

A NATION OF GHOSTS?: HAUNTING, HISTORICAL MEMORY AND FORGETTING IN POST-FRANCO SPAIN

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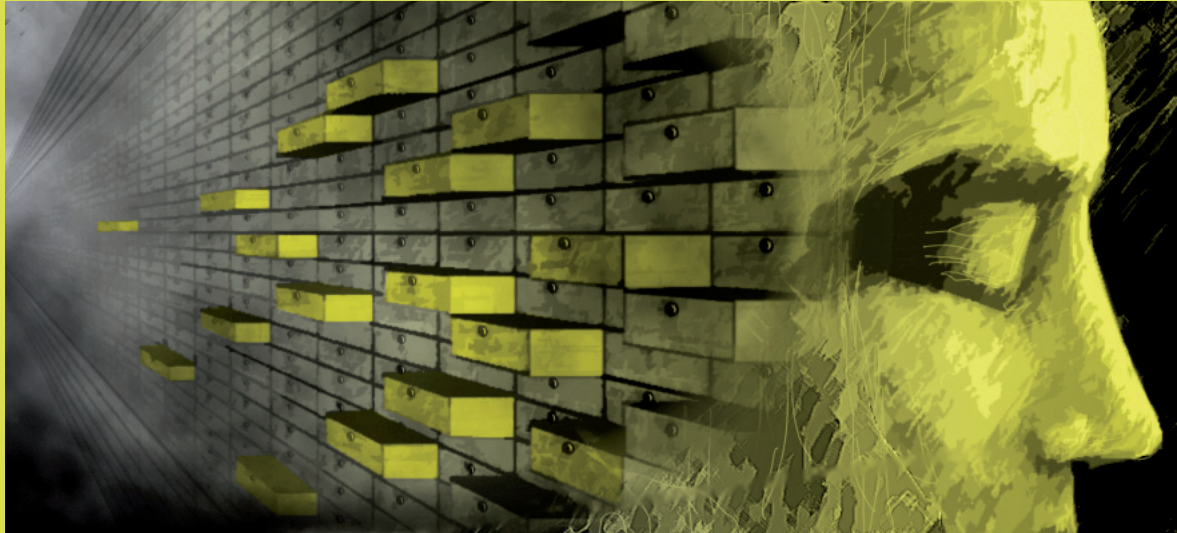
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Abstract || This essay examines some of the critical and theoretical approaches in the area of historical memory and identity studies that have emerged as a response to the contemporary cultural challenges that have resulted from the social and political transformations which have taken place globally in the last decades. The essay narrows its focus to a case study of the role of historical memory in the formation of collective identities in contemporary Spain, in the aftermath of the dictatorship and the subsequent political transition. This study explores in particular the use of the trope of haunting ghosts in contemporary Spanish literature and cinema as symptomatic form of spectrality of the repressed collective past.

Key-words || Transition | Historical memory | Ghosts | Spain.

“The past is never dead. In fact, it’s not even past.”
William Faulkner
Requiem for a Nun

“El olvido es una de las formas de la memoria”
Jorge Luis Borges

0. Memory and Identity: Some comparative theoretical perspectives

The study of memory and collective identity formation has become a major area of academic research in our days, cutting across the boundaries of long established disciplines in Social Sciences and Arts and Letters. Narratives of memory and collective identity, and the academic discourses that examine them and construct them, have experienced enormous growth in recent years, and no discipline in the Humanities, whether cultural anthropology, literature, cinema, history or political science, has been impervious to its advance. As interdisciplinarity, with the advent of cultural studies, is fast becoming the norm rather than the exception in the dominant Anglo academic world, and gaining greater visibility everywhere, traditional boundaries are being redrawn, and the constitution of discreet fields of knowledge is undergoing an extensive transformation. Perhaps arguably, some of the most innovative leading-edge research in the Humanities is currently taking place at the intersections and margins of traditional disciplines and canons. The field of Comparative Literature, founded on the principles of interdisciplinarity and the crossnational study of literatures, is potentially well situated to profit from this paradigmatic shift, but is also subject to radical reconfiguration, as the traditional theoretical certainties that constructed its edifice have been eroded in recent years (such as eurocentrism, humanism, and universalism).

So how are we to explain this unprecedented attention to the study of memory and identity in our age? What approaches has critical theory generated to deal with these issues, and what are the limits, possibilities, and challenges for cultural studies in general, and for literary studies and comparative literature in particular? In the following pages, I will try to delimit some of the theoretical questions that inform the current debates of memory and collective identity, and their implications for the case study of contemporary Spain.

Undoubtedly, the changing paradigms in current critical and literary theory have directly influenced the renewed attention to memory and collective identity studies. Poststructuralist theorizations of difference, a central concept in any modern exploration of cultural identity, have radically repositioned the traditional configurations of center and margins, and have questioned the exclusion/inclusion

dynamics involved in canon formation, while challenging the philosophical tenets of Western thought (Derrida). These theories have also provided the intellectual tools for deconstructing pervasive dichotomies such as present/past, presence/absence, written/oral, high/low, History/story that have defined traditional representation. Challenging those established structures of power, the poststructuralist critique of academic discourses has refocused the interest towards alternative configurations on the margins of power and traditionally marginalized or excluded stories from underrepresented groups, as well as their neglected memories and collective identities. Similarly, the recurring postmodern assessment that our contemporary global culture suffers amnesia, and its accompanying rhetoric of mourning and obsession with the loss of identity, as seen in the pervasive signs of fragmentation, dismemberment, simulacra, fissures and the cultivation of nostalgia, has renovated the interest for the recovery of memory and cultural identity. In a lament over the disappearance of traditional forms of memory in modern societies, Pierre Nora has noted that “we speak so much of memory because there is so little of it left” (7). Andreas Huyssen has expressed eloquently the paradoxical dynamics of memory and forgetting: “The spread of amnesia in our culture is matched by a relentless fascination with memory and the past” (254).

Likewise, postcolonial theories have questioned metropolitan hegemony and cultural homogeneity, while refocusing the attention to multiculturalism and the construction of subaltern identities (Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak). Feminism and queer studies have provided fundamental theoretical insights into the construction of gender and sexual identities and different process of remembrance (Butler). Diaspora and globalization studies have also focused on the role of collective memories in the formation of group identities in a constantly shifting world (Said, Castells, García Canclini). The study of collective memory represents an alternative to official national historiographies, potentially giving voice to the subjects traditionally excluded from representation, minority and subaltern groups, on the basis of cultural contingencies such as ethnicity, language, class, gender and sexuality, among others. In all those areas, reconstructing the histories of those marginalized groups and understanding the formation of collective identities are enterprises that need to be undertaken hand in hand.

Memory and collective identity have also become intensely debated topics in social discourses and the mass media, as issues of cultural identity have frequently focused on the construction of cultural and historical memories. This has been particularly the case in the context of post cold war and post dictatorship societies in need to reopen and investigate their past, which had been heavy guarded and repressed, and the new challenges provoked by the currents

of globalization (Barahona De Brito et al. 2001; Waisman and Rein 2005; Martín-Estudillo and Roberto Ampuero 2008).

The apparent paradox of the current “obsession with memory” (Huysen) in our forgetful contemporary societies needs to be put in the same context of the paradigmatic shifts in cultural studies mentioned above, and the ensuing double paradox of the *centrality of marginality* and the role of *cultural difference in identity formation*. My hypothesis is that these phenomena are a reflection of the enormous social and historical changes that have occurred globally in the last decades of the 20th century, and the cultural anxieties generated by the unleashing of the currents of globalization and the resulting fear of collective forgetting.

Several theories of memory have become particularly useful for the study of collective identity in cultural studies. It is worth remembering two important aspects of Maurice Halbwachs’s classic theory of collective memory, which, quite fittingly coming from a sociologist, privileged the social dimension of remembrance. On the one hand, his conceptualization of memory as a social construction, with his tenet that “individuals always use social frameworks when they remember” (40). On the other, his notion that the memory of the past is a reconstruction, more than a recovery, reenacted from the present and always informed by that present: “Even at the moment of reproducing the past our imagination remains under the influence of the present social milieu” (49). The past is recovered from the present, but it is not simply past, since the process of recovery of the past can have direct and indirect repercussions for actions in the present. Indeed, what we refer to as collective memory, many times is a present collective consciousness of the past, rather than personally lived memories. Thus for Silvia Molloy, historical memory is “una base de saberes fragmentarios compartidos por un grupo” (257). More recently, the study of collective memory in cultural and literary studies has been energized by the work of historian Pierre Nora and his influential theory of *lieux de mémoire*, as material, symbolic, and functional “sites of memory”. According to Nora, in our modern societies characterized by the prevalence of mass culture on a global scale, memory has ceased to have the traditional channels and functions of premodern societies, in part because it has been replaced by history. Instead, Nora acknowledges “the embodiment of memory in certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists” (Nora 7). These new spaces of remembrance are *lieux de mémoire*, defined by Davis and Starn as “places’ where memories converge, condense, conflict, and define relationships between past, present, and future” (Davis 3). Monuments, museums, commemorations, symbols, books, documentaries, all can be considered collective “sites of memory”, and the meanings taking shape in those sites have potential impact in the formation and consolidation of modern

collective identities.

Within poststructuralist and postcolonial cultural studies there has developed a critique of the traditional emphasis on the recovery of the past, as the essential element of collective identity. While recognizing the absolute importance that the gaps in the narratives of the past be acknowledged, and silences be articulated, there has been a refocusing from simple recovery to questioning what we do collectively with that past, and how we try to deal, or not, with it. For cultural theorist Stuart Hall, from a postcolonial identity perspective, the crucial point involves more than the actual recovery or discovery of the past, focusing more on how that process is undertaken, and how those narratives are retold for the interest of the present (and future). He suggests that cultural practices and narratives of identity such as literature or cinema go beyond: “not the rediscovery but the *production of identity*. Not an identity grounded in the archaeology, but in the *re-telling of the past*” (224). The interest lies in the actual process of reconstruction of the past, and the ensuing construction of collective identities. More than simply identity understood as “being”, which is a basic and necessary sense of identity, he aims for a cultural identity as the process of “becoming”, thus challenging any preconstructed or received notions of identity. Just like memories by definition are not stable or fixed, but always in a process of reconstruction, so are cultural identities, occurring in a historical frame, and always evolving. Thus, Hall’s concept of cultural identity “is not a fixed essence at all, lying unchanged outside history and culture. It is not some universal and transcendental spirit inside us on which history has made no fundamental mark. It is not once-and-for-all. It is not a fixed origin to which we can make some final and absolute Return” (226). Hall recognizes the dangers inherent in any cultural practice that essentializes the past, as the mythical point of origin and return, and its fetishization of the past, instead underlining the effect of our contextual cultural positionality in regards to that past:

Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in mere ‘recovery’ of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past. (225).

Other contemporary critics have also noted how collective memory and identity are mutually supportive cultural constructions following a continuous process of selectively forgetting and remembering. Under this light, the constructions of memory and collective identity have to be seen side by side. On a special issue of *Representations* on Memory and History, Davis and Starn have noted: “We can say

... that identity depends on memory, whether we mean by that a core self that remembers its earlier states or, poststructurally, the narratives that construct (and deconstruct) identities by comparing 'once upon a time' and 'here and now'" (4). Memory stands as the founding block of collective identity, as Andreas Huyssen as noted: "Without memory, without reading the traces of the past, there can be no recognition of difference (...), no tolerance for the rich complexities and instabilities of personal, cultural, political and national identities" (252). Memory forms the basis for a sense of cultural collective identity marked by those contingencies of difference such as class, gender, language and ethnicity. The construction of national identities is directly shaped by the recollection of collective memories of a common past. As such, memory has an important function as a site of struggle and resistance for oppressed groups (ethnic and linguistic minorities, political dissidents, women, exiles, migrants, etc.) in their construction of alternative cultural identities, against official narratives of the past that has excluded them. These cultural contingencies can, and often do, cross the geopolitical national boundaries, and therefore transnational communities are formed. In addition, the new forces of globalization and the transformation of transnational public spheres are also influencing the existing channels of remembrance, and the constitution of collective identities that do not coincide with the nation-state (Assmann and Conrad).

1. Reconstructing memories and identities in modern Spain

En el fondo el olvido es un gran simulacro
nadie sabe ni puede/ aunque quiera/ olvidar
un gran simulacro repleto de fantasmas

Mario Benedetti
El olvido está lleno de memoria

Against this general backdrop, I would like to focus on the interrelationship between the construction of historical memory and the constitution of collective identities in modern Spain, at both the nation-state and sub-state levels, before an examination of cultural representations in literature and film. The politics of memory (in its diverse manifestations as mourning, nostalgia, counter-memory, and forgetting) has become a site of struggle for cultural definition in Spain in the long period from dictatorship to democracy, and the construction of memory has played a key role in the subsequent process of political and cultural decentralization in post-Franco Spain. In this context, it is crucial to examine how the process of identity definition constructs, and is constructed by, historical memory. This issue is particularly relevant in our day as Spain's modern transformation

and recognition of its plurilingual and multicultural reality has become a particular case study for central questions about the formation of modern subjectivity and the struggle for cultural self-representation and self-definition. These changes have not escaped the attention of other nations and communities struggling to affirm their cultural identities, particular national minorities without a state, such as the Scottish, Welsh or Flemish, and others involved in the process of democratic transformation and modernization, particularly Latin America and Eastern Europe. It is the case that in our post-national global setting, communities learn from each other's pasts beyond the limits of the nation, which traditionally has been the principal channel of collective memory.

We can distinguish three particular cultural moments in contemporary Spain that have shaped the construction of memory and collective identity: the post civil war dictatorship, the democratic Transition, and the post-transition process of European integration and globalization. Following the trauma of the Spanish civil war (1936-1939) and its long aftermath in the repressive regime of General Franco, memory became a site of ideological struggle. Memories of the civil war were officially repressed, the war was rewritten as a religious Crusade, and historical memory was substituted by nostalgia for a long lost imperial past, when not literally exiled, as hundreds of thousands died, were imprisoned or disappeared in the post-war diaspora. A unified Spanish national identity was imposed from above (one culture, one language, one religion), as different national identities from the periphery (Basque, Catalan and Galician in particular) were subjugated, cultural rights suppressed and censored by the state apparatus. Repressed historical memory formed a vast corpus of oppositional counter-memories as forms of cultural resistance (particularly in literature, film and popular song) many of them produced clandestinely or from exile.

The political Transition from dictatorship to democracy in the 1970s and early 1980s fluctuated between the attempts to recuperate historical memory and the official politics of amnesia. The process of democratization, with the recuperation of freedom, the recovery of vernacular marks of identity, and the unofficial restoration of repressed memories of the national past, as evidenced in an avalanche of memoirs, autobiographical novels, films, documentaries, and revisionist historical accounts, paradoxically coincides with the official politics of collective forgetting. The new project of modernity demanded the exorcism of the past. The historically unprecedented transformation of the Spanish political system, characterized by a consensual multi-party transition, rather than by revolution, coup or war, was predicated upon the "social contract" of the burial of the past--no reopening of old wounds and no questions asked. Fundamentally, this political transformation followed the model of the

“transition as a transaction” between political elites. This negotiated burial of the past implicated that political amnesty was thus predicated upon historical amnesia. As a result, the memories of the civil war and of Franco’s legacy became a new cultural taboo, and therefore acquired the spectral quality of ghosts, nor here nor there. National identity became tainted with self-questioning and a general sense of disorientation. Simultaneously, the official silencing and forgetting of the national past came with the affirmation of other sub-state identities, hand in hand with the reconstruction of their particular collective memories. The shortcomings of the transition and the resulting political malaise generated a sense of cultural *desencanto*, particularly with the anti-Franco sectors of the population, marked by the *disillusion* with the pragmatic transactional aspect of the transition and the general *dissolution* of collective hopes of the past and the former unity of the anti-Franco resistance. Memory eventually came to occupy a residual space with a sense of nostalgia for a utopian future indefinitely postponed.

In spite of the grand narrative of the Spanish transition as an overwhelming success story, which in fact has become a foundational myth of Spanish modernity¹, there are some limitations inherent to the process of Spanish democracy which cultural critics and historians have noted in hindsight, in particular the way of dealing with the past, or perhaps, of not dealing with it². The politics of memory of the transition has been repeatedly described as the erasure and eradication of historical memory, and the forgetting and silencing of the past (Morán 1991, Medina 2001, Colmeiro 2005, Labanyi 2007). While that perception is based on the official “pact of forgetting” brokered by the political elites and is in general terms accurate, I would like to raise a few points for consideration of the role of memory during the Transition. One is that we should take into account the asymmetry of memories across the national geography. The atrophy of memory in the national political discourse was parallel to the recovery of historical memory in the peripheries of the nation-estate, where local forms of sub-state nationalism relied heavily on a different collective memory. A major component of the recognition of cultural and ethnical difference of the so called “historical nationalities” and their demands for political rights was historical memory. The emphasis however was not in reparations or backward-looking justice, but in the restoration of pre- civil war local institutions of government, and Statues of Autonomy for Catalonia, Basque Country and Galicia, which had been cut short by Franco’s uprising against the Republic.

The second point is that memory and forgetting are not a simple either-or phenomenon, since memory always necessarily involves forgetting, and “forgetting is full of memory”, as the Uruguayan poet Mario Benedetti has expressively stated (*El olvido está lleno de*

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1 | The Spanish Pavilion at the 2010 World Expo in Shanghai celebrates spectacularly the narrative of Spanish modernization as a result of the Transition, considered “el gran éxito de España” by the Spanish commissioner María Tena (Reinoso 2010).

2 | “La Transición” has become a grand narrative in Lyotard’s sense. Cultural critics have recently questioned the unexamined assumption of the Spanish Transition as a “model” referring to its lack of closure in dealing with the past as well as its symbolic deficit (see Martín-Estudillo and Ampuero 2008).

memoria 1995). As a corollary of that, I would argue that historical memory did not completely evaporate during the Transition; it may have disappeared from the surface of political debates but it left noticeable “traces” and remained operative in other areas on the margins of power. Memory was exiled from institutional political discourse, and displaced to the intellectual and cultural arena, where it found a distinctive space, or better a variety of *lieux de mémoire*, as attested by the sudden increase in the early years of the transition, between 1976 and 1978, of works of literature, documentaries and films, and historical and testimonial accounts dealing with the recent past, and the wide public recognition of those works. A brief review of popular titles of those years would give us a good indication to the extent that historical memory was an important matter for the national collective imaginary. Award-winning novels such as *Los mares del Sur* by Manuel Vázquez Montalbán, *El cuarto de atrás* by Carmen Martín Gaité, *Si te dicen que caí* and *La muchacha de las bragas de oro* by Juan Marsé, *Autobiografía de Federico Sánchez* by Jorge Semprún, testimonios such as *Los topos* by Manuel Leguineche and Jesús Torbado, plays such as *Las bicicletas son para el verano* by Fernando Fernán Gómez, and documentary films such as Basilio Martín Patino’s *Canciones para después de una guerra* and *Caudillo*, Jaime Camino’s *La vieja memoria*, Jaime Chavarrí’s *El desencanto*, among many others. All these works had in common the central place given to the memories of the civil war and the dictatorship, and their legacy in the present. The fact that most of these works became popular best-sellers and box-office hits, receiving the most important literary prizes in Spain, such as the Planeta and Anagrama, indicates that historical memory still resonated strongly with relatively large segments of the Spanish public, no matter what the political elites had decided behind closed doors, and that a significant memory void still needed to be filled.

That brief explosion of collective memory in the second half of the 1970s, however, did not last very long. In essence, there were no official channels for public remembering and not enough collective desire to remember either³. Spanish society embraced the new liberties and the experience of modernity without much interest in remembering the sordid past, on the contrary, it actively tried to disassociate from this past very rapidly. The generational change would set off the emergence of the Movida and its intense live-the-moment, forget-about-the-past attitude, which would be an illustrative result of this phenomenon. It is also not surprising that a key symbolic figure who reappears forcefully in the cultural narratives of the Transition and the Movida years is the transsexual/transvestite, an ambiguous figure who embodies a past that needs to be forgotten, and a present that is constructed as a series of continuous acts of performance⁴.

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3 | Aguilar also mentions “the overwhelming desire of Spanish society to see a peaceful and gradual change and even to pretend that it had forgotten the past rather than call anyone to account” (2001, 99).

4 | The marginal figure of the transvestite becomes a symbol of the Spanish transition and the pact of forgetting with such iconic stars as Bibi Andersen and Angel Pavlovsky, and as seen in documentaries and feature films of those years: *Ocaña, Retrat Intermitent* (1978), *Cambio de sexo* (1977) o *Un hombre llamado Flor de Otoño* (1978). Vázquez Montalbán recurs to the transvestite in *El pianista* (1985), as a political and moral allegory of the ambiguity of the transitional period and a critique of the cultural forgetting of the past. In the cultural production associated with la Movida the transvestite and the transsexual are also predominant, such as the comic *Anarcoma* by Nazario, Antón Reixa’s *As ladillas do travesti* (1979), and of course, the cinema, texts and drag spectacles by Pedro Almodóvar (*La ley del deseo*, *Patty*, *Diphusa*, *Fabio y Macnamara*).

The crisis of memory of the post-transition and the age of globalization has followed a quantitative inflation/qualitative devaluation paradigm, as the void left by the disenchantment and the taboo of memory has been filled with new forms of memory that simultaneously overflow and weaken the traditional channels of memory: the fragmentation and decentralization of memory due to the emergence of particular nationalist memories and new invented traditions (as a reaction against the absolutist nationalism imposed by Franco) and in opposition to a diluted unified national memory; the emergence of new forms of institutional memorialization filling the void, through the spectacle, the commemoration and the museum; and the substitution of historical memory by a consumption culture of nostalgia. This proliferation of institutional and commercialized memory is in fact the other side of cultural amnesia. As Huyssen as noted, “Amnesia simultaneously generates its own opposite: the new museum culture as a reaction formation” (254)⁵.

But, at the same time, we live in a postmodern era without clear and unambiguous overarching grand narratives that tell us what is important to remember collectively (such as could be, in different times, the nation-state, the revolution, the war, the resistance, and so on). In this context, national identity is constantly interrogated, fragmented, deconstructed and reconstructed, subject to the opposing challenges produced by the local/global interface, the processes of European political integration and of economic and cultural globalization, frequently perceived as threats to vernacular cultural identity. We are confronting a complex “post-national” paradigm, in which the crisis of the national is the result of challenges from both sub-state forms of peripheral nationalism (such as Catalan/Basque/Galician, etc), and transnational global currents (such as the European Union). Memory then becomes a site of struggle where collective identities are formed in reaction to, and as a result of, these multiple challenges from within and from without.

2. The haunting of the past in contemporary Spanish cinema and literature

¿Qué es un fantasma? Un evento terrible, condenado a repetirse una y otra vez. Un instante de dolor, quizá. Algo muerto que parece por momentos vivo aún. Un sentimiento suspendido en el tiempo. Como una fotografía borrosa, como un insecto atrapado en ámbar.

Guillermo del Toro
El espinazo del diablo

Undoubtedly there has been a resurgence of public interest in memory in Spain in recent years, after several decades of diagnosed

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5 | Natalie Zemon has referred to a “modern crisis of memory” in the generation following the French Revolution (3).

“collective amnesia”. This reawakening has been a result of social, judicial, and political movements reclaiming the unearthing, literally and symbolically, of the past (the atrocities and human right violations committed during the Civil War and its aftermath). The recent polemic surrounding the excavation of mass graves of the Spanish civil war and the dictatorship, and the creation of a myriad of grassroots organizations such as the Asociación para la Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica speaks forcefully about the spectral nature of Spanish history. Thousands of unmarked burial sites in ditches along the roads still remain in the Spanish landscape, invisible but ever present, just like ghosts still awaiting their day of justice. The liminal and invisible position is an adequate metaphor of their non-existing status in the margins of the official history. Thanks to the work of grassroots movements, human right organizations and NGOs, they have become collective *lieux de mémoire*, highly symbolic sites of memory. Quite unexpectedly, memory has now come back to the center stage in discussions about what to do collectively with that past, with crucial political, legal and ethical repercussions. There are also important international issues at stake, with worldwide debates about the process of dealing with the traumatic memories of the past, and the extent that amnesty laws can be upheld for crimes against humanity under the principles of universal jurisdiction.

There has been also a simultaneous boom of narratives dealing with the past, in both Spanish literature and cinema. Best-selling novels such as Javier Cercas’s *Soldados de Salamina* Manuel Rivas’s *La lengua de las mariposas*, or Jesús Ferrero’s *Las trece rosas*, and their respective successful film adaptations, immediately come to mind. We should not explain this reemergence as a simple derivative phenomenon or a market-driven fad. It is important to consider how these cultural narratives provide a certain language and tools to engage with the past and position ourselves historically, indeed to identify as subjects part of a collective. As Stuart Hall has noted, cinematic and literary representation are not to be seen as part of “a second-order mirror held up to reflect what already exists, but as that form of representation which is able to constitute us as new kinds of subjects, and thereby enable us to discover places from which to speak” (236-37). In that sense, we should examine how the collective memory of the past has been represented in those narratives, what points of enunciation have been deployed, and with what effects to the collective identity.

It is interesting that the predominant mode of Spanish cultural narratives about the past produced in recent years, particularly in the mass media of television and cinema, has followed a traditional realistic and *costumbrista* naturalistic style. Even the screen adaptations of non-realistic works of literature repeatedly recur to long-established realistic, linear modes of representation, often

against the grain of the original literary work. This is the case of well known film adaptations such as *Tiempo de silencio*, *!Ay, Carmela!*, or *O lápis do carpinteiro*, three very recognizable works dealing with the traumas of the past in Spain, from the postwar, the transition, and the globalization period respectively. Recent popularly acclaimed films dealing with this topic such as *Los girasoles ciegos*, *Las trece rosas*, *Silencio roto*, *Libertarias*, or *El viaje de Carol*, all have the same look and feel of conventional heritage drama productions. Some critics have pointed out that these works, in spite of their noble goals of making the traumatic past of repression and resistance accessible and understandable to contemporary Spanish audiences, mostly without direct access or personal recollection of those events, they have made it perhaps too palatable and too comfortable, thus neutralizing their potential as instruments for social intervention. These film and TV series, dressed in the polished style of costume dramas, can appear to reinforce the idea of the pastness of the past, easily accessible but just as easily disconnected from present day historical realities and social and political concerns⁶. This trend may suggest a certain aesthetic commoditization of the horrors of the past, somewhat domesticated for contemporary consumption, when not a nostalgic reinterpretation of the past, such as Fernando Trueba's Academy-winner *Belle Époque*. In some extreme cases, these representations are literally costume melodramas featuring glamorous TV actors and actresses, appealing to a retro aesthetic, with fancy period dresses and décor, as in the popular Spanish television soap opera *Amar en tiempos revueltos*, which has been a leader in television audience rankings in Spain for several seasons. As the title of the series already suggests, the postwar dictatorship is just a mere melodramatic backdrop for the conventional love intrigues and disputes characteristic of the *telenovela* genre.

The unproblematic transparent mimetic representation of the past, with its meticulously reconstructed mise-en-scene, and traditional linear structure, effectively sutures the discontinuities of the fragmented past, made out of silences and voids. This tendency to reconstruct the past as a narrative without fissures and safely removed from present day realities, thus paradoxically seems to replicate the straight and smooth official historical narratives that avoid challenging the status quo. Thus, many of these sanitized representations of the past dangerously follow the officially sanctioned discourse of reconciliation without apologies or reparations, and the erasure of potentially destabilizing counter-discourses, reinforcing the pastness of the past and its irrelevance to present day concerns.

On the other hand, some writers and directors dealing with the subject of the Spanish civil war and the dictatorship have resorted to other non-realistic modes, in an effort to better capture the work of memory, the experiences of trauma, the silences and the voids of the

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6 | Several cultural critics and intellectuals have noted the problematic ramification of this trend (Labanyi, Rosa).

past, the historical discontinuities, and the elusive nature of historical narrativization. One recurring element used in these works has been the trope of haunting, which underlies the ghostly nature of the past in its ever-returning nature, projecting its shadow towards the present and the future. These haunting narratives thus make visible the disappearances and absences silenced in normative historical accounts, and replicate the process of confronting a difficult past that still needs to be dealt with in the present.

Several cultural critics have advanced theories to explain the recurring presence of ghosts in contemporary narratives of the past. Some have argued that these ghosts reflect the postmodern disbelief in master narratives of progress, that the spectral histories of discontinuities and absences are a response to the need of creating new accounts of the past that do not replicate the official historical accounts, acknowledging the victims of modernity, those precisely disappeared from the historical record (Marcus). María do Cebreiro Rábade has referred to this haunting aspect as a defining characteristic of historically dispossessed communities. In her insightful examination of the “unspeakable home” of the stateless Galician nation, she notes that Galician cultural narratives are often marked with the overwhelming presence of ghosts. For Rábade, Galicia is symbolically represented in those narratives as a “community of the dispossessed” and a “nation of ghosts” (Rabade 244). More generally speaking, it can be argued that it is in those societies that need to confront their own (self) repressed histories that the spectrality of the past is perhaps more noticeable. In Spanish cultural studies in particular, Jo Labanyi, following Jacques Derrida’s formulations in *Spectres of Marx*, has presented in a series of articles a suggestive interpretation of the recurrence of ghosts in contemporary Spanish culture. Labanyi bases her analysis on a reworking of Derrida’s concept of “hauntology”, a neologism created in a typical poststructuralist pun as an alternative to ontology, to describe the spectral aspect of history, a past which is already not there but at the same time makes itself present. The spectrality of history requires a process of acknowledgement of the “traces” of the traumatic past, by allowing the repressed memories of the past to be told in ghost form. The ethical imperative emanating from these narratives is to give ghosts “a hospitable memory... out of a concern for justice (qtd Labanyi 2002, 12).

José Sinisterra’s play *Ay Carmela*, Manuel Rivas’ novel *O lápiz do carpinteiro*, and Guillermo del Toro’s film *El espinazo del diablo*, among others, rely centrally on the trope of ghosts, to tackle the traumatic legacy of the horrors of the past in the present. It is intriguing that the same presence of ghosts occurs prominently in other internationally acclaimed recent films by Spanish directors, such as Alejandro Amenábar’s *The Others* and José Luis Bayona’s *El orfanato*, two of

the greatest international box-office hits of Spanish cinema of all time, with not apparent or obvious historical connections to the Spanish civil war or Franco's dictatorship. The centrality of ghost narratives in these films and the present preoccupation with the resurgence of a national repressed past cannot be mere coincidences. We should remember that one condition of ghosts is their elliptical nature, as well as the fact that they don't make themselves visible to everybody⁷. Also, the trope of orphanhood, like the trope of ghosts, has a well established connection in post civil war Spanish culture, by referring elliptically to the unspeakable horrors of the past and the traumatized identities of its victims (*Nada, Primera memoria, Cría cuervos, El desencanto, El Sur, Los niños de Rusia, El espinazo del diablo*, just to name a few). Even Pedro Almodóvar's recent films *Volver* and *La mala educación* have a central ghostly component, where the main characters are haunted by the ghosts of the past, inevitably connected to the repressive national past. In these two cases, however, we encounter rather simulacra of ghosts, the disappeared who fake their return as ghosts (*Volver*), or the living who assume the personality of the deceased (*Mala educación*). But in either case, the emphasis is on the haunting nature of the past accosting the living, and its refusal to disappear. This connection should not be altogether too surprising, since the spectrality of the past and the postmodern recurring use of simulacra both refer to a void that needs to be filled in virtuality⁸.

We can see that Spain's historical trauma is the originating cause of these narratives populated by ghosts. The spectral nature of that past, full of voids, omissions, and disappearances, cannot form a continuous narrative without distortion. Below the smooth surface of official accounts of history, lie those stories that have been silenced and erased, leaving only their ghostly traces, and therefore bound to return and haunt the present. Ghost stories construct a representation of the past "as a haunting, rather than a reality immediately accessible to us" (Labanyi 2007, 112). Ghosts, as embodiment of the past in the present, destabilize the accepted notions of history, reality, and self, and the clear demarcations that define them. Their here-but-not-here borderline existence, between the dead and the living, blurs the binary divide that constructs our perception of reality. Ghosts remind us that we need to confront our past if we want to move ahead and construct a better future.

It seems evident that the reappearance of ghosts in Spanish post-Franco culture has almost everything to do with the repression of the past, as an enforced prohibition during the dictatorship, and as a political taboo derived from the "pact of forgetting" during the political transition. The return of the past in spectral form would be thus a symptom of the collective inability to deal with it properly, but it can also offer the possibility of rectification, acknowledgement and

NOTES

7 | Natalia Andrés del Pozo makes a convincing argument for the historical symbolism of ghosts in Juan Antonio Bayona's *El orfanato*. Similarly, Acevedo-Muñoz has analyzed the national allegories of the traumatic legacies of the repressed past in Alejandro Amenábar's *Abre los ojos* and *The Others*. These films project the still unresolved questions of the national past onto the global scene, which coincides with the transnationalization of memories and policies dealing with the past and the establishment of universal jurisdiction.

8 | Interestingly, the Spanishness of some of these films almost entirely disappears, as in *The Others*, which was shot directly in English with a complete cast of English actors. Thus not only the past is spectral, the very core of the movie is built around a void, an unspeakable *unheimlich* place, like the spaces left empty by thousands of forced disappearances.

reparation. The mythical figure of Federico García Lorca, a symbolic national martyr of the Spanish fascist uprising, assassinated in the first weeks of the civil war for his political and sexual orientation, and still unaccounted for, is profoundly symbolic. Like a ghost, Lorca's shadow is a powerful reminder of the unsettled nature of the collective past, still haunting the present. In the same manner as the spectral representations of the past in the literary and cinematic works seen before, this shadow projects the image of a nation full of ghosts, still waiting recovery, resolution, and reparation.

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