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Michael Richards

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## Introduction: cultural trauma in Spain

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This book explores how the life-shattering ordeal of Spain's civil war and repressive aftermath has been remembered and represented during the post-war decades from 1939 to 2007, the moment at which the Spanish parliament passed a government-sponsored Law of Historical Memory. The principal aim is to place into historical perspective the recent pre-occupation with memory, which has been at the centre of Spanish political debate on justice and reparation since the late 1990s.<sup>1</sup> The legacy of civil war rupture and post-war violence was sustained and significant during the unprecedented social change from the 1950s onwards, as 'official' or doctrinal memory, personal testimony, and the constructed narratives of public figures attest. 'Master narratives' and mythscapes of the war persisted and overlapped, forming the background to the historical picture of the war constructed both by individuals and by identifiable communities of memory. Throughout the post-war decades, remembering the conflict and its victims was shaped and understood according to the shared qualities and objectives valuable to the formation of collective identities. Most recently, memorial activity, crystallised particularly through the excavation of wartime burial pits and the identification and dignified reburial of the mortal remains of Republican victims of wartime and post-war terror, has been stamped with the impression of a universal culture of human rights.

During the long Franco era (1939–75), those who were free to remember collectively and able to participate symbolically in the public replaying of the recent conflict were counted exclusively amongst the victors. These public representations formed the basis of officially encouraged claims to a collectively traumatic past. The concept of cultural trauma will be understood here as a tapestry of historical constructs depicting specific painful events which is shaped by the *post facto* interplay of political power, social relationships and agency, and shared

<sup>1</sup> In comparative terms, see István Deák, Jan T. Gross and Tony Judt (eds.), *The Politics of Retribution in Europe* (Princeton, NJ, 2000).

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structures of meaning.<sup>2</sup> Whilst related materially and metaphorically to personal trauma (persistent damage caused to individuals who have lived through violent experiences which cannot be forgotten), *cultural* trauma is viewed here as something distinct. This remains the case even though it is essential to recount many individually traumatic experiences in order to make sense of and evaluate claims of collective trauma.

The individual–collective distinction can naturally be applied to the theme of memory in general (of which trauma is a particular form). The problematic concept of memory is treated here inclusively both as a faculty of the individual mind, which functions in the light of social and cultural influences, *and* as the production of images, representations and narratives of the past which are disseminated and shared in the public realm through active social agency. This way of working relies broadly on the celebrated theory of collective memory elaborated by the sociologist Maurice Halbwachs who, though he did not focus on trauma, maintained in his ground-breaking research of the 1920s that past events and experiences always formed a social or collective framework for present experiences and were drawn upon in making the present intelligible.<sup>3</sup> The analytical value of the concept of ‘collective memory’ has, in recent times, been diminished, however, by imprecise usage and the making of easy assumptions about the content of group memories with little or no critical analysis of the historical process and necessary social agency involved.<sup>4</sup> The concept of cultural trauma, though it can be related to that of ‘cultural memory’ (which refers too broadly to memory as a ‘vehicle’ which carries widely held suppositions about the individual and social world), is more precise in meaning because it insists on pinpointing particular negative events and instances, and the associated processes of memory construction, rather than general phenomena, allowing description and analysis of the ways in which pasts related specifically to suffering and sacrifice are actively contested and struggled over.<sup>5</sup> This angle of approach, particularly

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Patrick Finney, ‘On Memory, Identity and War’, *Rethinking History*, 6, 1 (2002); John R. Gillis, ‘Memory and Identity: The History of a Relationship’, in Gillis (ed.), *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (New Haven, 1994); Wulf Kansteiner, ‘Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies’, *History and Theory*, 41 (2002).

<sup>3</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (Paris, 1925); *La mémoire collective* (Paris, 1950); Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (ed. Lewis Coser) (Chicago, 1992).

<sup>4</sup> See Jay Winter, *Remembering War* (New Haven, 2006); Emmanuel Sivan and Jay Winter (eds.), *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, 1999).

<sup>5</sup> On cultural memory, see Michael Lambek and Paul Antze, ‘Forecasting Memory’, in Antze and Lambek (eds.), *Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory* (London, 1996), pp. xi–xxxviii.

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when presented within a chronological structure, allows for analysis of struggles for ‘ownership’ of cultural trauma and the evolution of post-war memory in relational and processual terms, an appropriate theme for social historians.<sup>6</sup>

The experiential and the representational require some level of separation in explaining cultural trauma. Although events may be catastrophic, dislocating and painful, affecting masses of individuals, they are not inherently traumatic: in its collective form, trauma is a socially mediated attribution. As the sociologist Jeffrey Alexander has written, ‘events do not, in and of themselves, create collective trauma’.<sup>7</sup> At a collective and cultural level we know this is the case because similarly negative historical ‘happenings’ are not always followed by a traumatic legacy; in some instances events need not have happened at all in order for a case to be made to a potential community of memory and for a sense of identity to be considered compelling. Though this is generally not so in the case of Spain’s civil war, the point forces us to consider the processes by which a multitude of individual experiences interact in their retelling with broader society-wide settings and developing group consciousness in the making of such claims, particularly when they are made by competing collective victims.<sup>8</sup> The active construction and mediation of claims of cultural trauma in Spain – their rise and fall over seven decades – and the dialectic of ‘possession’ of group trauma form a unifying thread throughout this study. Although recent historiographical focus has tended towards ‘the memory of the defeated’, especially since the 1970s, Francoists as well as Republicans made claims on political and social allegiance and group identity through the construction of collective trauma claims based on particular representations of the origins, experience and effects of the civil war. Since we are interested in social memory in its relational dimension and as a process, claims on both sides require evaluation, though the objective is not to look or argue for any ‘equivalence of suffering’.

In the aftermath of communal violence, social groups often deny or dilute their responsibility by projecting blame for their own suffering

<sup>6</sup> On history and sociology in the study of memory, see Jeffrey Olick, *The Politics of Regret* (London, 2007), pp. 85–118.

<sup>7</sup> Jeffrey C. Alexander, ‘Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma’, in Alexander (ed.), *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (Berkeley, CA, 2004), p. 8. See also Ron Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 1–22.

<sup>8</sup> See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised edn (London, 2006). On the role of constructions of the past in the Balkan conflicts of the 1990s, see for example: V. P. Gagnon, *The Myth of Ethnic War: Serbia and Croatia in the 1990s* (Ithaca, NY, 2004).

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onto the demonised or ‘othered’ enemy: the hated group ‘in our midst’.<sup>9</sup> In so doing they refuse to recognise the trauma of these others. Based on making claims of the indelible nature of the cultural and psychological scar left on group consciousness, a struggle ensues to create or reconstruct communities and political authority by denying legitimacy to other collective identities, especially of ‘the defeated’. Commemorating Spain’s war twenty-five years after its beginning, a leading member of the secretive Catholic lay organisation Opus Dei, who was an industrialist, banker, and veteran of Franco’s ‘crusade’, justified his fears in 1961 that society might forget the war and its sacrality by suggesting that those who supported the left could not have been traumatised to the same extent as Catholics and conservatives because the left always undertakes collective endeavours in the name merely of social and material gains; it was the right which suffered for the sake of the nation, history and identity.<sup>10</sup> This association of trauma with identity, and as something sacred, though obviously reductive in its basic premise (since both left and right clearly later remembered their struggles as traumatic and essential to collective bonds at particular moments and for various reasons), is nonetheless essential in explaining the dissonance between diverse individual, collective and ‘official’ memories (the last, particularly during the Franco dictatorship of 1939–75), their varying levels of intensity, and their relation to both popular and governing myths of the past, throughout the post-war era of unprecedented social change.<sup>11</sup> The ambivalence of cultural trauma, the tension between avoidance of painful or shameful events and reliving or reconstructing them, is explicable only in terms of social process, including the formation of collective identities and generational evolution, and of finding solutions to the problems thrown up by change.

This does not mean that the events remembered are unimportant. Meaningful attribution of traumatic status to any collective claim can only be understood in relation to the nature of the originating events. The quantifiable aspects of a destructive social event are insufficient, however, in measuring its catastrophic status. The extent to which

<sup>9</sup> Neil J. Smelser, ‘Psychological Trauma and Cultural Trauma’, in Alexander (ed.), *Cultural Trauma*, p. 52.

<sup>10</sup> Lucas María de Oriol y Urquijo, ‘Los horizontes abiertos en 1936’, in Hermandad de Alféreces Provisionales, *Generación del 36* (Zaragoza, 1962), p. 39. For memory as claims of Catholic trauma at the hands of the Republic, e.g., Alfonso Bullón de Mendoza and Álvaro de Diego, *Historias orales de la guerra civil* (Barcelona, 2000), p. 106.

<sup>11</sup> For the individual–collective dissonance: Jeffrey K. Olick, ‘Collective Memory: The Two Cultures’, *Sociological Theory*, 17, 3 (1999), 333–48. On the politics of war and memory: e.g., Henry Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France since 1944* (Cambridge, MA, 1991).

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symbolic or sacred sources of collective identity are destroyed, leading to a common sense of disgust, shame or guilt, is vital, though the leap made from this historical reality to its construction as a defining collective tragedy into which the identity of certain groups often becomes 'locked' is dependent on many other factors.<sup>12</sup> Communal violence detaches groups and individuals from previous cultural moorings to the external world, and this displacement of identity often persists, is repeated and reacted to, long after the initial violence. The catastrophe, as Alan Mintz has argued, inheres in the event's 'power to shatter existing paradigms of meaning'.<sup>13</sup> In Spain, the vast majority of those killed on the home front, on both sides, had not been captured at the front but were rounded up, often from their homes, and frequently because they had been denounced from within the community to wartime authorities.<sup>14</sup> Social cohesion and solidarity were profoundly undermined in the Spanish case by massive disruption of organised social life and the extensive reach and intimacy of communal violence.

So radically against human nature did the violence seem to witnesses and subsequent observers (including historians) that it has been interpreted as inherently and collectively traumatic. This 'naturalist' approach, though persuasive as far as common sense is concerned, is not without difficulties, not least because there is an evident tension between individual and collective trauma, just as there is between individual and collective memory. Although the likelihood of painful events leading to cultural trauma is certainly high after protracted and wide-ranging internal wars, claims of cultural trauma are not automatic: social and political agency is required and it is this which forms the basis of the chapters which follow. The composition, structure, aims and representativeness of the 'collective victim' in question need in each case and in each period to be detailed and described.

We need, first, to turn to events, however. Individual memory and personal trauma are obviously and intimately related to events in the past. Collective memory and cultural trauma are also related to the

<sup>12</sup> On the 'sacrality' of memory of violence in recent years (and memory's implicit critique of History as 'secular' or 'sacrilegious'), see Tzvetan Todorov, *Hope and Memory: Lessons from the Twentieth Century* (New York, 2003).

<sup>13</sup> Alan Mintz, *Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature* (New York, 1984), p. x, cited in Peter Gray and Kendrick Oliver (eds.), *The Memory of Catastrophe* (Manchester, 2004), p. 7.

<sup>14</sup> In psychological terms, it is frequently maintained that trauma is more severe if the originating event is one of 'human design'. E.g., American Psychological Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 3rd edn (Washington, 1980), p. 236.

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past, though more problematically. Understanding post hoc collective representations of devastating events certainly demands careful historical consideration of such ‘happenings’. The premise of chapters 2 and 4 is that without exploration of Spain’s war and its polarised aftermath it is impossible to explain post-war memories. As Timothy Snyder has commented, ‘our recollections are always recollections of something, and unless we have an independent source of knowledge about this something, we can learn nothing about how memory works’.<sup>15</sup>

The Spanish civil war was fought out on the field of battle and, more significantly in terms of memory and trauma, within communities, during the years 1936–9. In a country of some 23 million inhabitants, the conflict cost the lives of around 350,000 Spaniards and the exile of approximately half a million more. Throughout Spain, half of the total recorded deaths occurred through politically motivated violence away from the field of battle.<sup>16</sup> There were over 30,000 more registered deaths in 1936 (413,000) than the pre-war norm, though the actual number was certainly higher. In 1937 the total number of recorded deaths was 472,000, it rose to 485,000 in 1938 and was 470,000 in 1939; for each of the three years it was at least 20 per cent higher than the 1935 rate. The biological and demographic rhythm of society was irreversibly disrupted.<sup>17</sup> The birth rate declined by 100,000 in 1937 and 1938 and by 200,000 in 1939, and marriage was delayed, especially amongst ‘the defeated’.<sup>18</sup> At least 100,000 ‘Reds’ were executed by the rebel ‘Nationalists’ during the war years, and probably some 50,000 in the post-war purge.<sup>19</sup> Between 38,000 and 55,000 ‘enemies of the Republic’ were killed in the government zone during the conflict, most in the first five or so revolutionary months from July to

<sup>15</sup> Snyder, ‘The Memory of Sovereignty and Sovereignty over Memory: Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine, 1939–1999’, in Jan-Werner Müller (ed.), *Memory and Power in Post-War Europe* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 40.

<sup>16</sup> For comparison: 19 per cent civilian deaths of total losses in the 1914–18 war; 48 per cent of the total in World War Two; 34 per cent in Korea; 48 per cent in Vietnam, and 40 per cent in the Bosnian war of the 1990s, though many of the victims in at least two of these wars died as a result of bombardment rather than political execution. The most recent and thorough account is Paul Preston, *The Spanish Holocaust* (London, 2012).

<sup>17</sup> See Jesús Villar Salinas, *Repercusiones demográficas de la última guerra civil española* (Madrid, 1942); Juan Díez Nicolás, ‘La mortalidad en la guerra civil española’, *Boletín de Demografía Histórica*, 3, 1 (March 1985), 42–5; Karl Mannheim, ‘The Problem of Generations’ [1928], in Kurt H. Wolff (ed.), *From Karl Mannheim*, 2nd edition (New Jersey, 1993), p. 365.

<sup>18</sup> E.g. George A. Collier, *Socialists of Rural Andalusia: Unacknowledged Revolutionaries of the Second Republic* (Stanford, CA, 1987), p. 183.

<sup>19</sup> Santos Juliá (ed.), *Víctimas de la guerra* (Madrid, 1999), pp. 410–12.

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November 1936.<sup>20</sup> Approximately 7,000 of these victims were murdered priests and others belonging to holy orders. For the Spanish Church and the Nationalist faithful, the origin of the theocratic New State and of post-war cultural trauma was the blood tribute of its martyrs who had given witness to the grim reality of ‘Godlessness’.<sup>21</sup> The death toll related to the political repression of defeated Republicans, and to hunger, disease and imprisonment during the first post-war years was almost as high as that in the period of the war, and the annual rate of deaths did not return to pre-war levels until 1943. There were as many officially recorded mortalities in 1941 (484,000) as there had been at the height of the war. In Catalonia, one of the country’s most developed regions, the infant mortality rate was on average 40 per cent higher throughout the 1940s than in 1935, reaching levels unheard of since the influenza epidemic of 1918–19. Average general life expectancy in Catalonia in 1941–5 was lower by four years than in 1935; the number of widows under 30 multiplied by five times that of 1930.<sup>22</sup> This was probably related to the influx of rural migrants from the south during and in the aftermath of the conflict, where there was real starvation during the early 1940s, but the Barcelona middle classes also went hungry in this period.<sup>23</sup>

When we add the post-war recorded deaths above the pre-war norm (215,000 during 1940–2) to the wartime figure, therefore, we are able to estimate the total human losses on both sides attributable directly or indirectly to the civil war as approximately 565,000. We can also conclude that some three-quarters of the total war-related deaths in the period 1936–44 were non-battle fatalities.<sup>24</sup> The scale of the suffering – the objective basis against which the status of culturally constructed collective trauma may be gauged – helps us to imagine the reasons for the silence in the aftermath of the civil war of those who considered themselves to be amongst the defeated.<sup>25</sup> Public memory was inhibited because the gulf which had opened up between the fragmented state and

<sup>20</sup> See, e.g., José Luis Ledesma, ‘Una retaguardia al rojo’, in Francisco Espinosa Maestre (ed.), *Violencia roja y azul: España 1936–1950* (Barcelona, 2010); Joan Villarroya, ‘La vergüenza de la República’, *La aventura de la historia*, 1, 3, January 1999, 32.

<sup>21</sup> See Antonio Montero Moreno, *Historia de la persecución religiosa en España, 1936–1939* (Madrid, 1961). Two features of this important book were later (from the 1980s onwards) evident in accounts of executions on the other side by rebel forces: (1) long appendices listing the names of victims; (2) use of the term ‘extermination’.

<sup>22</sup> Borja de Riquer and Joan Culla, *El franquismo i la transició democràtica (1939–1988)* (Barcelona, 1989), pp. 27, 42.

<sup>23</sup> Francisco Candel, *Los otros catalanes* (Barcelona, 1965), pp. 115–17.

<sup>24</sup> Though much reduced in numbers, deaths through war-related violence continued significantly until 1948.

<sup>25</sup> See Michael Richards, *A Time of Silence: Civil War and the Culture of Repression in Franco’s Spain, 1936–1945* (Cambridge, 1998).



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society during the war had allowed a widespread form of collaboration with wartime authorities to take place in both war zones through denunciation of ‘enemies’ by individuals (see maps 1–4). This privatised form of complicity with violence was extremely widespread and grew in the aftermath. Within the context of the post-conflict political settlement and the constructed ‘trauma’ of the victors, denunciations impeded collective recognition of suffering and the processing of the pain of the war. Acknowledgement and remembering were circumscribed because the deep ideological and cultural divisions of the pre-war period had been perpetuated in the extreme violence of the conflict and widened, not resolved, by General Franco’s total victory.

Part I sets the scene for analysis of post-war memory, first, by outlining the political, moral and social dimensions of war memories, and, second, by accounting for the crisis of the Second Republic, the erosion of state legitimacy in the 1930s, and the complex and intimately violent process accompanying coercive state reconstruction in both war zones during the civil war. In violent intrastate conflict, being precise about the historical ‘happening’ which forms the kernel of collective or cultural trauma is not as straightforward as it may appear. Two particular problems need to be posed: first, the difficulty of locating the primary ‘traumatic’ reference points and identifying more precisely than previously the associated collective victims of the conflict; and, second, critiquing the notion of the civil war and its violence as a singular, ‘national’ and ‘unified’ experience to be analysed most fruitfully at the macro level.

The chapters in Part II explore memories of the war during the Franco years, from the 1940s to the 1970s. (Map 5 shows the regions and other places mentioned in the text.) Each decade is explored in two chapters, first, through the production of state-supported myths, propaganda and politics of memory, and, second, through the shaping of ‘social memory’: recollection as reflected in pervasive cultural assumptions and social practices. Chapter 3 thus explores the use and renovation of religious symbolic resources in examples of the victors’ commemorative ceremonial and the making of memory claims in the aftermath of the war and throughout the 1940s. Chapter 4 looks at the profound impact of the war within the tissue of the body social in the 1940s and the manner in which defeat was assimilated and social obligations, loyalties and solidarity were unmade. Moving to the 1950s, Chapter 5 demonstrates how the Cold War revived memories of Franco’s ‘crusade’ and assisted in maintaining the General’s power, even though active commemoration was limited. Political neutering and the hypervigilance of the 1940s gave way gradually to a sense of resignation about the past and impulses towards future-oriented urban migration, often from the most



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fractured rural communities (Chapter 6). From the 1960s (discussed in chapters 7 and 8), there was a decline in collectively expressed affective reactions from many regime loyalists and Catholics to what they saw as the wartime profaning and pollution of sacred values. Political power had slowly evolved from reliance on charismatic authority towards more routinised bases of legitimation, and the state encouraged a vague generalisation of the trauma, cautiously, at the level of political rhetoric in the shape of a narrative of the war as a ‘fratricidal’ struggle. This narrative aimed (at a rhetorical level) to incorporate sections of society not previously encompassed by the victimised collective imagined by and associated with Franco and the wartime Nationalists. Amid unprecedented social change and pressure for modernisation, a unified and coherent sense of Catholic and conservative traumatic identity was no longer tenable, and the Church’s turn towards public reconciliation by the early 1970s would be highly significant, though internally contested (Chapter 9).

Part III, dedicated to war memories after Franco, compares the variety of ways in which memory registered during the three decades or so since 1975. The shadow of the past during the tense era of transition to democracy in the years 1975–82 is explored in Chapter 10. This process was eased by concurrent macro development of the market economy and the Amnesty Law (*Ley de Amnistía*) of 1977, though the transition itself would come under threat from renewed political violence, not least from a section of the army. The relationship between modernisation, ‘moving forward’, and ‘forgetting the past’ during the tenure of the first post-Franco socialist government from 1982 to 1996 is discussed in Chapter 11. In Chapter 12, focused on the period from 1996 until the Law of Historical Memory of 2007, it is argued that the recent surge of war-associated memories is related to a critique of ‘forgetting’ after 1975, but also to a general fragmentation of contemporary forms of collective identity, the retreat of the nation-state, and the consequent dilution of national identity as the basis of memory. The march of global capital has created pessimism about the possibility of radical change through political action.<sup>26</sup> Whereas Spaniards embraced the future with enthusiasm from the 1960s to the 1980s, the novelty and coherence of modernity as an ideal began to flag towards the end of the millennium, and sustenance and authenticity were sought in eras of the past marked

<sup>26</sup> Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge, 1989); Charles S. Maier, ‘Consigning the Twentieth Century to History: Alternative Narratives for the Modern Era’, *American Historical Review*, 105, 3 (2000), 807–31; Tony Judt, ‘The Past is Another Country: Myth and Memory in Post-War Europe’, in Deák, et al. (eds.), *Politics of Retribution*, pp. 293–323.

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by radicalism, commitment and sacrifice. In a fluid and inconstant world there was a renewed focus on the past as the basis of identity and political critique, though this has sometimes led to oversimplification, an emphasis on imaginative reconstruction, and the treatment of history as moral rhetoric.<sup>27</sup>

In each period, those who acted as ‘meaning makers’ in the public sphere, the often generationally defined collective agents of memory and cultural trauma who rose and fell with the changing times, are identified. The ever-evolving relationships of various ‘traumatised’ groups to political power and to the rest of society (the wider ‘audience’ for memory claims) are analysed, as are the ways in which each collective defines the fundamental injury done and identifies and depicts the perpetrators. The ‘meaning’ of the past was mediated within religious, aesthetic, legal, state-bureaucratic, and scientific (academic historical) institutional arenas and the channels of mass communications, a process of evolving social and political relations.

<sup>27</sup> E.g., Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (London, 2000).