Ghosts of the Holocaust in Franco’s mass graves: Cosmopolitan memories and the politics of “never again”

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Abstract
This essay presents a sociological analysis of what is known in Spain as the “recovery of historical memory” and the politics deriving from this recovery. This process was catalyzed by the exhumations of the remains of victims of Francoism that have been under way since the beginning of the twenty-first century. In order to do this, we will use the literature on cosmopolitan sociology and provide a dialogue between this sociology and recent developments in the study of social and cultural memory using concepts like postmemory, multidirectional, and cosmopolitan memory. The article moves beyond the national context and looks at Spanish memory politics through the theory and praxis of Holocaust memory on the one hand and the memory of the Argentinean victims of the military dictatorship on the other hand. This will enable us to identify the components and problems of a culture and politics of globalized memory.

Keywords
Argentina, cosmopolitanism, Holocaust memory, multidirectional memory, postmemory, Spain

He cavado la fosa
de mis muertos en el aire,
donde sus huesos ligeros

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At the start of the twenty-first century, globalization represents a challenge to the ways individuals and groups integrate personal and collective memories into a temporal and spatial frame that makes sense to them. History, borders, and ethnic and national belonging are no longer the only forms of social and symbolic integration. This also holds true for the study of memory, a field that often is pervaded with a spatially fixed understanding of culture that is taken for granted. Globalization challenges traditional notions of politics as bounded by origin and territory.

What happens to intergenerational responsibilities in the context of globalization? How much do “we” owe to “our” past, and to whom are we responsible for the future? Put differently, how do we need to alter the structures of justice and politics when memory becomes unbound? We would like to investigate this question by looking at Spanish memory culture and asking how “Spanish” it really is, and in what ways Spain can serve as an example of a cosmopolitanizing nation (Beck and Levy, 2013). In what ways are people of a current generation free to act or bound by the necessity imposed on them by the past and the memory of this past? Do they feel responsible or not responsible for the “sins of their fathers,” or concerned about their forebears’ victimization? What new forms of politics follow from this?

This essay offers a sociological analysis of what is known in Spain as the “recovery of historical memory” and the politics deriving from this recovery. This process was catalyzed by the exhumations of the remains of victims of Francoism that have been under way since the beginning of the twenty-first century. We will look at the Spanish case from the perspective of a cosmopolitan sociology (Beck and Sznaider, 2006), and in dialogue with the study of social and cultural memory in the last 20 years or so, employing the concepts of postmemory (Hirsch, 1997, 2008, 2012), traveling memory (Erll, 2011), and cosmopolitan and multidirectional memories (Levy and Sznaider, 2005, 2010; Rothberg, 2009), where the strict alliance between memory and identities is being challenged. Looking at memory through a cosmopolitan or multidirectional lens, we discover a different kind of memory, a memory on the move, transcending time and space. Such a memory is often based on experiences that arose in sites other than the origin of the memory itself. The sets of conceptual and theoretical tools that emphasize the supra-groupal, transnational, and communicative nature of collective remembering have the potential to move us beyond the national context. They enable us to identify the components and problems of a culture and politics of globalized memory, which also have been exposed in the practices of the historical memory movement in Spain during the past decade.

For a long time, Spain was known for its successful transition from dictatorship to democracy. The process is a controversial and much-debated point in the literature on this period. How
successful was the transition, really? To what extent was it motivated by fear of renewed violent conflict? Did it take into account the grievances of the victims of Francoism (Aguilar, 2007, 2008)? Nevertheless, it has served as a model, showing how a society can move from authoritarianism to freedom, integrate into Europe, and modernize within a short period of time and without revenge and retribution against those responsible for the previous chapter. That seemed to change in the year 2000 when civil society associations started to exhume mass graves of victims of the Civil War. It was not the first time mass graves containing corpses of Republican militants or sympathizers were exhumed in Spain (Ferrandiz, 2013).3 But as a result of the emergence of a surprisingly strong social movement centered on the Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory (ARMH), the open graves and corpses of the executed victims now reached an unprecedented level of public exposure. The movement gave rise to intense debates exposing conflicting political cultures, from both an ideological and a generational viewpoint. The debates focused on the legacy of Franco, the crimes committed during his dictatorship, and the role of Spain’s Amnesty Law of 1977. The exemplary and much-touted “Transición” (the period between the death of Franco in 1975 and the completion of the new Constitution in 1978), which had allowed reconciliation, modernization, and democracy, became for many observers of Spanish politics a “pact of forgetting” (pacto del olvido) concluded among the political elites. This is true especially for the generations born since the 1960s, who were no more than children when Franco died, had no direct experience with the dictatorship, and had not participated in the political pacts surrounding the 1977 Amnesty Law, which shields crimes of the Franco era from prosecution.4 This article does not seek to evaluate the success or failure of the transition or to determine whether Spain can serve as a model for transitional justice. We are concerned here with the theoretical implications of a transnational politics of memory, not with debates about Spanish history.

Part of the paradigm change in thinking about the Spanish past is the desire to frame the discussion in a transnational language of the politics of transitional justice, human rights, and victimhood. This interpretative frame for understanding political violence and state terror has clear links to Argentina, a fundamental source for the contemporary Spanish memory movement. The Argentine discourse, in turn, borrowed, and continues to borrow, from the language and symbolism of the Holocaust and its politics of memory. Thus, our decision to look at the Spanish memory movement through the lens of Argentina and its debates about the enforced disappearances is driven by the isomorphism that the metaphor of the Holocaust can provide to social actors in the field. Clearly, memories of the Holocaust have helped shape a new, potentially pan-European culture of human rights (Levy and Sznaider, 2010). But in addition, this memory culture has important, though often overlooked European and non-European dimensions, in terms of both its historical origin and its continuing development. Memories of the Civil War, military dictatorships, famines, oppression in Europe and elsewhere, and other atrocities have also contributed to the formation of Western ideas of human rights. Thus, the impact of the Holocaust and its influences on European experiences open a new vista for transcultural studies.

While the influence of the Argentine Desaparecidos on the memorialists in Spain has been acknowledged (Elsemann, 2011; Ferrándiz, 2010), we will argue in this article that through Argentina as well as through Spain’s Europeanization, the Holocaust has found its way to the mass graves of Francoism. The Holocaust serves not only as a bridging metaphor and a powerful symbol, but also as a cognitive model—a script—for structuring and framing the events of the Spanish past.

Unlike Argentina, in Spain the temporal distance from the events of the Civil War and its aftermath (more than 70 years) means that both the perpetrators and the majority of the witnesses are no longer among the living. Thus, the mass grave is the new context for the emergence, articulation, and circulation of narratives and images relating to the Franco regime and its crimes. The mass grave is also a metaphor and a symbolic key to their present meaning, bringing the corpses
“back to life” (see the extraordinary body of scholarship produced by Francisco Ferrándiz (2006, 2007, 2008, 2010, 2013) and Ferrándiz and Baer (2008)). But the graves of the victims of Franco and the acts of violence they bring to public attention seven decades after the events do not simply emerge without more ado, in a vacuum. The graves and the social movement of historical memory that results from them interact creatively with present-day ways of producing, communicating, and using the memory of mass violence, ways highly conditioned by the standards of the Holocaust.

The Holocaust and the politics of “never again”

Help to write the history of the latest khurbn (destruction). (The pledge of the Jewish Historical Commissions of Europe, a loose organization of Holocaust survivors who sought to study the destruction of the Jews right after it occurred; see Jokusch, 2012)

The Museum’s primary mission is … to encourage its visitors to reflect on the moral and spiritual questions raised by the events of the Holocaust as well as their own responsibilities as citizens of a democracy. (Mission statement, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum)

Please help recover the names of those who were murdered before there is no one left who can remember their time here on this earth. (Yad Vashem. The Victims’ Names Recovery Project)

If anything characterizes the memory of the Holocaust at the present time, it is the multiplicity of meanings and their continuous evolution. But what exactly do we mean when we speak of the memory of the Holocaust? Some people view the Holocaust as the culmination of the history of antisemitism, some see it as the apogee of the history of racism, and some consider it a crime against humanity (Levy and Sznaider, 2005). The differences among these points of view are subtle but crucial. Antisemitism is suffered only by Jews; racism, a broader category, can be experienced by anyone who is different or Other; crimes against humanity are broader still and may even be considered crimes against the human condition. The quotations that precede this section are evidence of those meanings. If in the first quotation the Nazi crimes are incorporated into the tragic and, one could almost say, cyclical fate of Jewish history, in the second the historical fact that is the object of remembrance and representation is placed in a context of ethics and central political values in the United States. These values are specifically those of a liberal democracy (equality before the law, religious freedom, freedom of assembly, freedom of expression, habeas corpus, etc.). The US Holocaust Memorial Museum is envisaged as an expression of the sacredness, and hence, the validity and obligatory nature of those values. The Holocaust in this case is no longer the latest of the catastrophes suffered with age-old resignation by the people of Israel, but the paradigmatic manifestation of the evil that collides with what we would define today as democratic values and human rights. The Holocaust has transcended the framework of Jewish memory and has been universalized. In the third example, we see how these two frameworks are negotiated through the initiative of the Israeli museum commemorating the victims of the Holocaust. Names are individuals and families. Intergenerational responsibility is framed differently in each of the examples.

The Holocaust is taught in itself, as a historical event, but in a more contemporary sense as well, raising questions of pluralism, tolerance, coexistence, respect for human dignity, and even legal and medical ethics. The Holocaust is simultaneously a moral lesson, a pedagogical device, and a political lesson. This universalist concept of memory, which transcends the communities, nations, or groups involved in the events as victims, bystanders, or persecutors, is incorporated into museums and memorials in Europe—such as, for example, the Jewish Museum Berlin or the recently opened museum Kazerne Dossin in Antwerp, which, not by chance, bears the name Memorial, Museum and Documentation Centre on Holocaust and Human Rights. But we also find this
approach in Latin America, not only in Holocaust museums like that in Buenos Aires, but also in sites of memory linked with the state-sponsored terrorism in the Southern Cone (e.g. the Museum of Memory and Human Rights in Santiago, Chile, or the Memory Park in Buenos Aires). We also see its shape in official acts of commemoration (27 January as Day of Holocaust Remembrance and Prevention of Crimes against Humanity, and the activities connected with that commemoration; Baer, 2011; Baer and Schnettler, 2012; Schnettler et al., 2010). The Holocaust has become the paradigmatic “Never Again” from which all other “never agains” derive. The slogan can serve as a memorial, a ceremony, a museum, a text, a pledge; in all cases, it transcends time and place and constitutes a moral imperative, an ethics of avoidance, and a rallying call for justice.

Has this universalized memory replaced particular memories? No, they coexist at the same time and in the same space, and each affects the other, in a process of mutual feedback. The lessons of “never again” can even be antagonistic and incompatible: for example, the European never again, which is universal (“Never again fascism!”), in contrast to the Israeli or, in some cases, the Jewish never again, which is particular (“Never again victims!”). There are four core discursive concepts involved in the debate on the universalization or particularization of the memory of the Holocaust: (a) With respect to the victims of the future (as the previous example shows): Does it concern only the Jews, or is it something that can happen to others as well? (b) With respect to the victims of the past: This is the discussion about the (Jewish) singularity of the Holocaust and the semantic confusion characteristic of the term: Does it refer only to the Jewish victims or to all the victims of Nazism, a category that would include Gypsies, communists, homosexuals, and, in our case, Spanish Republicans deported—for political reasons—to German concentration camps? (c) As regards the perpetrators, were the Nazis unique in their evil, or was there only a quantitative difference in comparison with other forms of mass violence, such as that employed by Franco during and after the Spanish Civil War? Finally, (d) with respect to the carriers of public memory, who has the right to evoke the memory of Nazism and the Holocaust, its symbols, metaphors, and globalized analogies? (Levy and Sznaider, 2005) As we see, these various ways of extending and universalizing the Holocaust beyond the communities of memory affected by this historic incident not only shape a wide, complex field of theoretical discussion, but also form the core of many debates about memories of political violence.

_Nunca Más_: Argentine Nazis and “Judíos del Sur”

In the context of the 1984 Truth Commission Report (_Nunca Más_) and the 1985 trials of the juntas, Argentina developed an important and broadly influential human rights movement that included other justice-seeking mechanisms, including the first groups of mothers and grandmothers of the disappeared, the first human rights forensic anthropology team, and the first truth trials (Sikkink, 2008). In a fundamental way, the human rights movement has shaped the collective memory of the period of military dictatorship (1976–1983) and its crimes, and the Holocaust plays an important role as an interpretative frame for this past. According to Finchelstein (2008), who studied the ideological roots of the dictatorship, Argentina had a unique relation with the Holocaust, because the perpetrators themselves presented the acts of extermination “as an active memory of the past of Auschwitz” (p. 179). In this regard, the Nazi crimes against the Jews became an important source of images, symbols, and representational models that were employed to shape and understand state terror in Argentina in the 1970s. Argentine victims are very often compared to Jewish victims of the Nazis, writer Miguel Bonasso (1984) employs the formulation “Jews of the South” in his acclaimed autobiographical novel _Recuerdo de la Muerte_. The dictatorship itself is “Nazified” by writers, artists, human rights activists, and others (Goldberg, 2001; Senkman, 2011; Timerman, 2002, etc.). At the same time, several scholars have challenged these analogies and interpretative
Thus, Goldberg (2001) emphasizes that this equation of “Jews under the Nazis” with “Argentines under the dictatorship” operates on two levels: the level of the events and the level of the possibility of the representation itself. The Holocaust has become a significant frame for interpreting the present and the past. The parallelisms follow one another in the establishment of similes and equivalencies between the historical processes and their characteristics: the idea of the internal enemy and its process of separation from the political body by means of a consecutive process of segregation, exclusion, and destruction, using the metaphor of the “Diaspora” to describe political exile. In this context dominated by the Nazi genocide, the Argentine military officers General Videla and Admiral Massera are no longer an expression of the old-style Latin American military, but become part of the dreadful history of the twentieth century, and their crimes are added to other bureaucratically organized atrocities (Andermann, 2012; Huyssen, 2003, 2004).

Saul Friedländer (2007), in his magisterial work on the Holocaust, has used the term “disbelief” as a central part of his methodology. By giving an account of the victims’ voices in his study of history, Friedländer attempts to make disbelief a part of the real world. However, we also need to take into account that the so-called voice of the victim can be an esthetic one rather than a political one. While Friedländer used this approach to write the history of the Holocaust, the sense of disbelief has traveled to other sites of victimization. In Argentina, the 1984 Truth Commission Report (published in English translation in 1986), in an effort to come to terms with the dictatorship is called Nunca Más (Never Again) in direct reference to the history of the Holocaust, given that it reproduces the slogan of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and starts with this sentence: “Many of the events described in this report will be hard to believe” (CONADEP, 1986: 9). The report speaks directly to “never again” on the one hand and to “disbelief” on the other. The imperative “nunca más” was, for the authors, an expression of hope that the historical cycle of repression in Argentina could and would be ended. “Hard to believe” means that even though it happened, it is not part of the natural order of things. It is so implausible as to induce disbelief. This defiance of credulity, which Friedländer understands as a methodology, connects the traumatic events in Argentina to the Holocaust. “I am aware that between the Shoa and the ‘desaparecidos’ there are so many differences that, historically, they are incomparable, except in one thing: in that incomprehensible presence of evil,” writes Hector Schmucler (quoted in Senkman, 2011: 29). “The adoption of models offered by Jewish history,” Goldberg writes, “constitutes the adoption of a paradigm of emptying in order to express, symbolically, the emptying of the paradigms.” In reality, we are faced here not with Jewish history or memory (the example of the khurbn, or “destruction,” indicates that there was no such representational impossibility for the survivors), but with a set of much later discourses born in the heat of a theoretical debate about the impossibility of representing the Holocaust: the trauma and the social catastrophe (Kaës, 1991), the civilizational rupture (Diner, 1988), or the metaphor of an earthquake that has destroyed all instruments for measuring (Lyotard, 1988).

A sociology of mnemonic practices (Olick et al., 2011) ought to pay attention to the displacement generated from forms of memory and group identity and collective action at the moment when these categories, frames, and scripts are adopted. What consequences does it have for the understanding and also for the moral and political assessment of a specific episode of extreme political violence such as that practiced by Argentina’s military dictatorship between 1976 and 1983?

Various authors have offered eloquent answers to the question of the genesis of this process and its consequences. Emilio Crenzel (2008), for example, understands that the Nunca Más report establishes, on the narrative level, the figure of the desaparecido as an innocent victim of state terror. Crenzel argues that the distinctive feature of the disappearances is found in the shaping of a “humanitarian narrative that favors the factual description of the same” and “the definition of the victims on the basis of their main features of identity” rather than their political predicaments. The work of CONADEP (the National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons) framed the
events while omitting the “analysis of the responsibilities of the political and civil society before and after the coup, and avoided historicizing the causes of the political violence” (Crenzel, 2008: 102). Crenzel (2012) also claims in his study of the writing of the Argentine Nunca Más report that its title was chosen after one of the authors had seen the phrase written in several languages on the monument at the Dachau concentration camp in Germany (p. 71). Even though the inscription is part of the international monument (which is separate from the Jewish monument), above all the events hovers the nightmare of the Holocaust, the paradigmatic “Never Again.” “Never again” needs to be experienced through representations of various kinds, to establish the ethics of “never again,” which connects the evils of nature with evil constructed by men in the cosmopolitan consciousness of our times. One clear example of such a cosmopolitan taboo is the presence of human rights in a new transnational world (Beck and Sznaiider, 2011).

In this sense, the human rights movement that springs from the mobilization of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo also emphasizes this family dimension, based on kinship—Madres de Plaza de Mayo, Abuelas (“grandmothers”) de Mayo, HIJOS (“children”)—this universal, personal, “post-memory” (the experience of the generation which comes after) component, in contrast to the memory of the militant activity based on political identity. This is also a point of contention in Spain, as we will show below. Ultimately, it is about an account that is legitimized by emphasizing the innocence—and in that sense the absence of agency—of those who are victims because they endured violations of their rights. This code probably expressed a major cultural and political change of direction with respect to the previous traditions of a large part of its carriers. Andreas Huyssen (2004) gives reasons for regarding this emblematic memory as “forgetting” because “the political dimension of the leftist insurgency that the military dictatorship was trying to root out is forgotten.” This form of forgetting, however, differs from repression or denial and constitutes a “memorialist discourse.” In Argentina as well as in Spain, and in any other case where the crimes occur in a context of political conflict, this “recovery of memory” entails a certain forgetting, especially if there is a desire for social resonance beyond the groups directly affected.10

As Crenzel (2008, 2012) writes, the Nunca Más report provides the symbolic and empirical foundations for the trial of the military officers, whom it denies all legitimation of an ex-post-facto justification of the coup—a justification that frames the events as features of civil war. But at the same time, with the adoption of a language linked with the Holocaust, the political history of the conflict recedes or is forgotten, which is the principal difference from the example it takes as a model: the crimes of Nazism and of the Shoah in particular. This “forgetting,” on the other hand, is a cause of controversy and division among organizations in the movement for justice and memory, because it implies, for some, an embarrassing acceptance of a dominant discourse inherited from the military: “They didn’t do anything” (and its infamous counterpart: algo habrán hecho—“they must have done something”). Likewise, the term “victim” is considered inappropriate for application to those who defended an involvement and commitment as agents, rather than as mere passive objects, of the state-sponsored violence. For that reason, the “never again”/human rights framing of the events, which has significantly shaped Argentine memorial culture, is also contested in Argentina in different spheres. Moreover, many of the former militants reject the human rights discourse and Holocaust analogies, which they view as negating their political agency, commitment, and personal sacrifice in the cause of revolutionary social transformation. Here, there are clear echoes of the Spanish case. As mentioned above, it is precisely the political (Republican, leftist, antifascist) dimension of history, and therefore of the activities of memory, that is made the object of dissent between the two principal organizations (ARMH and Foro por la Memoria). In Argentina, the same tension can be found between the two main “Mothers” organizations. The Founding Line of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo has supported exhumations for personal motives and individual restitution, aside from the importance of proving and documenting the
disappearances for legal and forensic purposes. The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo Association, presided over by Hebe de Bonafini, rejects exhumations and also compensations and closure (Moon, 2012). Burial and reburials, the latter organization argues, undermine political activism and depoliticize the disappearances by individualizing the mourning. Moreover, as Bevernage (2012) has shown, the expression “aparición con vida” firmly contrasts with the celebrated phrase “nunca más,” which is denounced as an empty slogan (p. 38). In Spain, too, the families and some of the Republican organizations contest the exhumations. They believe that the bodies need to stay where they are as testimonies to what took place and as part of the refusal of closure.

The ethnographies of exhumations reveal the tendency of the relatives (above all, those of the first and second generations) to maintain a depoliticized memory of the crimes (Bevernage and Colaert, 2014; Fernández de Mata, 2011; Ferrandiz, 2013; Renshaw, 2011), when the reason for the murders is fundamentally the political identity of the executed persons in a war or post-war context. But the juridification of the process in the context of human rights advocacy also can be interpreted as depoliticization. In 2002, ARMH succeeded in including Spain in the United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, originally set up in 1980 to investigate disappearances in Chile (Davis, 2005; Renshaw, 2011). Human rights organizations in Spain “borrow” freely from their Latin American and especially Argentine counterparts to conceptualize “forced disappearances in Spain” (Elsemann, 2011; Ferrández, 2010; Schindel, 2005). Thus, the term desaparecidos, with its clear Latin American connotations, depoliticized meaning, and subtext of Holocaust victims became a central reference point for Spanish human rights organizations wanting to place in context the Spanish victims of the Franco regime. We will turn to this case in the next section.

The graves of Francoism and the Desaparecidos of the Spanish Holocaust

Why did the fathers of the constitution leave my grandfather in a ditch? (Banner on the ARMH website)

Have the dead on the Republican side been forgotten? The social memory movement that emerged in the heat of the exhumations in the year 2000 answers that question in the affirmative. According to the Spanish memory movement, during the transition to democracy a thick veil was drawn over the Republicans who were murdered by Franco, and this represents a serious betrayal in ethical and political terms, with far-reaching effects on the democratic quality of the present (Ferrándiz, 2013). The recovery of “historical memory” is understood, therefore, not only in terms of individual restitution, through the finding and exhumation of the graves and the identification of the bodies, but also in social and political terms, through a set of initiatives—artistic, cultural, legal, and educational initiatives—that give public visibility to this same process of “recovery.”

It is in this process, in which the physical traces of these crimes come to public light, that a new interpretive framework also becomes established for the Civil War and Francoism, as well as the Transition. There is, therefore, a critical review of the way of understanding the past of violence, which, as we will see, is re-signified, and also of the model chosen for overcoming that past (the Transition). In the 1970s, priority was given to the concept of forgetting as a civic virtue, and peace (the prevention of a renewed round of violence) was considered more important than (transitional) justice. In Spanish politics, amnesty and amnesia played rather explicit roles in the transition to democracy (Agüilar, 2002, 2007, 2013). Amnesty and amnesia in this context mean a new beginning, a capacity not to be determined by the past. “Never again” in this context meant “nunca más guerra civil” (never again civil war) and a call for reconciliation (Agüilar, 2002, 2008).11

This has become part of a universal norm in processes of transitional justice in which former enemies are expected to reconcile past evils for the sake of a shared future. Memories are passed
on to observers and transmitted through media channels that are shaped by human rights tropes. This fusing of perspectives makes the act of reconciliation a key experience of memory. It is not so much the original crimes that are on the agenda—the passage of time removes the actual victims and perpetrators, and they are no longer the actors—rather, it is how their descendants deal with these histories and memories. What remains is the memory of a common history that cannot be divided. This notion, of course, is problematic, as divided history is exactly what caused the injustices in the first place.

The emergence of the memorialist movement at the turn of the century therefore implies a 180-degree turn in assessment and social awareness with respect to remembering and forgetting what happened in the pre-democratic period. And it opens a rift of two opposing visions in the political sphere, summarized by the concept of open wounds that finally close, thanks to “historical memory”—as the memorialist movement maintains—and the contrasting concept of closed wounds that “historical memory” opens at great risk, as the movement’s opponents assert. If the leitmotiv of the transition was to look ahead in order to overcome the past, the memory movement reverses this relationship and recommends looking back. But this looking back, we might say, is infused with the present. There are new actors, basically a third generation without any direct experience of the events, who open this debate about the past in which the nature of the suffering, the nature of the victim, and the attribution of responsibilities have been redefined. A “post-memory generation” is now recovering family history and reconstructing bonds of identity with relatives who were killed more than 70 years ago. The members of the new generation, in part, are discovering that members of their families were murdered by the Franco regime during this period. The generation of historical memory is thus inscribed at this particular turn-of-the-century moment, marked by “looking backward rather than ahead and defining the present in relation to a troubled past […] it is a consequence of traumatic recall but […] at a generational remove” (Hirsch, 2008: 106).

We are facing a new pattern of memory in which the moral, the legal, and the political are constantly being fused. As in Argentina, the discovery of the victims and testimonies that reveal the fate of the disappeared and the nature of the crimes inform a new memory narrative, where “victims become representatives and bearers of a task of ethical and political reconstruction in society” (Senkman, 2011: 25). Hence, law displaces war as a lens for interpreting the events. The past is not interpreted in terms of a civil war that calls for “reconciliation” and “starting a new chapter.” The imperative of remembrance is now linked with the unique nature of the crimes—fundamentally imprescriptible, unaffected by any statute of limitations—that were committed by the Franco regime in the war and under the dictatorship, and with their framing in the context of European fascism:

I don’t hear anybody say that they should forget the Holocaust, that they should forget the death train going to Auschwitz or to Mauthausen, that they should forget Pinochet. Nevertheless, in Spain you had to draw a thick veil, forget all our family members, forget the sorrow and the anguish. I don’t know why you have to forget everything and let bygones be bygones.¹²

The historical memory movement is not necessarily writing a different history (although the exhumations are contributing new and more exact data on these crimes), but is inverting the previous regime of memory (or of forgetting or “disremembering”) that was dominant until the late 1990s. According to the movement, this was an anachronism in the European framework (Spain has been an EU member since 1986). Post-fascist Spain is portrayed as backward and incompletely European. Spanish activists constantly invoke the established and uncontested public memory of the Nazi regime in Germany. In this light, the transition emerges as a morally unacceptable pact adopted by the political elites, leaving out what today would be defined as “victims’ rights.” What was “thrown into oblivion,” the term coined by Santos Juliá (2003, 2011) in his passionate defense of the agreements and balances struck in the transition, are no longer the fratricidal fights of a civil war,
but a “crime against humanity.” And this crime not only has no statute of limitations but also calls for the revision and even repeal of the legislation that ignored it, and for restitution in its full scope. If, in legal terms, the crime against humanity is not subject to a statute of limitations, in moral and political terms it is characterized by its validity and operation, by constant posing of questions to the present. In this sense, one can also understand the discursive interconnections to which we alluded in the title of this section and the progressive incorporation of legal terminology (for offenses categorized as crimes against humanity) in the historiographical and political debate about the past in Spain, which shapes the current regime of memory. Various authors have addressed, exhaustively and precisely, the conceptual and symbolic transfers of Latin America to the Spanish case, in which the *paseados* (those who were “taken for a walk,” that is, executed) of the Franco regime who lie in mass graves throughout the country become *desaparecidos*. This is a key *topos* in the memorialist movement; it serves as a central reference point for classifying the crimes of Franco. Ferrándiz (2010) has analyzed the “social life” of this offense, which is a concept from international human rights law (“forced disappearance”), with respect to the way it is being retranslated and employed by various groups in present-day Spain in their political and legal demands, that is, in their attempt to use international law as legal, political, and symbolic capital. Gabriel Gatti (2011) has done this by raising doubts about the suitability of the *desaparecido transnacional* as an aid to understanding the specific nature of the horror of Francoism and the post-war era (see also Elsemann, 2011). Thus, it is no coincidence that the founding of the memorialist movement in Spain by Emilio Silva—by now an almost mythical event—was an article he published in 2000, titled “My Grandfather Was a Desaparecido, Too,”13 connecting the fate of his grandfather discursively to the fate of the victims of the military dictatorships in the Southern Cone.

The Holocaust is included in an implicit way and also explicitly in the dynamics, contributions, and debates relating to the Spanish Civil War and the Franco regime in Spain. As we have seen, there is an appeal to the semantic and iconographic strategies that place Francoism in the context of Nazism and European fascism. The paradigm of Nazism and the Holocaust is seen in numerous historical works on the Spanish Civil War and the Franco regime. The most recent, though not the first, is Paul Preston’s (2011) book *The Spanish Holocaust. ¿Hay un Holocausto español?* (Is There a Spanish Holocaust?) is the subtitle chosen by the authors of *Las fosas del silencio* (The Graves of Silence) (Armengou and Belis, 2005), based on testimonies of victims and witnesses of Franco’s terror. In addition, the terminology employed in the indictments of Nazi crimes is used to describe the actions of extreme violence carried out by the Francoist troops and supporters during and after the Spanish Civil War. Javier Rodrigo (2003, 2012) points out the frequent use, in the historiography of the Franco regime, of the terms “genocide” or “Holocaust” and the typical definition of the Civil War as a “war of annihilation” or “war of extermination.”14 For example, Francisco Espinosa thinks that the massacre in the bull ring in Badajoz in August 1936 represented a preface to, and foreshadowing of, Auschwitz. Ferrán Gallego (2008) also suggests that “German and Spanish fascists carried out [… ] forms of extermination planned in a more or less painstaking manner” (p. 12–13).

In this way of framing this past—by subsuming Francoism under the term “fascism” and using analogies such as those described—we see that elements of an antifascist narrative are regained but put to a strictly national use, given their international decline or disuse. As Dan Diner (2010) pointed out so skillfully, it remains paradoxical that the (antifascist) memory of the Civil War has gone from being a European icon (“no pasarán,” they shall not pass) to being a purely local or national issue. The global icon at present is the Holocaust (Never again!), and the representations of the Spanish past are subordinated to its representational codes, involving its depoliticization. The “meaning struggle” between the ARMH and the communist Foro por la Memoria is the field on which this is most clearly played out in Spanish memory politics (see also Bevernage and Colaert, 2014; Ferrándiz, 2013). This struggle, which plays out within the Spanish left, is embodied by the two
slogans “nunca más” and “no pasarán,” one stating a generalized ethics of “never again” and the other invoking the revived, politicized memory of the Spanish Civil War as a struggle between Left and Right. Linked to the Foro’s criticism of trauma is also criticism of interpreting the exhumations as a family affair. The Foro not only challenges the Amnesty Law and the pacts of the Transición (in clear contradiction to the Communist Party’s position during that time), but also wants to re-establish the Civil War as a manifestation of the ever-present struggle between fascism and socialism. Indeed, if it can be claimed that current memory politics has made the Holocaust the dominant memory paradigm, subordinating the political memory of the Civil War to its new paradigm (Diner, 2010), then the Foro wants to re-establish a pre-Holocaust memory frame: The Spanish Civil War took place between 1936 and 1939 and was the first battle between fascism and socialism on a global scale. The Foro and the ARMH need to negotiate with each other their respective time-frames of memory.

We argue, therefore, that Holocaust memory is the driving force for much of the human rights frame of the ARMH. Part of this frame is mediated by family concerns and the search for therapeutic closure. The Foro, however, views this as a treasonous “privatization of memory,” and argues that recovery of historical memory actually means the re-installing of a straightforward antifascist metanarrative in which the political dimension surpasses the human rights claims of family members seeking restitution. This can be observed at the exhumation sites of mass graves and in ceremonies and tributes. In the exhumations of the Foro, political affinity (of party or union members) is a form of kinship that has preeminence over family ties. The dead speak through their present-day comrades (e.g. the International or the Republican Riego Anthem is sung), regardless of the wishes or worldviews of their living relatives. However, this distinction is not always as clear and unambiguous as in the previous example. The initiatives to honor the memory of the Spaniards deported to the Nazi camps, which in general terms are subsumed as just another element in the recovery of historical memory in Spain, actually create a space where we can identify the entire range from opposing to overlapping memory frames. The link with the Holocaust is obviously more direct in historical terms (the Nazi camps). The fact that most deported Spaniards were militant antifascists—and not Jews—obviously complicates the framing of memory. That brings us back to the debates about the meaning of the term “Holocaust” (which also makes it possible to define who its victims are) and the options available for universalization of the never again slogan discussed in the second section of this essay (see also Baer, 2011). Both Jews and Spanish Republicans—though to different degrees—were victims of the Nazi terror. The experience of the political deportees and the experience of the people condemned to extermination intersect in the Nazi concentration-camp universe, and in this sense, we can speak of a crossroads of histories. Nevertheless, the writer and Buchenwald survivor Jorge Semprún (2005) insisted on the difference between the deportation of the enemies of Nazism—such as the European resistance members, including the Spanish Republicans—and the extermination of Jews and Gypsies. The latter were exterminated for being what they were, Semprún writes, “although they never committed an act, a mere gesture, of opposition to the regime.” This distinction between deportation and extermination is not quantitative but “ontological.” Even so, as if under the cloak of memory, the incidents lose the historiographical clarity that Semprún demands. We find an interesting overlapping of memory frames when, for instance, the political deportees are memorialized as “exterminated” and at same time remembered as heroic “antifascists” (see, for instance, Angel del Rio (2012)). Terms associated with the genocide of the Jews (such as “extermination camps” or “Holocaust”) are used to describe the deportation of the Republicans, and we also find this phenomenon of the intersection and superposition of memories in the testimonies and autobiographical works. For example, Tres Mauthausen (After Mauthausen) by the survivor Mariano Constante belongs to the genre of Holocaust memoirs, to the extent that its author refers to the cultural matrix which now pervades
our way of looking at other historical injustices (Gómez López-Quiñones, 2010). Accounts of Spanish Republicans evolve from a heroic and collective narrative of the political deportee to become a private and tragic narrative of the surviving victim. In a culture of memory in which the Holocaust has taken on such central importance, subordination to its coordinates and semantics seems to be a condition of its existence.

Conclusion

Clearly, from a moral point of view, every group or nation has the right to its own narrative of suffering and victimization, and it is no coincidence that the paradigm, icon, and universalized model of these narratives—the Holocaust—has left its stamp on the methods chosen by the social actors involved in memory work to relate to this past and project it in the public sphere. But what are its consequences? Invoking the ghosts of the Holocaust—which will impose on any historical injustice the metaphysical dualism of Nazis versus Jews—can have unpredictable effects, and may also imply potential conflict (see Robben, 2012). In terms of advancing the sociology of Holocaust memory, our cases also suggest another problem that has not been sufficiently explored in the literature on social memory in Europe. The Western European assumption that narratives of the Holocaust would provide the foundation for a shared European identity has clashed with the memory politics of post-Stalinism and post-Francoism, and state-imposed commemorative practices have become the subject of fiery debates contributing to the renationalization of European memories. What unite these divisions are traumatic narratives of victimizations that ignore politics and history; in other words, conflict associated with memory is a relationship between opponents who share significant cultural references. In these narratives, the Holocaust exists as a memory paradigm but not as shared memory. This means that at the beginning of the twenty-first century, Europe (it makes little sense to distinguish here between East, West, South, and North) is searching for shared cultural images. Clearly, the memory of the Holocaust, as a foundational event for such a shared past, has a seminal role. Common narratives are not common in the sense that everybody would tell the same story. Instead, the recognition of different narratives is the crux of the matter. It primarily involves a conflict-ridden history in which various groups, linked across national boundaries and cleavages, seek to experience the conflict without necessarily trying to overcome it, pursuing a common narrative without hoping to achieve it. In so doing, they are also changing their own identity to a certain extent and are creating new opportunities for political action. Thus, as we have shown, memories can indeed be cosmopolitan and multidirectional in theoretical terms; the translation from theory to politics is still a challenge for memory activists and researchers alike, if both sides want to be left with more than a traumatized past.

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Notes

1. Poem titled “Todos los nombres” by Ana María Valencia Herrera, “granddaughter of grandparents shot in Marchena and a paternal grandfather who went into exile,” http://www.todoslosnombres.org/. Translation:
I have dug the grave  
of my dead in the air,  
where their light bones  
merge into the highest branches  
of the trees  
and gently the bright stars  
offer them their white lights.

2. Paul Celan, “Todesfuge” (*Mohn und Gedächtnis*)

Black milk of daybreak we drink it  
come evening we drink it  
come midday we drink it  
come morning we drink it  
we drink it and drink it  
we spade out a grave in the air  
there it won’t feel so tight.

3. Mass graves containing corpses of Republican militants or sympathizers were opened in clandestine fashion by relatives during the dictatorship, and after Franco’s death other exhumations took place with scarcely any institutional or technical support (Ferrándiz, 2011). In October 2000, sociologist and journalist Emilio Silva organized the exhumation of a Republican mass grave in Priaranza del Bierzo (León) containing 13 corpses, including that of his grandfather. This exhumation, the first that was conducted with the participation of technical experts (Silva and Macías, 2003), led to the founding of the ARMH (Asociación para la Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica). As in many other contested settings, historians argue about the death toll of the Spanish Civil War. Most calculations estimate around 350,000 violent deaths during the years 1936–1939, with 200,000 of them classified as victims of Franco (see Preston, 2011). An estimated 40,000–60,000 are still buried in unmarked graves.

4. This law is highly contested now, and there are fierce debates about whether it violates international human rights law. For the general context, see Davis (2005) and Encarnacion (2008).


7. Hugo Vezzetti has argued that there are fundamental differences between the Nazi crimes and the Argentine massacres perpetrated by the military juntas. He sees the critical factor in the latter as “the decision to exact a corporative revenge” (Vezzetti, 2002: 154). Vezzetti (2012) also criticizes the use of the term genocide for the Argentine case (as argued by Feierstein (2007)), partly because it is hard to see a common identity in the diverse categories of “subversives” who were the victims of the illegal repressive system (p. 32).

For our purposes, Vezzetti’s contribution to the debate is a fundamental conceptual differentiation between memory conflicts in Argentina’s post-dictatorship era and broad social representations of the past, which are organized according to a logic that does not replicate that of the social and political history of the country.

8. See also Jacobo Timerman’s (1981) “Prisoner without a Name,” who framed his own experiences as a prisoner in Argentina within a Holocaust frame. For an analysis, see Tarica (2012).

9. This process is also being facilitated and mediated through the presence of a large Jewish European refugee community in Argentina, whose members are confronted by a military that never hid its admiration of the Nazis. One should also note that the practice of “disappearance” employed by the Argentinian military refers to the Nazi tactics of making people disappear in “Nacht und Nebel” (Night and Fog) round-ups.

10. Here, we must note that in Argentina, the framework is again tilting toward militant interpretations of the past, particularly in light of the memory politics of Kirchnerismo under Néstor and Kristina Kirchner since the turn of the century. However, the Argentine “paradigm” that was imported to Spain is the one that became dominant in the human rights movement and shaped a victim-centered public memory of the military dictatorship.

11. However, in the context of the memory movement, we will also see a re-semantization and a merging with cosmopolitan versions of “never again,” such as “Nunca más fascismo,” in the context of the
recovery movement. Even if the term itself is used less than in Argentina, just by emphasizing the phrases “víctimas del franquismo” (victims of Francoism), “verdad, justicia, reparación” (truth, justice, reparation), and “contra la impunidad” (against impunity)—very common slogans of mobilization—Spain’s memory movement places itself under the umbrella of a very different “nunca más.”

12. Testimony of a victim interviewed by Montse Armengou and Ricard Belis in Las fosas del silencio.

13. La Crónica de León, 8 October 2000.

14. Javier Rodrigo maintains that it is necessary to use more appropriate terms for the Spanish case, because Franco’s objective was not so much to exterminate as to defeat and transform, above all. Therefore, without minimizing the extreme violence Franco employed to that end, Rodrigo advocates use of the term “policy of exclusion” rather than “policy of extermination” with regard to Franco.

15. When Hitler’s Germany occupied France in 1940, thousands of Spanish Republican refugees were left at the mercy of the collaborationist Vichy regime. After Franco’s government denied them recognition as citizens, 9000 Spaniards—most of whom were Republican veterans who had enlisted in the French Army, in the Resistance, or in the militarized Labor Units—were deported to German concentration camps, mainly Mauthausen in Austria. There, about 5000 lost their lives (see Toran, 2002).


References


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