

Varias novelas españolas contemporáneas hacen un ajuste de cuentas con la historia, o mejor dicho las historias de la guerra civil, de la posguerra y de la dictadura franquista. Estas novelas, escritas en su mayoría por autores que no vivieron personalmente ni la guerra ni la posguerra (aunque posiblemente los últimos años de la dictadura), relatan y configuran mediante la ficción las experiencias de republicanos vencidos, reivindicando el valor y la dignidad de sus vidas y acciones después de décadas de un silencio oficial sobre la suerte de ellos. Al hacerlo, resaltan en particular algunos conceptos valorados hoy día como la libertad, los derechos humanos y los papeles de hombres y mujeres durante y después de la contienda. *La voz dormida*, por ejemplo, trata de mujeres presas que mantienen una labor feminista siendo presas políticas en un ambiente sumamente varonil y violento. En *Soldados de Salamina* el narrador busca reconstruir la historia de un héroe desconocido y de un personaje histórico conocido. En ambas novelas se cuestionan en cierta medida las ideas que se manifiestan acerca de la libertad, los derechos humanos y de los papeles de hombres y mujeres en el pasado a partir de los conceptos que conocemos y entendemos en la actualidad. Tomando como punto de partida teorías de habitus, capital y campos de Bourdieu y de la fusión de horizontes de Gadamer, se estudia cómo se configuran y expresan dichos conceptos en estas novelas contemporáneas.

Palabras clave: libertad, derechos humanos, papeles tradicionales de hombres y de mujeres, ficcionalización, historia contemporánea.

Collective memory in Spain is and has been an issue of major debate in recent years, particularly during the first decade of our present millennium. Collective memories as well as identity issues are viewed within regional, national or ideological frameworks. Oftentimes memory and identity are the themes of novels, films and documentaries and are presented in ways in which one party is enhanced, or victimized, and the other is denigrated, or made a culprit. Hence, these issues acquire ethical dimensions insofar as the discourses indicate how the self and the other are valued. Who is approved of and who isn’t? How nuanced are the descriptions? Are they self-critical or rather critical of the other. Therefore, I venture to call the ongoing debate an ethical one since it encompasses questions related to moral values.

As Ricoeur (1996:166) pointed out, no text is ethically neutral since its discourse necessarily indicates a point of view, or stance, on the matter dealt with. That is naturally the case also in Spanish texts that deal with such controversial questions as Spain’s conflictive past. However, ethics are not once and for all given norms. They are void until they are filled with contents given by individuals, groups, institutions or authorities. Ethics basically deal with value-laden questions such as: what is good?, what is evil?, what is just and unjust? (Heberlein, 2008:103). The answers given to these questions differ over time and space depending, *i.e.*, on norms, cultures, religions, traditions and other circumstances. As we shall see, the ethical contents of the memory debate are connected to ideological and political views.

**Theoretical and historical considerations**
It is sometimes said that we best remember that which has hurt us. Sufferings, injustices and misfortunes leave a stronger imprint on our memory than happy moments; they mark us more profoundly than positive experiences. This is the case not only of personal memory but also of collective memory. Using the terminology of Ricoeur regarding misuse of memory (2005) one might speak of a collective memory that was “injured”, “unwell”, leaving scars and traumas among the many who had supported the ideas and reforms of the republican years. The injury was of course mainly caused by the repression against oppositionists during and after the Civil War, but the silence imposed by terror and the discourse that distorted the truth no doubt added to the collective memory’s pathological dimensions. Memory was thus subject to abuse as it was forced into silence, if not oblivion. Misuse of memory occurred once again when Spain’s first democratically elected parliament following Franco’s dictatorship in 1977 passed a law of amnesty regarding politically motivated crimes of the past. This amnesty law became popularly known as the Pact of Oblivion (el pacto del olvido).

Ricoeur (2005:119) defines collective traumas as collective wounds, wounds that may be the result of loss such as loss of a homeland, an ideal, freedom etc. In the case of Spain, it is certainly possible to speak of loss of a homeland for the thousands of Spaniards who fled the nation following Franco’s victory. But even those who remained had lost the homeland in which they had believed and hoped. The ideals, rights and freedoms of the (at least initially) promising constitution had been annihilated and replaced by coercion, repression and fear. Nothing was left of the programs or reforms of the republican governments.

The memories that are subject to debate today mainly go back to the Civil War and to Franco’s long-lived totalitarian military regime. Nearly 75 years after the end of the Spanish civil war few Spaniards are capable of giving direct testimonies of their experiences. Most accounts of injustice have been handed down through the generations. As my research primarily concerns ways in which the past is being reviewed and represented in Spanish contemporary novels and history books, in this paper I wish to look into two particular historical novels published in the first years of our present millennium: Javier Cercas’ Soldados de Salamina (2001) and Rosa Chacel’s La voz dormida (2002).

Memory is necessarily selective, so narratives of the past, be they fictional or historiographic, present a selection of facts, memories and circumstances. Given the ideological divide in Spain, collective memory is also selective. Some say that the Civil War is still being fought, albeit on paper. Others are weary of delving into past sorrows, preferring to forget. The popularity of historical novels that deal with that period in Spanish history testifies to the fact that history is more than an ideological issue; it touches upon the very identity of the Spaniards and their interests regarding such matters as freedom, human rights and gender roles.

La voz dormida and Soldados de Salamina

As examples of historic novels published in the first years of the new millennium Dulce Chacón’s La voz dormida (2002) and Javier Cercas’ Soldados de Salamina (2001) are perhaps among the most celebrated. Both novels enjoyed enormous success when they appeared; both have been made into films. They also have in common that their theme is historic and situated in the Spanish Civil War or

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1 It may be correct to say that there was also a sense of loss and fear among conservative groups such as clergymen, landowners and the military when the reforms of the republican constitution were carried into effect in the years 1931-36.
postwar years. Moreover, their protagonists have certain heroic attributes. They differ, however, in that one is dominated by women and is essentially feminist while the other is dominated by men and is certainly not feminist. More importantly, they differ in that one is a bearer of collective ideals and ethics; the other expresses more of individualistic interests and values.

Dulce Chacon’s novel *La voz dormida* (2002) depicts the deplorable circumstances of incarcerated women in the Ventas prison in Madrid in the 1940’s. This overcrowded and ill-renowned prison was filled with women whose only offense had been to side with the defeated republicans, many of them for being their wives, mothers and sisters. The book opens with a description of the main character, Hortensia, a young, pregnant woman who is sentenced to death. The reason for this death sentence is not clear; however, it is understood that she is to die because she is not married to the father of the child or because he is still at large. In other words, he, she, the unborn child and other relatives are to suffer the consequences of having supported the “wrong” side during the war. Morals were a major issue among the nationalists and their supporters, not least the church. Yet moral questions were generally limited to sexual matters (such as sex before marriage, or marriage outside the Church) and to the simplistic idea that everything on the left was evil while everything on the right was good (this confused idea referred to a citation from the New Testament in which Jesus said that at the final judgment the righteous will be seated as his right hand side in heaven whereas those doomed to eternal fire will be placed on his left side). In an analogous fashion, all values pertaining to leftist or republican ideals were condemned by the victorious nationalists.

Hortensia and her fellow inmates were deprived not only of basic human rights such as freedom of conscience, but also of their dignity as human beings. They were systematically subjected to physical and mental torture, starvation, lack of health-care and a number of other sufferings. The prison guards, headed by the implacable and macho-like nun sister Maria of the Seraphims, humiliated the imprisoned women, inflicted random punishments on them and forced them to perform infantile acts of religious devotion, such as kissing the feet of a baby-Jesus doll. In all, the officials, being representatives of the victorious “good” nationalists, are presented in this novel as wholly sinister characters, void of love and compassion, ruthless, power-hungry and evil.

Hortensia and her fellow inmates represent, as far as values are concerned, the opposite side of the ethical scale. A strong sense of solidarity and sharing binds them together. They teach their illiterate comrades to read and write. They encourage each other to remain strong and resilient. They show concern and care for each other and their families. They secretly feed a comrade who has been left to die of starvation in a dungeon-like space. In short, they are unselfish, patient, kind-hearted and brave. Examples of moral values articulated by Christians and others throughout the ages, but ironically not practiced by those in power under a Christian banner.

Once Hortensia has given birth she is executed. She faces the firing squad without fear, having refused to go to confession in the early hours of the night before her execution, thereby marking that she feels no remorse for her ideological conviction. The child is given to be reared by her sister, who names her Hortensia in honor of her mother. Following the death of the protagonist, other women come to the fore in the novel, all supporters of clandestine republicans who operate in and outside Spain. Together they set up a seemingly innocent theater play, con the guards and organize the escape of two of the women. In doing so, they reveal a sense of humor which also holds value.
Although the characters are individuals, the story revolves around the republican inmates and their relatives as a group. In the same way, the guards are beings pertaining to the opposite group. Both are collective entities to a large extent. In this way the ideals and values are those of their respective ideological sides, although it is difficult to speak of values of those in power. The feminist aspect of the novel is in line with the ideals of gender equality of the republican constitution and the years leading up to the civil war. The reader does not get to know the innermost thoughts of the characters but does learn of some of their personal memories, memories of their lives and roles as mothers, sisters and lovers, and of the tragedies they suffered for their common cause. Moreover, much focus is placed on the personalities and activities of the women. It can therefore be said that they are fairly homogenous as characters pertaining to either side of the conflict. Their ethical principles are synonymous with their political convictions.

Javier Cercas’ novel *Soldiers of Salamin* (*Soldados de Salamina*, 2001) is dominated by men. Here the narrator, who bears the name of the author, investigates the fate of Rafael Sánchez Mazas, one of the founders and ideologists of the fascist movement in Spain. Again we have a historical setting, this time with a particular focus on a relatively unknown historical figure. The novel is divided into three parts in which the circumstances and investigation of the narrator are intertwined with the story of Sanchez Mazas’ close call with death and with that of an unknown republican militiaman who saved the life of this nationalist and fascist ideologist.

Facing a firing squad in the woods of Catalunya, Sanchez Mazas and another captive belonging to a group of war prisoners succeed in hiding in the bushes as the republican militia prepares to shoot. One of the militiamen tracks down Sanchez Mazas but decides to let him go. This act of altruism is presented as an enigmatic and at the same time heroic choice on behalf of the soldier to have mercy on a fellow human being during the final, dramatic days of the war. Sanchez Mazas wanders and gets lost in the woods but finds help among a few locals who, foreseeing the defeat of the republican forces, had deserted.

One might say that two ideologies are presented here as having lost the ability and motivation to confront one another due to the ravages of the war. Once the war is over Sanchez Mazas is made a minister in Franco’s first government and, in that capacity, on one or two occasions he helps the locals who had helped him, as they risked imprisonment and execution because of their former allegiance to the republican government. This act of gratitude does not, however, render Sanchez Mazas any noteworthy values. On the contrary, he is depicted in the novel as an anti-hero, a cowardly figure and a representative of the oppressive, self-righteous Franco regime.

His counterpart, on the other hand, embodies the attributes of a hero who, at the time in question, transcends the rules of his ideological community by letting an enemy live. Moreover, this character, who eventually is given the name Antonio Miralles (after being identified by a friend of the narrator, the now deceased Chilean writer Roberto Bolaño), is presented as a simple man, a carpenter who after the war enters the Foreign Legion and fights one war after another in Africa, only to end up in his old age in a home for the elderly run by nuns in Dijon, France. As a mercenary he does not fight for any particular cause nor represent a particular ideology, quite the contrary. The reader does not learn of other possible acts of compassion on his behalf nor even if this character, in fact, really
existed. Yet he is very much admired by the narrator who sees in him a man of principles endowed with qualities such as humility, courage and goodness.

As I said earlier, *La voz dormida* and *Soldados de Salamina* have common denominators such as the war and postwar, ideological and gender contrasts. But there are differences that I find interesting as regards their ethical paradigms. Whereas the characters of *La voz dormida* represent collective memories and collective values (feminist values but also general human values), *Soldados de Salamina*’s rather singular characters transcend the ethical parameters of their respective ideological communities. Sanchez Mazas does not perform heroic acts, but he does stick to his promise of helping those who helped him in the forest. The militiaman willingly chooses to save the life of a doomed enemy. Neither of these characters identifies himself entirely with the cause for which he is fighting. According to Ricoeur (2005:123), a factor that affects identity is that of ideology, oftentimes a discourse that condemns the opponent on the ideological battlefield, making “the other” appear as ideologically corrupt. In both these novels the discourse does indicate who is considered good and who isn’t. The actions and appearances of those who are considered good are presented in positive words, the others not so. Hence, the ideologies of the characters mark their identity.

If we consider the ethical legacy of Socrates, the man who was sentenced to death for not worshipping the right gods and who chose not to escape death to be true to himself and his principles, we find a follower of his line of ethics in Hortensia, who is prepared to die for her republican ideals although it implies leaving her newborn daughter orphaned. She does not waver in her ideological stand although the sentence could perhaps have been mitigated had she given in to pressure. Her last words are Viva la república! Her personal feelings as a mother are subordinate to the republican cause.

Miralles, in *Soldados de Salamina*, nominally represents the republican side in the war, but reveals an individual stand when confronted with an opponent. Like several women in *La voz dormida* he embodies traditional human values such as respect. The story does not tell us if he killed others or how many, nor if he saved others’ lives. It can only be assumed that he as a mercenary was not always as clement. The question therefore arises: why did the militiaman let Sanchez Mazas live? Was it a matter of principle at that moment, a sudden feeling of compassion or just an indifferent whim? Regardless of the possible reason for his act he reveals a personal freedom. “Freedom”, according to José Emilio Palacios Esteban, “makes us into human beings, into moral subjects”. Hence, his character is laden with moral value.

**Ideas of freedom, human rights and gender roles**

**Ethical aspects of memory politics**

As has been said already, when Franco’s dictatorship ceased with his death in 1975 and censorship ended, hopes rose again that past injustices be addressed. The ethical values articulated by the left wing during the transition years were those of social equality, social justice and peace (ibid, 1076). Social justice at the time comprised questions on women’s rights, trade unions, equality, social benefits and other social matters; less so issues related to claiming justice for the victims of Franco’s oppression. Apparently the pact of oblivion had reached its objective. Claims of justice acquired momentum at the end of the 1990’s in connection with media coverage of the judicial process

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2 In Gonzalo Acosta Bono, Angel Río Sánchez & José María Valcuente del Río (2007:71), *La recuperación de la memoria: una perspectiva transversal desde las ciencias sociales.*
initiated by prosecutor Baltazar Garzón against Chile’s former dictator, Augusto Pinochet. According to Madeleine Davis, the similitude of Pinochet’s dictatorship to Franco’s awoke the consciousness of many Spaniards from their possible resignation to silence. Since then memory and oblivion have become not only ideological, but also historiographical issues.

As Daniel Stofleth (2008) has indicated, memory has since become a struggle of power in Spain. The delicate and inflammatory issue of the nation’s traumatic past is being used by ideological “entrepreneurs of memory” in order to vilify the other and promote particular agendas. Hence, the other is implicitly or explicitly depicted as the guilty one (and thereby the evil one). The politics of memory in Spain are, in fact, a narrative battlefield in which selective and constructed memories oppose one another (cf. Jelin, 2002:6). Therefore, it is sometimes said in the media that the civil war continues on paper and in other ideological discourses.

The memory debate led to a legislative act in 2007, popularly known as the “Law of Historical Memory”. This law, according to Stofleth (ibid:14), “calls directly for the cultivation of “democratic memory,” which presumably is positive, though not explained, and attempts to make the conception of democratic values inseparable from the Republican fighters with whom the Left is establishing an ideological and emotional connection.” In my view, an important detail in Stofleth’s text is the sentence that “democratic memory” is “presumably positive, though not explained”. It may be assumed that “democratic memory” is understood as being the opposite of the manipulated and distorted memory and memorials that were imposed during Franco years.

Nonetheless, the concept of democratic memory would need to be defined. Just as democracy is and has been interpreted differently memory is also subject to various subjective or collective interpretations. Moreover, there is no guarantee that “democratic memory” is not manipulated according to the interests of those who pose as its spokespersons. Stofleth points, for instance, to the fact that the law on historic memory only praises the efforts of the Republican soldiers during the war, stating that they fought for “democratic values”, and that it condemns the Nationalists. The Constitution of 1931, for which the Republicans fought, did introduce ideas of parliamentary democracy and a number of civil rights, i.e. values that are seen as positive for the common good and thereby ethically good.

But in all fairness it should be said that the centrist government elected democratically in 1977 and the present right-wing party Partido popular, (PP), have not opposed democracy or values such as human rights, human dignity and liberty. Although there are Spaniards who claim that life was better under Franco (in particular some members of the generation that grew up during the dictator’s last years, times in which the standard of living had risen and discreet political pluralism was tolerated), the right wing does not advocate a return to fascism or any other form of totalitarian regime. Hence, the “democratic values” expressed by the left wing are shared by Spaniards at large independently of their political preferences. In terms of ethics there is, consequently, a general consensus in Spain regarding the “goodness” of those principles for which democracy stands today.

Identity, memory and ethics


4 “...one or more things thought to be true about democracy: 1) it is a dangerous form of government; 2) it includes genuine competition for power: 3) it permits mass participation on a legally equal footing; 4) it provides civil and other liberties that restrict the sphere of state power within the society; or 5) it promotes widespread deliberation about how to make and enforce policy so as to promote the common good. (William Reisinger, http://www.uiowa.edu/~c030142/DefinitionsOfDemocracy.html, accessed 2013-07-10).
It is fairly easy to find others guilty of wrong-doings but all the more difficult to admit responsibility for one’s own wrong-doings. This common trait in humans is equally common in political discourse. The Spanish debate features mudslinging from right and left, but hardly any confessions. Yet ethical stances necessarily include taking on responsibility for one’s choices and actions, even under precarious circumstances. As Heberlein (2008:105) states, we human beings are responsible beings; we are capable of taking responsibility, of choosing between right and wrong and of reflecting on ourselves and our actions. On an individual basis this is no doubt true; but to what extent is it possible to speak of collective responsibility and reflection? It is here that identity plays a role insofar as it touches upon the ideas and values with which we wish to identify ourselves. Such ideas are often expressed by collective entities such as political parties or other institutions such as Church, State or other collective authorities. The remainder of this study will be my attempt to delineate, with the help of Ricoeur’s theoretical considerations, the ways in which identity, memory and ethics intersect in the ongoing debate in Spain.

Identity is of course more than just ideas or values with which we identify ourselves. Ricoeur (1996) speaks of the being as a combination of idem and ipse, sameness and selfhood, and defines the two in the following way: “the self’s idem-identity is that which gives the self, among other things, its spatio-temporal sameness. Its ipse-identity is what accounts for its unique ability to initiate something new and imputable to a self, be it oneself or another, as agent. Without both sorts of identity there is no self.” In other words, the sameness expressed as idem is that which is recognizable and durable in a being throughout time. Oftentimes the idem, or sameness, is that which constitutes an identity and identification. The selfhood, or ipse, on the other hand, signifies the being’s capacity to act, to decide and to take responsibility for its actions at given moments in time. The ipse affects others since “the responsive self is primarily concerned not with its own condition but rather with responding faithfully and thoughtfully to others. I speak to someone. I affect someone by the doings and makings I either perform or leave undone.” Thus, actions as well as omissions have consequences.

In the Spanish debate the question what am I (to which side do I belong, with which ideas do I identify myself) is more dominant than the question who am I (what decisions do I make and how do they affect others). Moreover, the debated historical memory creates a notion that “we are such” and “you are such others” with all the moral ballast that goes with such categorization. Hence, a polarized view is created and the dichotomy of a “divided Spain” continues into the present. There is in this polarization implicit fear as well as contempt of “the other” due to the violence manifested by either side in past times. In this way the memory of “the other” is marked by the memory, experienced or related, of violence. To put it simply, the left is reminded and accused of its violence towards the Church and other targets during the years of the republic while the right is accused of its violence towards sympathizers of the republic during the war and the postwar years. Neither is of course prepared to assume moral responsibility for acts of violence committed seventy or so years ago.

Conclusions

The ethical contents of the historical debate in Spain are closely connected to current ideological and political views. While the right wing does not in general wish to be identified with sympathizers of the Franco regime the left wing more willingly identifies itself with the oppressed republicans of the

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6 ibid
7 As Ricoeur (2005:122) states, hardly any community in history has come into existence without circumstances connected to conflict or war.
civil war and the postwar years. The right wing advocates a policy of forgetfulness (and forgiveness), stressing that times were different in the thirties and forties whereas the left wing demands more consideration for the victims of Franco’s military uprising and dictatorial regime. While some extreme rightwingers claim that “life was better under Franco”, some leftwingers have been known to claim that “life was better against Franco”. Somewhere between these two sides exits a large part of younger generations that choose to be ignorant or uninterested in Spain’s particular history.

As the cultural elite in Spain has been dominated by sympathizers of the left wing for several decades, and has moreover been financially supported by PSOE governments, literature, media and the arts focus to a large extent on the historical interest in revealing silenced or hidden information on the fate of countless republican victims during the war and postwar. I took as examples two well-known historical novels, La voz dormida and Soldados de Salamina, whose discourse is favorable to those characters that represent the republican or socialist ideology while being unfavorable to those that represent the fascist ideology that prevailed under Franco. Values such as bravery, solidarity, compassion and kindness are attributed to the protagonists whereas their adversaries are depicted as cowardly and vile beings. La voz dormida underlines the characters’ identification with the ideals of the republic and the collective sameness (idem) of their values. Soldados de Salamina, on the other hand, marks an example of a momentary decision to let an enemy get away, thereby revealing the selfhood (ipse) of the hero. Both novels appeal to the revival of memory in Spain.

Understandings of memory and identity differ depending on times and circumstances. The present understandings are of course not identical to those that prevailed when Franco took power. Memory and identity parameters changed considerably in connection with political disenchantment and postmodern ideas, from collective to more individualistic. The search for memory and identity continues in a regionally, historically and culturally divided nation that has yet to settle accounts with its past.

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