.

However, as the years have passed, this vocabulary has been extended to encompass other historical cases. Thinkers such as Enzo Traverso (2005), Paul Ricoeur (2004) and Henri Rousso (1991) argue that the memories of certain events of Western civilisation in the 20th century correspond to the temporality that underlies traumatic experiences. Although collective trauma has become one of the lenses through which memories of the 20th century are understood, some European historical cases have attracted less attention than the German and French cases. One such case is the remembrance of the Spanish Civil War (1936–39). Discussions about the possibility of understanding this memory as a collective trauma have only started to take place within academia in recent decades. It is precisely the theoretical problems stemming from recourse to the notion of trauma to delve further into the memory of this event on which I wish to shed light. Resorting to such terminology within historiographical or sociological discourse is not unproblematic. The bridge from the individual to the collective cannot be crossed so easily. As Schwab (2010) notes, 'Collective trauma is passed down to individuals in multifarious and refracted ways' (p. 42). Thus, it is necessary to consider further the assumptions that underlie this notion.

'Trauma' was first used to refer to the effect of a wound whose scar had not healed. The term was later adopted by psychoanalysis to denote scars left in the consciousness by the experience of dreadful events. In the second chapter of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Sigmund Freud (1920/1995) described the suffering of people who experienced frightening events that were impossible to predict or anticipate. Although Freud's patients had escaped unharmed from those situations, their dreams 'repeatedly [took] them back to the situation of their original misadventure, from which they [awoke] with a renewed sense of fright' (1914/1950, p. 15). Images related to such events emerged in the victims' consciousnesses, causing feelings of grief and anxiety, which Freud defined as 'traumatic neurosis'. The original events had been so intense that they had become encrusted in their psyches and, after a period of time, emerged

uncontrollably and unwilled, to a point that 'the patient is assumed to be, so to speak, psychically fixated' (p. 14). This is why trauma should be understood as a crisis of temporality (Green, 2002). Traumatic experiences are not embedded within the autobiographical memory of the subject. Properly speaking, the experience is not remembered but instead appears with the same vividness as the present after a long period. It is thus a past that has not passed and that, therefore, will not stop passing, invading, and haunting the present.

There is no easy way of simplifying how trauma is repeated across history. However, trauma theory has moved on from the assumptions underlying this Freudian psycho-economical approach to trauma in acknowledging the complex conceptual problems related to the concept of collective trauma. For example, Cathy Caruth (1992) asserts that trauma consists of unassimilated experience that returns to disturb the survivor (p. 9). It does not return through 'the reappearance of images' (p. 14) but rather through stories by means of which a previous wound cries out. By contrast, Marianne Hirsch's (2012a) approach to trauma focuses less on stories or images and more on the 'affective force' still attached to traumatic experiences years after the original psychic wound. As Lerner and Micale (2001) have argued, 'trauma is nothing but elastic' (p. 4). Nevertheless, there are some commonalities among approaches to trauma from which a theoretical basis for analysing collective trauma might be established. As Lucy Bond and Stef Craps (2019) have stated, trauma refers to a past experience that is not completely past inasmuch as it is 'alive in the present; and its legacies continue to resonate in complex and controversial ways' (p. 2).

In spite of the aforementioned theoretical problem underlying this 'conceptual transference' from psychoanalysis to history, the vocabulary of trauma was increasingly used within the field of memory studies at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century to such a degree that trauma studies became interdisciplinary and began to address issues beyond the scope of psychiatry. As soon as a traumatic experience is considered to extend beyond the individuals who have suffered it directly, the following conceptual question emerges: How can trauma be shared by different subjects? To address this problem, James Young (2002) and Anne Kaplan (2005) use the notions of 'vicarious trauma' and 'mediated trauma'. According to Kaplan, traumatic experiences such as 9/11 make us perceive that, when overwhelming events happen, the borders between the individual and collective become blurred. She further claims that the media plays an essential role in producing and spreading collective trauma: 'Most of us most of the time experience trauma in the secondary rather than direct position' (p. 40), through mediated rather than direct experience. This view of the role of images and narratives of traumatic experiences is taken to its ultimate conclusion in Wulf Kansteiner's (2004) critique of trauma studies, who emphasises in one of his essays the role of narrative devices in healing traumatic experiences and reframing the meanings associated with them: 'The experience of violence, pain and trauma is always socially mediated. The way we react to

and try to make sense of our suffering cannot be separated from the specific social contexts which have shaped us' (p. 211). This relevance of the socio-historical context in which collective traumas are framed raises the question of what provokes collective trauma – the experience itself or the cultural frames within which it is defined as traumatic.

The problems regarding *collective trauma* are not only theoretical and epistemological but also ethical and political. Referring to a traumatic experience within the context of war and violence implies that someone was a victim and that it is the victims who have acquired the right to claim recognition and restoration. This aspect of victimhood in relation to collective trauma makes the controversies that revolve around this notion even more difficult to solve. The politics of memory have been so focused on victimisation over the last four decades that we must question whether victimhood is based only on violence suffered or on how such violence is retrospectively depicted by public institutions.

To challenge the philosophical and conceptual assumptions that underlie *collective trauma,* I apply this concept to the aftermath of the Spanish Civil War. In *Understanding Others*, Dominick LaCapra (2018) asserted that 'Despite the considerable amount of work already devoted to the topic, the nexus of trauma, history, memory and identity is still of widespread interest, and much remains to be investigated on both empirical and theoretical levels' (p. 81).To fill this gap, this paper addresses these issues in relation to the memory of the Spanish Civil War.

The Spanish Civil War as a Collective Trauma

In opposition to the social and political reforms supported by liberals and left-wing political parties, and against the background of social turmoil, economic crisis, and political polarisation within the Second Spanish Republic (1931–36), the most reactionary sectors of the Spanish army organised a *coup d'état*, the failure of which gave rise to the most dreadful event in contemporary Spanish history: the Spanish Civil War (1936–39). The three years of this war saw around 470,000 casualties on the front lines and approximately 200,000 people killed in rearguard actions. Moreover, after winning the war, Francoist authorities strongly repressed the supporters of the Second Republic, creating 50,000 more victims. After the war, these victims were publicly humiliated, and thousands more were killed, had their properties expropriated by the new state, or were forced into exile. The implications of the Spanish Civil War extended into the international arena, in which context it is also considered as a prelude of World War II and described by historians as one step in a stream of violence that spread across Europe during the mid- 20th century.

However, Spanish society came to terms with its past in different ways from other Europeans. While the post-war generation in Germany overcame its 'inability to mourn' (Mitscherlich and Mitscherlich, 1975), those born during the Spanish post-war period took part in a 'pact of oblivion' (Encarnación, 2014). To avoid social confrontation, the Spanish Civil War was not publicly commemorated or discussed, an attitude that also underlay the transition to democracy (1975–82). During the 1970s and 1980s, therefore, efforts were made to erase the politics of the Civil War from the collective cultural memory. This silence about the past had certain material consequences for the defeated side. Most of the roughly 114,000 corpses (Ferrándiz, 2008) were never found, identified, or even searched for by public authorities, either during the dictatorship or the democratic period. The large numbers of supporters of the Republic, including soldiers, politicians, and civilians, who remain unidentified in mass graves constitute an unsettled historical debt.

From a diachronic perspective, there is a certain continuity to the situation of these victims. As Armengou and Belis (2004) point out, 'They disappeared three times: in death during the war, in silence during the dictatorship, and in forgetfulness during democracy' (my translation, p. 58). Thus, the Spanish transition to democracy is unique within the Western European context for various reasons. During the 1980s and 1990s, it was considered a model of how to accomplish political change without violence within the international arena. However, as the years have passed, the flaws in this process with regard to victims' rights have been emphasised. Whereas some European countries, such as Germany, Portugal, and France, engaged in transitional justice, this was not the case in Spain, some of whose historians and politicians thought that judging the crimes of the dictatorship might make the path to democracy more difficult, supplying the main justification for the 'complicity of silence'.

Many studies of the Spanish transition to democracy have analysed the role played by the collective memory of the Spanish Civil War. In these studies, the evolution of collective memory during that transition has taken the form of an opposition between official memory – supported by the media and political parties – and counter- or unofficial memory – supported by the relatives of the disappeared. The former regard the war as a historical tragedy and encourage Spanish society to forget historical debts and look toward the future, whereas the latter focus on the necessity to restore the rights of the victims on the defeated side who were not commemorated in the public sphere during the post-war period or the dictatorship (1939–77). Each of these contesting war narratives has its own memory makers, whose struggles to shape the public memory of the war offer a frame for understanding the evolution of that memory during the transition to democracy and beyond.

In this paper, I analyse the development of, and relations between, these two different ways of remembering and dealing with the past, drawing on current trends in the field of trauma studies. By using ideas from trauma studies to

address the foundations of both ways of depicting and displaying these violent legacies, this paper echoes a number of historical and sociological works that have drawn on psycho-social terminology. In contemporary Spanish historiography, the notion of trauma has been embedded within discourse not just as a metaphor but as an explanatory resource that sheds light on the Spanish pact of oblivion. According to Paloma Aguilar (2002) and Walther Bernecker and Sören Brinkman (2009), during the 1970s and 1980s most of Spanish society remembered the Civil War as a period of senseless violence and collective insanity. Some of the labels under which this event was represented and remembered within Spanish society include 'the great catastrophe of 1936', 'the Uncivil War', 'the fratricidal struggle', 'the hideous massacre', and 'the unspeakable tragedy' (Izquierdo, 2014). Those tropes capture the psycho-social factors that were considered to underlie both the causes and the consequences of the Spanish Civil War and that shape collective forms of remembrance. On the official view, its outbreak was reframed as the result of a 'collective madness', and its effects were considered unbearable and unspeakable. Some scholars have suggested that such references to the psycho-social factors underlying the memory of the war indicate the convenience of resorting to the notion of trauma to frame the social ways of remembering and dealing with this past. As Omar Encarnación (2014) points out,

> The most popular explanations for the rise of forgetting in Spain all relate to how the traumas of the past affected the political mindset of the Spanish political elite and society at large around the time of the democratic transition. The best known among these 'psycho-political' explanations is the theory of *traumatic memory*, which stresses that during the transition the Spaniards willed themselves into political amnesia as a direct consequence of the collective traumas inflicted by the Civil War and the postwar period. (p. 11, emphasis in original)

References to 'the Spaniard's political amnesia' (p. 13) suggest that the Spanish preferred not to look back to this past because it was so unsettling. However, this view, as Encarnación has pointed out (p. 14), fails to consider the role played by the political elites and the media in promoting such social forgetfulness. The repression and recollection of traumatic experiences depend not only on the overwhelming nature of the events but also on how cultural memories and politics have reframed the events in the intervening years. This brings to the fore the ambiguities inherent in the concept of trauma within the Spanish context. Trauma cannot be applied in a historical context without enquiring into all the theoretical and practical problems entailed in dealing with collective trauma: How has traumatic experience been displayed across space and time? Who can claim to be the victims of this traumatic experience? This paper's main contribution to this field is to argue that when historians,

sociologists, and journalists used this concept to define the attitude of Spanish society during the 1970s and 1980s, they conflated two different ways of understanding trauma, which led to different understandings about the events of the war, the identity of the victims, and the bearers of moral duty towards them.

Between Postmemory and Cultural Memory

To highlight the contrast between the two ways of presenting Spain's collective trauma since the Spanish Civil War, this paper employs Marianne Hirsch's (2012a) concept of 'postmemory' and Aleida Assmann's (2016) concept of 'cultural memory'. Insofar as these notions describe memories that extend beyond the experiences remembered by witnesses of events, they are helpful for considering how the Civil War was both remembered and forgotten by the generations that did not experience it but grew up under its traces. However, the ways in which these two concepts explain how traumatic experiences have been presented within the collective field are far from similar.

Postmemory deals with the transmission of emotions and affects stemming from traumatic experience between fathers, mothers, sons, daughters, and so forth. It refers to 'experiences they "remember" only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors which they grew up with' (Hirsch, 2012b, p. 22). Therefore, addressing the present topic by using Hirsh's postmemory entails a 'bottom-up' approach to Spanish Civil War trauma. By contrast, cultural memory concerns how cultural and political frames stabilise and institutionalise memories through rituals, museums, and commemorations. It aims to reframe the meanings ascribed to traumatic experiences as these are remembered by individuals. Therefore, analysing the Spanish Civil War using the concept of cultural memory means adopting a 'top-down' approach. Postmemory and cultural trauma represent widely different methodological perspectives, and their use in relation to Spanish 20th century history makes them not just different but also antagonistic. The below analysis reveals that the consequence of the traces of trauma in the present may be entirely different, even antithetical, depending on how it has been transmitted and depicted across generations and how the shattered identity of the national population has been rebuilt. Michael Richards (2013) highlights

> the ambiguities in Spain of a situation where one section of society feels that the violence of the war is intimately present while, simultaneously, another views the suffering and terror as belonging to the distant past, in part because they belong to a tradition which formerly monopolised representation of the collective trauma. (p. 339)

Some of the features of postmemory and cultural trauma are analysed below to further examine how these views are opposed.

Regarding postmemory, according to contemporary trauma theory, the emergence of trauma involves two processes: the suffering of a painful wound; and the inability to narrate or communicate this unsettling event to others or to oneself. For this reason, being a victim of trauma not only affects the individual's psychic life but also that of his or her descendants, as long as they have to live under the influence of a hidden truth that haunted their parents. In this regard, Abraham and Torok's (1994) theory of a transgenerational phantom complements Hirsch's ideas about the process through which the unfinished experiences of parents are handed down to their descendants. According to the authors, 'the patient appears possessed not by his own unconscious but by someone else's' (p. 173).What haunts the second generation is the parents' inability to work through their own traumas. If this unresolved familial trauma is shared by an entire group and has not yet been mourned despite the passing of time, it may lead to the emergence of what Gabriel Schwab (2010) has defined as a national or collective crypt that will continue to interfere with the psychic lives of the following generations. The extent to which this formulation of trauma represents a bottom-up approach can be perceived in the transmission of the trauma from the victims who suffered violence directly to their descendants and, finally, to an entire community.

By contrast, it is possible to argue that collective traumas are not necessarily linked to the experiences suffered by particular individuals. Such traumas are developed through the retrospective reconstruction of the events using symbolic and cultural resources. In this formulation, trauma does not refer to a wound transmitted across different generations, from parents and mothers to sons and daughters. Instead, 'trauma' is a symbolic category in which suffering and victimhood are redefined within the public sphere. As Silke Arnold-De Simine (2018) asserts, 'Trauma and the consequential victim status have acquired symbolic capital and present the opportunity to gain a voice and visibility in public forums' (p. 142). This ground-breaking approach echoes Fassin and Rechtman's (2007) theory that the truth of trauma lies not in the psyche but in the moral economy of contemporary societies (p. 276). It does not stem from experiences suffered by victims but from how those experiences have been retrospectively reframed in accordance with political purposes and cultural parameters.

This reshaping of trauma by cultural memory also aligns with Alexander's (2012) notion of 'cultural trauma'. In contrast to theories of collective trauma inspired by psychoanalysis, Alexander's main argument is that collective trauma does not arise from the nature of events. 'Traumatic' is not an inherent property of a crisis that puts the identity of a group into question. Instead, collective traumas are cultural constructions that arise out of the ways in which collectives and 'carrier groups' experience themselves. These traumas only exist as a result

of social and cultural auto-reflection, which retrospectively generates new cultural meanings of victimhood. Experiencing a painful wound is not enough to constitute the suffering of a trauma; such suffering depends on the successful construction of a cultural framework that defines the event as traumatic. 'Experiencing trauma can be understood as a sociological process that defines injury to the collectivity, establishes the victims, attributes responsibility, and distributes the ideal and material consequences' (p. 26). The agency underlying cultural trauma is similar to that underpinning Vamik Volkan's (2014) notion of 'chosen trauma', who argues that, years after the unfolding of a violent event, a group's mnemonic vectors may go back in time and reactivate and inflame the memory of that event (p. 25). By doing so, they retrospectively reframe it as a collective trauma, which reinforces an ideology of entitlement. In short, according to this top-down approach to collective trauma, the trauma does not stem directly from traumatic experiences but is imposed on experiences to reshape and mobilise their meanings in a particular way.

Despite their differences, these two approaches to collective trauma should not be regarded as independent of one other. Rather, they influence each other and cannot be separated in the context of this study. However, an analytic distinction should be maintained as it can cast new light on the ways of dealing with the Spanish Civil War, especially since, in this historical case, the social effects of cultural trauma have contributed to the failure to work through the historical debts whose very foundations are located in the postmemory of the victims' descendants.

The Postmemory of the Victims' Descendants

To further examine the distinction between the two approaches, in the following two sections I discuss how the trauma of the Spanish Civil War has been embedded through postmemory and cultural memory. I focus not only on how the past is depicted but also on which subjects are considered victims of that event. From a postmemory perspective, victims are those whose losses have not yet been mourned and whose descendants are burdened by their traumas, since it is these descendants who have inherited the responsibility of restoring their relatives' rights and dignity in the public sphere. By contrast, from a cultural memory perspective, victimhood spans all of Spanish society, so distinctions between victims, culprits, and bystanders are blurred.

First, I analyse how the traumatic experiences of the defeated are embedded in the postmemory of their sons and daughters and why the diagnosis of this traumatic postmemory should be limited to the descendants of the dead, that is, to those who lost and died fighting for the Spanish Second Republic. As explained above, two features characterise the emergence of traumatic experiences. The first is the suffering of a painful wound as a consequence of

extreme violence. In this regard, the historical fact that violence against civilians was carried out by both sides in the Spanish Civil War must be considered. It is therefore important to emphasise the differences in the nature and intensity of the violence on the two sides. As some historians argue (Preston, 2017; Rodrigo, 2008), the violence committed by the Francoist rearguard troops was quantitatively and qualitatively more destructive than that committed by the Republican rearguard troops. Nonetheless, these differences in the nature of the violence cannot fully explain why the transgenerational projection of trauma is restricted to the victims.

This leads us to the second condition for the emergence of trauma: the impossibility of narrating these experiences to others or to oneself. Overcoming and recovering from a traumatic experience requires the skill to narrate it as part of a plot; the narration of the experience cannot be carried out in isolation. In their post-Holocaust theories, which regard testimony as a performative act, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (1992) argue that narrating a traumatic experience requires the presence of an otherness, a *thou*. Thus, the healing of trauma is a dialogic process. The absence of a space for such communication blocks the representation of the events. A victim who lacks a listener will be unable to narrate the traumatic events, even to him- or herself. The victims of Francoism were the only ones who suffered from such a situation after the conflict, in which the Francoist politics of memory in the post-war period led to a lack of any public mourning for the relatives of the dead. As a consequence, the victims of the Republican side suffered what has been called an 'inner exile' (Miñarro and Morandi, 2012). They became locked up in themselves because they could not exteriorise their traumatic experiences – either in public (because of Francoist legislation) or in private (because of the fear of repression by the Francoist state). Both the defeated and their sons and daughters became what Vamik Volkan (2014) calls 'perennial mourners' (p. 69), who, as a consequence of not working through their trauma, internalised it and handed it down to their descendants. The origin of this 'inability to mourn' among Republican victims can be understood by examining the attitudes of the Francoist rearguard troops at the beginning of the Civil War. As Reig Tapia (1968) remarked, 'During the war, to be dressed for mourning was considered as a provocation by the Francoist authorities, that thought about the possibility of forbidding mourning […] they shaved the heads of the wives that showed their pain in public' (my translation, p. 63).

Due to the emotional ties that postmemory generates, unspeakable memories, the absence of fathers and mothers, and the presence of hidden truths in families all significantly affect the psychic lives of victims' descendants. Numerous testimonies reveal how deeply those losses have affected children. That is how María, a daughter of a republican killed during the war, gives an account of her experience that instanced the blocking of mourning into which I am delving further.

> There are things that stay with you. When they informed us that he was dead, my mother put me in black and I went to school in the morning and the teacher entered, Miss Emilia, she was a substitute teacher, and asked me for whom I was in mourning and I could not answer. The only thing I could do was start to cry. It's that there was nothing more to say than the fact that we had been left without a father, and it was them that had killed him. But we couldn't say it. I couldńt do that because it was like a sin and it is the anguish of that sin we have lived with. (Renshaw, 2011, p. 71)

Manuel Lorenzo, a Republican's son, explains how the unsettling absence of his father has deeply affected him throughout his life: 'I've just turned seventy years old, and almost all my life I have been affected by my father's absence and the fact that his life was taken shamefully and disgracefully by some bastards' (Ferrándiz, 2008, my translation, p. 189). In so many cases, the transmission of trauma was not unconscious at all for the descendants, who, despite the repression and silence imposed upon them, inherited the suffering and political compromises of their parents. The postmemory of Francoists' victims is thus an alternative mode of representing the experiences of the war that opposes the attempts of Francoists to erase or deny the traces of their own violence. In the post-war era and during the dictatorship, the alternative memory targeted by institutional violence was merely silenced, not erased, by the official politics of the past. This was also the case regarding the memory of racial violence, as remarked by Ricardo Ainslie (2014).

'When Everybody Is to Blame': The Spanish Civil War as Cultural Trauma

Despite the political changes that took place during the 1970s, the failure to mourn the victims was not reversed. There was no public space to communicate their experiences of suffering and dread during the transition to democracy. It should be noted that this absence of mourning did not stem from a political and social climate of repression and revenge – as was the case during the dictatorship – but rather from a climate in which the politics of the past strived to de-politicise and privatise those painful memories. These *haunting* memories could not turn into a political discussion. Traumatic memories of the war were considered too unsettling and risky to underpin the foundations of a new democracy. Thus, the official version of cultural and political life did not consider the victim's descendants whose losses were yet to be publicly mourned.

This refusal to face the past was compounded by the violent conflicts that Spanish society experienced during the first years of transition. As some contemporary studies have remarked (Soler, 2010; Baby, 2018), the Spanish transition to democracy could not be defined as a shock-free, peaceful process. On the contrary, the first years of democracy were characterised by social

turmoil, riots, and political repression. Some of those events – the 23-F failed *coup d'état*, the Atocha massacre, and the terrorist violence – triggered memories of the Civil War in parts of the Spanish population, leading them to avoid struggling for justice and reparation for Franco's victims. Fear of a resurgence of violence thus worked as an engine of the pact of oblivion during the transition. According to a survey conducted in 2008 by the CIS (Aguilar and Baraz-Ramírez, 2014), 61.5% of Spaniards who witnessed the 23-F feared that another civil conflict might spring from the failed *coup d'état*. Omar Encarnación (2014) asserted that the violence carried out by the terrorist group ETA between 1979 and 1980 also reminded some sectors of the Spanish population of the Civil War (p. 19). This fear, supported by the media and the official version of the politics of the past, continued to influence Spanish society until 1986 when Spain became part of the European Community. The violence of the 1970s worked as a mirror through which memories of the war were re-enacted in the present. However, those memories were not regarded as worthy of being addressed or redressed. Within collective memory, forgetting this past was encouraged. It worked as a 'negative memory', and cautionary advice was issued to not mention this unsettling past to avoid increasing social and political tensions (Labanyi, 2007). In this way,

> The war turned into an historical experience from which important lessons could be learned. Yet, at the same time, it was better to forget this historical experience; never again were the mistakes of the past to be repeated. It was a source of political learning for the new stage, but of amnesia when it came to its origins and causes. (Benedicto, 2004, p. 195)

Fear of a revival of violence was not the only engine that underpinned the transition to democracy. The public forgetting of the victims of Francoism was also reinforced by a social construction of the past as an instance of cultural trauma. Some 'memory makers', including the media and political parties, promoted a depiction of the war that fitted well with the social pact of oblivion. As a consequence, a symbolic struggle occurred between the unsettled traumas embedded in the postmemory of the dead and the narrative proposed by the media during the transition. Behind these competing narratives was a struggle concerning the ownership of suffering.

This cultural representation of the war is framed in relation to the development of an official representation of the war in the decades after the conflict. The Francoist politics of memory in the post-war period can be summarised as granting neither justice nor forgiveness to the defeated side. As Javier Rodrigo (2008) has argued, it is not appropriate to talk about 'peace' in post-war Spain but only about 'pacification': a process that implies repression of the defeated, who were condemned to execution, jail, and exile. This political narrative was translated into a representation of the war, which was legitimised

as a crusade to defend Spain from the 'communist hordes' who were trying to undermine Spanish traditions. Consequently, victims who belonged to the defeated side led what Judith Butler (2004) calls 'precarious lives'; they were considered unworthy of mourning. However, as the decades passed, this representation of the war began to fade, partly because of the necessity to clean up the image of Spanish politics internationally. During the 1960s, the discourse of victory was somewhat substituted by a discourse of reconciliation (Aguilar, 2002). This change of discourse regarding the official politics of the past can be summarised as a shift from 'they were the only ones responsible' to 'all of us were equally responsible for the historical tragedy that the war was' (Sánchez and Izquierdo, 2017). This narrative, which became popular during the transition to democracy, can be considered an instance of Alexander's concept of cultural trauma. The retroactivity that underpins this depiction of the past is entirely aligned with the *après coup* temporality that, according to Alexander and Volkan, can underlie cultural or chosen trauma. In this regard, in *Cultura herida*, Cristina Moreiras-Menor (2002) argues that 'the original trauma (the primary scene – civil war and Francoist postwar) is constituted as a trauma *a posteriori*, when it engaged with a second scene (democratic scene) that set in motion a new chain of signification' (my translation, p. 55).

This cultural trauma of the war can be defined as a narrative of equidistance in relation to the violence carried out by both sides. According to this narrative, the Spanish Civil War was a tragedy, a collective madness, the burden of responsibility for which lies with all of Spanish society. The outbreak of war was not a consequence of the failed *coup d'état* against Republican democracy; rather, it was the result of tensions that were present throughout Spanish history. These struggles led to a spiral of violence that was fed by both sides. From this perspective, there were neither victors nor vanquished, perpetrators nor victims. All of Spanish society was equally to blame. Therefore, no reparation or justice had to be provided to any victims; it was wiser to look to the future and forget those traumatic experiences and historical debts; otherwise, violence might be enacted again. This narrative of cultural trauma led to a blurring of responsibilities and was what allowed the new generation, those born in the post-war period, to look the other way and turn a cold shoulder to the claims of the descendants of the dead whose relatives remained unidentified in mass graves. The traumatic experiences that were not mourned during the post-war period remained unresolved because of a confusing collective guilt. Besides this, the opportunities brought by 1960s consumerism to improve social welfare were aligned with a future-oriented perspective rather one oriented to the past (Graham and Labanyi, 1996).

In sum, it is not difficult to synthesise the differences between the representations of the war that arise from the two ways of displaying and reshaping its memory as a collective trauma. According to the cultural trauma narrative, the victims of the war were the entire Spanish population, and

responsibility fell on both sides. According to the postmemory perspective, the victims were those on the defeated side whose bones have not yet been recovered, while the culprits were the rebel soldiers who organised a *coup d'état* against democracy. During the transition to democracy, the cultural trauma narrative became the glass through which Spanish society viewed the Civil War. Michael Richards (2013) summarised the effects of this trauma in stating that 'the "fratricidal" thesis allowed the victors to usurp the suffering of the defeated and counter the latter's sense of collective trauma which had begun to be expressed as the regimen drew to a close' (p. 185).

Conclusion: Is Spain Coming to Terms with its Traumatic Past?

As highlighted above, the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century brought a change in the ways of dealing with this past (Aguilar and Payne, 2016). Today, a new cultural process of recovering collective memory is taking place. This process stems from the postmemory of the defeated and counteracts the effects of the popular depiction of the Civil War as a 'mad war'. It emerged from a reversal of Spain's way of coming to terms with its past through the unofficial exhumation of the bones of the victims of Francoism. Considering the traumatic nature of the memories that emerged within the public sphere, this new 'turn to memory' should be contextualised between the poles of postmemory and cultural trauma as defined above. Thus, three factors that underlie the new gaze on the past should be considered.

First, the generation engaging in this process of historical remembrance is not the second but the third generation: the grandchildren. In the case of the sons and daughters of the war, their 'space of experience' was conditioned by the experience of the war and the misery of the post-war period. By contrast, their 'horizon of expectations' (Koselleck, 2004) was shaped by the possibility of a new democracy beyond the chains of dictatorship. However, the situation is very different for the next generation. They live in a democracy, so they are not threatened by the possible re-emergence of civil war struggles. Furthermore, some have inherited from their grandparents a postmemory of certain experiences and losses that were not mourned in the public sphere.

Second, the social effects of the cultural trauma that shaped the representation of the war are fading. The progressive socialisation of the historical knowledge of this past and the emergence of testimonies at the end of the 20th century, which stemmed from the postmemory of the defeated, offered an alternative version of the war that was incompatible with the narrative of 'shared guilt'.

Finally, the civil movements for the recovery of historical memory must be considered, particularly the *Asociación por la Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica* (Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory (ARMH)),

established in 2000 by Emilio Silva. Silva was interested in locating and recovering the bones of his grandfather, who was a victim of the Francoist repression. After he dug up his grandfather's corpse, other grandchildren of unidentified victims began to collaborate with him and to ask for his help in recovering the bones of their own relatives. Within a few weeks, the familial issues of those who shared a personal wound were projected into the public space though the activities of ARMH (Blakeley, 2005). The creation of this association can be considered an instance of affiliative postmemory. This concept is one of the most ground-breaking aspects of Marianne Hirsch's theory. When Hirsh considered postmemory to be rooted in familial ties, she was not implying that the influence of postmemory cannot exceed familial bonds. She therefore formulated the concept of 'affiliative postmemory' to refer to those memories that extend beyond the familial frame but that have not lost the affective content in which they are embedded. This affiliative postmemory, whose foundations are the personal traces of the silences and absences that shaped the familial relations of ARMH members, began to influence Spanish culture and the politics of memory and to counteract the effects of the representation of war as a cultural trauma. It began to generate ethical and political bonds with the victims who had not been mourned when democracy was established. As Hirsch (2012b) explains, affiliative postmemory 'strikes to *reactivate* and *re-embody more distant* political and cultural memories' structures by reinvesting them with resonant individual and familial forms of mediation'(p. 33, emphasis in original).

In this paper, I have argued that the overlapping tensions between postmemory and cultural trauma – that is, between the different ways through which traumatic memories have become embedded in the present – offer a theoretical framework that can cast new light on what Sebastiaan Faber (2018) has called the 'memory battles' of the Spanish Civil War. I have further shown that using the concept of collective trauma to understand the evolution of Spanish Civil War memory is neither unproblematic nor unambiguous. On the contrary, applying psychoanalytical terms to the field of memory studies requires a detailed analysis of how traumatic events are provoked and displayed. The presence of a 'past that did not pass' may take on different features depending on the affective and social mediations that allow us to think about its traumatic conditions today. Moreover, the consequences of both ways of mediating and plotting traumatic experiences have led to these views becoming polarised. Representing the conflict as a 'war of madness' for which everyone was equally to blame resulted in a refusal to take on the duty of recovering the victims of the war, whose memories are present through the experience of postmemory. The projection of these two ways of coming to terms with the past reveals the importance of understanding the recovery of Spanish memory as a process that developed between the push and pull of the postmemory of the vanquished and the cultural trauma of the Civil War.

Nevertheless, reframing the collective processes of remembering Spanish Civil War trauma within the entanglements of these two methodological approaches highlights the potential of psychoanalysis for rethinking historical legacies. Ultimately, according to some interpretations (Wersch, 2002), postmemory relies on an idea of collective memory inspired by psychoanalysis. By employing concepts such as cultural trauma and cultural memory, this paper brings to light how those traumatic experiences have been retrospectively reframed and reveals the tensions and contradictions underpinning two ways of displaying the country's traumatic past, both of which the Spanish society must confront.

About the Author

Rafael Pérez Baquero holds a PhD in Philosophy at the University of Murcia (Spain), where he also worked as a pre-doctoral Researcher (FPU-2015/00566) in conjunction with a Fellowship from the Spanish Ministry of Education. His doctoral dissertation was entitled *Narrating History, Remembering Trauma: Memory and Forgetfulness of Spanish Civil War, Eighty Years Later*. He also holds an MA in Theoretical and Practical Philosophy (2014) from UNED (National Distance University of Education), where he became University Expert in Social Memory and Human Rights (2018). He has been a Visiting Researcher at Cornell University (2017), Birkbeck, University of London (2018), and the University of Tartu (2020). His research delves into the dynamics and influences that arise between collective memory and the writing of history in order to apply this theoretical background to the Spanish context, with a specific focus on exploring the evolution of the memory of the Spanish Civil War (1936–39) during the democratic transition and thereafter.

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