Historical Memory and Postmemory in the Pluricultural Peninsular Hispanic Context

Veronica Orazi
Università degli Studi di Torino

Wars, persecutions, genocides involving groups, communities or entire peoples generate collective trauma. The response to this trauma activates psychological mechanisms that lead to its removal, alteration, distortion and progressive elaboration. Collective trauma and the social processes generated by it, which drive the recovery of the memory of the violent event suffered, repeat the mechanisms of individual trauma—that is, an "unclaimed experience", according to Caruth (1996, 10-24).1 All this in turn produces a “trauma secundario”, i.e. an “desasosiego empático”, resulting from the artistic expression (literarisation, in the words of LaCapra, 63-64) of other people's traumatic experiences. Collective trauma, from a sociological perspective,2 is the result of the perception and conception of the traumatic event as a threat to the social identity of the group that has suffered it and generates a crisis that affects its own identity (Alexander 2012, 15).

Therefore, the traumatic process takes place in the time between the traumatic event and its recovery in the collective memory.3 Social trauma is elaborated through the progressive approximation to the memory of the events of the traumatic past in the generations following those who were involved in it; during this period there may be a (gradual and/or partial) loss of confidence in the Institutions, which may in turn lead to a (partial or total) passive attitude towards political life. Consequently, when successive generations are confronted with the memory of the traumatic past, the question of responsibility and blame for what happened, key elements of their very identity, becomes central (Giesen, 14.475). The lack of a concrete elaboration of the trauma, a phase in which Spain still finds itself, because the recovery and reparation of what happened during the fratricidal conflict and Franco's regime is still pending, means that the question and the traumatic process itself remain unresolved. This is a phenomenon that has shared features in the different contexts concerned, such as the emergence of movements for the recovery of memory and their discourses and models of representation; these are transnational elements (Assmann & Conrad, p. 3; Assmann 2014) that refer to what has been defined as 'cosmopolitan memory' (Levy & Sznайдer; Reading). Therefore, the concepts of 'crisis and disruption', based on the idea of social or cultural (i.e. identity) trauma and affiliative or cultural memory, fit into contexts in which a global vision of the different elements that characterise them has already been elaborated, because they are very general concepts that refer to aspects as different as those generated by any type of 'crisis, conflict' or 'rupture, disturbance, disorder' (such as wars, terrorism and other intra-state conflict dynamics, economic crises and their consequences—impoverishment of the population, evictions, migrations— but also the ethical-political crisis and corruption, violence of any kind, e.g. gender-based, domestic,

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1 Kansteiner disagrees with this theory and denies that traumatic experiences retain this quality by becoming cultural memory.
2 Among the numerous sociological studies, cf. Alexander et al., Alexander 2004 y Smelser.
3 Halbwachs refers to the need to (re-)construct a shared past as a way of strengthening identity. Erll sets out the state of the art on Cultural Memory Studies; cf. también Assmann & Czaplicka and Erll et al. 2008. Since 2008, the international journal Memory Studies has been publishing contributions on this topic. Some key concepts, of obligatory reference, are: places of memory (Nora 1984-1992), memory/forgetting (Ricoeur), communicative memory/cultural memory (Jan Assmann 2008) and canon/archive (Assman 2008) or archive/repertoire (Taylor).
All these aspects refer to the ideas of crisis and disruption, but also to specific characteristics that must be approached beforehand when investigating each one of them, in order to arrive at a second moment at their vision as a component of a very varied whole.

The above emerges and evolves in a peculiar way according to the historical moment and the area in which the trauma and the consequent reaction take place (Shoah, dictatorships in the Southern Cone and Central America, Spanish Civil War and Franco's regime, etc.). It is precisely for this reason that, in order to undertake the analysis of the phenomenon in a specific context, it is necessary to emphasise the peculiar aspects that characterise it. Indeed, “while memory discourses appear to be global in one register, at their core they remain tied to the history of specific nation states”, and thus “the political site of memory practices is national, not postnational or global” (Huyssem 2000, 26; Huyssem 2002; Nora 2002), because “los discursos de memoria pueden adoptar patrones narrativos transnacionales, pero en el momento de interpretar sus funciones y efectos políticos y sociales tenemos que contextualizarlos en un ámbito local y nacional” (Lauge Hansen).

The concept of 'chosen trauma' (trauma elegido) also helps to clarify the issue, that is, the identity process in which violent past events lose their traumatic effects and become a key reference for the group, which fundamental function is to favour the (re-)construction of collective identity (Volkan). In the case of Spain, the 'chosen trauma' (trauma elegido) is such for only part of the population, because from the end of the dictatorship until today the lack of attribution of blame and assumption of responsibility has continued to amplify the gravity of the situation: here, the chosen trauma is constantly fed back, due to the impunity of the regime's representatives after the death of the dictator. This generates and emphasises the (sense of) impossibility of recovery, rescue and justice, in an endless and anguished prolongation of the trauma itself. In fact, any process of change towards democracy involves some necessary actions, such as the political replacement of high-ranking officials of the dictatorship and other prominent personalities linked to the regime, the redress of grievances, etc. (López de Abiada & Stucki, 108). This is why in Spain the fratricidal conflict of 1936-1939, the Franco regime (1939-1975), the Moncloa Pacts, the Pact of Oblivion (Pacto del Olvido) with the 1977 Amnesty Law and the Transition (Transición) (1975-1982) give shape to a historical, socio-political and artistic-cultural context that represents another unicum in the global panorama. Spain has not yet had its Nuremberg and, in general, those who held political or public office during the dictatorship have passed through the transition to democracy without being removed. The renewal that was supposed to bring about the birth of a democratic Spain has been at least partial, as demonstrated by the permanence of Francoist officials and/or their descendants in key areas of the country's life in the last quarter of the 20th century and in the first decades of the 21st century. Thus, “el fracaso del proceso democrático de los 80, en el que algunos sectores socio-políticos continuistas del franquismo quedaron exentos de responsabilidades jurídicas e historicas a pesar de su complicidad con el regimen dictatorial anterior”, and “la continuidad en el poder democrático de los artífices del régimen dictatorial mediante la institucionalizacion del olvido” (Amo, s.p.) have characterised the phenomenon in a peculiar way in the Hispanic peninsular context. Here, reflection on historical memory and post-memory is still at a preliminary stage, because the exact perimeter of the

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4 The Basque context constitutes one more element that concretises the unicum represented by the Hispanic peninsular context. As Manuel Montero demonstrates in his article, in this area, historical memory and postmemory are transcendent meta-historical concepts that extend and cover a period that goes from the Carlist Wars to the present day.
phenomenon and its consequences have yet to be established, to focus on the collective trauma par excellence, which stems from the Civil War, the post-war period, the dictatorship and its progressive elaboration and overcoming, both from the individual trauma that becomes collective and its concrete socio-political resolution. It was only in December 2000, twenty-five years after the dictator's death, that the Association for the Asociación para la Recuperación de la Memoria Històrica (ARMH) was founded, and its activities since then have proceeded without the expected speed, due to political dynamics that do not facilitate its action. Two years later, in 2002, the Federación Estatal de Foro por la Memoria was created, with the aim of locating, marking and excavating mass graves, recognising and helping ex-prisoners, reprisoners, exiles, ex-combatants and their families, as well as organising events and activities aimed at the recovery of memory. It took more years for the Ley de Memoria Histórica to be enacted in 2007, which establishes measures in favour of those who suffered persecution or violence during the Civil War and the dictatorship. Thirteen years later, in September 2020, the Spanish Consejo de Ministros approved a draft proposal for a Ley de Memoria Democrática, the text of which must be reported on by various state institutions in order to become a law project and be sent to the Congreso for its legislative processing. The Spanish Gobierno, on the occasion of the presentation of the draft proposal, warned that the development of the law, which updates the 2007 Ley de Memoria Histórica, will be very long and its application will take a long time. (La nueva Ley 2020). It is clear that it will take time to finally face up to the horrors of the war and the subsequent regime, to assign responsibility and to bring about justice. In other contexts, however, such as in Germany or in the Latin American countries that freed themselves from the totalitarian regimes that oppressed them, both in the Southern Cone and in Central America, the State has explicitly condemned the dictatorship and has acted as an active party in the re-establishment of democratic principles. Spain, on the other hand, remains suspended in limbo and the condemnation of its totalitarian past is not yet sufficiently defined. In this area, therefore, due to the still embryonic state of development of the issue, despite the strong impetus of part of civil society, some associations and a few public figures (politicians, intellectuals, creators, etc.), the focus is still on finding out what happened and starting to recover the memory of the victims. This situation leads to the questioning of the Transition process itself for its lack of effectiveness in this regard (Silva Barrera): “los vencedores […] no se vieron forzados a tomar responsabilidades por las injusticias cometidas y por lo tanto no quisieron implementar ninguna forma de justicia transicional”; this turns the demand for justice “en una acusación política, tanto a la sociedad actual como al mismo proceso de transición”; consequently, “el acto de contar las historias de las víctimas olvidadas, devolverles sus historias individuales, recordar sus nombres y reconocer sus sufrimientos” concreta “una forma de hacer reparaciones” (Lauge Hansen, 2 y 5). In the situation of backwardness that characterises this process in this environment, there is room for the crassest denialism and the deficient performance of the governments since the death of the dictator until today: publicly and politically, the phase of attribution of responsibility by the state is still insufficient and blocks the elaboration of the trauma, since a part of the community - an important 'official' part of the state apparatus - has not concretely assumed this incontrovertible truth.

Therefore, in Spain, the recovery of historical memory, the reparation and dignification of the victims by the different governments that have succeeded one another is still largely pending. This generates on the one hand a deep frustration and on the other a thirst for justice pursued through various means, among which artistic-cultural production occupies a privileged place, by materialising the trauma and
contributing to its awareness, problematisation, progressive elaboration and overcoming, as well as to contrast the collective oblivion, an action that the ruling classes have not adequately supported up to the present. In the absence of and pending effective political action, culture, the arts and literature end up playing a key role, metabolising and materialising such traumas, responses and mechanisms of elaboration, which take the form of different manifestations, depending on the specific factors that define each area, period and peculiar features of the groups, communities or peoples that have been involved in the traumatic events. In such manifestations, patterns of trauma representation are still shared by both direct and indirect witnesses: individual trauma, when it becomes collective because it affects the entire population, takes on a dimension whose objective is no longer just the recovery of the memory of a family member, but of the community and the people themselves. It is about the recovery of an identity memory based on the mechanisms of trauma elaboration that affect both the defeated and the victors. In the former, this manifests itself through removal to avoid reliving a traumatic past but also through the finalised claim to compensation for a huge debt; in the latter, it is sometimes expressed by sharing the perspective of the defeated and sometimes through denialism and the perception of the war and the dictatorship as something necessary and even positive for the country.

It is for all these reasons that the concept of 'affiliative memory' (Faber 2010, 102-103; Faber 2014)\(^5\) and the category of 'haunting legacies' (Schwab) do not quite fit the peninsular Hispanic context, where the issue is not so much one of solidarity, compassion, identification or haunting, tormenting and obsessing legacies, but here justice has yet to be established (rather than re-established).

In the Peninsular Hispanic context, due to the still incipient stage of development of the phenomenon in this specific area, in order to thematise war and post-war trauma – based on the transgenerational traumatic effect (Volkan; Schwab; Assmann 2014; Aguilar Fernández & Ramírez-Barat)– the concepts of Historical Memory and Postmemory (Hirsch 1992-1993),\(^6\) can be used as a starting point, by developing them further to make them more precise and more effective. Among the aspects that need to be better defined in order to take a step forward in critical reflection and to bring some key elements into sharper focus are the identification of hybrid categories and the concept of time (Orazi, 2019b, 521-523).

As far as the former are concerned, the most relevant is the category of 'victim': there are direct victims, i.e. those who were the target of the violence, and indirect victims, i.e. those who were not the main target of the violence but nevertheless suffered (indirectly) its consequences. A first important hybridisation is that which defines the subcategory of subjects who were both direct and indirect victims (e.g. stolen children, children of executed and/or imprisoned republicans). When referring to indirect victims, rather than talking exclusively about 'descendants' (children and grandchildren), one should talk about 'surviving family members' (children and grandchildren, but also mothers/fathers, siblings, nieces and nephews, grandparents, etc.). Another key hybrid subcategory is that of those who were both victims and perpetrators, such as those who compromised with their tormentors and ended up acting precisely like them, or individuals who populated the 'grey zone'.\(^7\)

With regard to the concept of time, one can speak of a 'curved time of memory', which concerns both Historical Memory and Postmemory. This is obviously a

\(^5\) Lauge Hansen (3) considers Hirsch's vision to have been superseded and agrees with Faber 2010.


\(^7\) Cf. the chapter entitled La zona grigia in Primo Levi’s I sommersi e i salvati (1986).
continuous chronological flow in which past and present form an inseparable unity. However, it is necessary to distinguish between two moments: the time in which the events took place, experienced by those who were the protagonists (the direct victims, the main target of violence) and who are bearers of historical memory; and the time after the events in which the indirect victims (who were not the direct targets of such violence), the victims' 'surviving family members' and outside observers play the role of agents of Postmemory, who were not involved in (and sometimes did not even witness) the events. Thus, when investigating the relapses in memory and in the collective identity of the Spanish Civil War, Francoism, the Transition and the progressive approach to democracy in the Hispanic peninsular area, it is appropriate to take advantage of the aforementioned categories, bearing in mind the clarifications illustrated above. This is the phase that must precede any kind of broader perspective (e.g., cultural or affiliative memory, “crisis and disruption”, etc.), because in order to reconstruct such a complex mosaic it is essential to first identify and analyse its tesserae, of which this is one of the largest in the area analysed. Although all the aspects mentioned refer to the same identity profile, the contributions in this monograph do not investigate the same issues as inter- and intra-state conflicts, economic crises and their consequences, etc., or the specific situation in other areas mentioned (e.g. Germany or Latin America). So much so that the relative lack of attention in the field of (and not only) Hispanic narrative to the perspective of the victimizer pointed out by Lauge (*, 4) is explained precisely by the fact that in this context the necessary prior step for this to take place has not been taken. In other words, neither have responsibilities been clearly attributed nor have the perpetrators been concretely recognised as such, due to a good deal of denialism or an attitude that justifies and even considers the regime positively, even today. This would be unthinkable in other contexts (Crownshaw; Eaglestone; Baackmann; Pettitt) and yet it is happening in a Spain that - so it was said - has not yet had its Nuremberg. This is why artistic-cultural remembrance is emerging as a socio-political reparatory practice to rescue and do justice, according to the perspective of the movement for the recovery of memory, and plays the role of opening up avenues with the aim of encouraging a still insufficient assumption of responsibilities. The different Spanish cultural fields (especially the arts and literature) have materialised the phases and typologies of reaction and elaboration of the phenomenon of the recovery of Historical Memory and Postmemory, concretising them in a peculiar way due to the specific configuration in this area of factors such as the reliability of memory and hypermediated memory, the representability of individual and/or collective pain, the question of the usefulness/legitimacy of memorial and postmemorial writing (Orazi, 2019, 521-523). This situation has also led to the emergence in Spain of direct testimonies (from the individuals personally involved in the events) and indirect ones (both from their descendants and, more generally, surviving family members, as well as from external observers, i.e. researchers, creators, etc.) (Macciuci & Pochat; Guzmán; García Martínez). Thus, works have appeared that deal with the theme of Historical Memory and Postmemory to give voice to direct witnesses (victims, perpetrators and those who populated the grey zone), indirect witnesses (descendants and surviving family members as well as outside observers) or those who were both direct and indirect witnesses (e.g., the stolen children), embodied in real and fictional figures. The visions of these categories are complementary and contribute to recomposing a complex picture that is difficult to reconstruct, express and transmit (Orazi 2017; Orazi 2019a; Orazi 2019b).

The aim of this monograph is to investigate the phenomenon of Historical Memory and Postmemory through their artistic-cultural manifestations and socio-political
implications in the multicultural Castilian-Catalan-Galician-Basque context. To this purpose, the published contributions study the representation of Historical Memory and Postmemory in some strategic genres and fields, such as testimonial literature, novel and graphic novel, theatre, cinema, photography, but also in the language of politics and in school textbooks.
Works cited


