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**A Secret Agreement: The Historical Memory Debate
and the Limits of Recognition**

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Certainly transmutations of what was to appear now and then in memory,
pointing to something expansive, utopian, essential, dispersed in the past.
—Ernst Bloch. *The Spirit of Utopia* (189)

It is a version of the past that is intended to connect with and ratify the
present. What it offers in practice is a sense of predisposed continuity.
—Raymond Williams. *Marxism and Literature* (116)

**Introduction: A Three-part Thesis and Its Three
Presuppositions**

The type of discontent with the so-called historical memory debate I am going to endorse in this essay is oblique and partial. As I will explain in the following sections, my own discontent also involves a critical note regarding the voices that, in line with Santos Juliá's often quoted claim, are adamant that since the mid-1990s, we have been living in Spain "bajo el imperio de la memoria" ("Bajo el imperio" 7) (under the tyranny of memory). Many of Juliá's most important arguments against the alleged abuses and incongruities of "[la] memoria colectiva, [la] memoria histórica y otras denominaciones equivalentes" ("Bajo el imperio" 10) (collective memory, historical memory and other equivalent terms) have been meticulously countered by some of the most theoretically sophisticated Spanish historians (Francisco Espinosa Maestre, Pedro Ruiz Torres and Pablo Sánchez León, among others). This type of give-and-take in which intellectuals challenge

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each other's ideas has a real significance only if these dialogues manage to exercise as much pressure as possible on other interlocutors' central lines of argumentation. Otherwise, instead of a meaningful intellectual debate, we would be doomed to witness a self-congratulatory staging of corporativist politesse. From this perspective, it seems clear to me that after Ruiz Torres's and Sánchez León's detailed responses to Santos Juliá, many of the latter's viewpoints (for instance, on the dichotomist binary of memory and history, the strictly individual nature of memory, and the inherent entanglement of any historical/collective memory and an organicist type of society *à la* Durkheim) are simply unsustainable.

This is why my own contribution will take a different approach to this debate. The thesis I am going to defend here is that, contrary to Juliá's ideas about the excess of memory in contemporary Spain, there is, in fact, a deficit of memory. More specifically, my point is that for the last twenty years, the most influential discourses (legal, associational, political and artistic) on memory have not merely gone too far (as Juliá would have it), they have not gone far enough. In contrast to the theories that postulate an asphyxiating overabundance of memory, in what follows I will develop a very different hypothesis that can be summarized in three central points. First of all, there is a structural political framework that constrains the potential for a more ambitious understanding of the role of historical memory in twenty-first century Spain. This coercing framework is, in my opinion, a semi-naturalized liberal scheme of *recognition*, understood as an always-already-in-place political horizon for the aspirations and claims of those involved in this debate (intellectuals, politicians, journalists, artists, affected families, organizations, cultural agents and political commentators).

Second, the political consequences of this general scheme of recognition are ambiguous. On one hand, recognition involves a type of social gain, a political achievement through which post-Cold War liberal democracies resolve, or at least negotiate, in symbolic and material terms, inter-cultural discrepancies, historical injustices, and comparative grievances among social groups. On the other hand, it has also often been pointed out (in my opinion, rightly) that recognition de-politicizes political disputes, neutralizing their disruptive potential and accentuating an all-too-easy inclusive accommodation. What is more, recognition translates non-liberal political aspirations (that is, political goals that are inimical to the liberal project) into a liberal vocabulary that, while acknowledging these aspirations and agendas, performatively deactivates their inassimilable and most unsettling content. It is difficult to exaggerate the impact of this liberal co-option when we think about the paradoxical fate of many left-wing radical projects (and our memory of them) in what Resina has called "a bourgeois liberal state[s], the new democratic regime" (10) and Michael Novak, as well as Eduardo Manzano Moreno and Juan Pérez Garzón have respectively referred to as "democratic capitalism" (98) and "a uniform Europe of triumphant

capitalism” (280).

Third and finally, there is a whole different but basically curbed/deferred/blocked dimension of political possibilities for the present-day memory of the Spanish Civil War. This is particularly the case since the 2008 international financial crisis, the real estate meltdown in Spain, the collapse of the job market and the International Monetary Fund’s rescue plans (or rescue “menaces”) for countries that do not comply with a new set of inescapable tenets. As Alex Callinicos (1–19), James Fulcher (104–128), Paul Krugman (119–138), and Manfred Steger and Kavi Roy (21–75) have shown, these neo-liberal precepts are now prescribed and imposed as *the* ill-fated, inevitable solution although they were the condition that enabled the global economic crisis. In the final section of this essay, I will explain how through a particular reading of Walter Benjamin’s “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” the memory of the Spanish Civil War could be re-connected with some of the most pressing political discussions and decisions of our time.

Before elucidating why the paradigm of recognition simultaneously stimulates and limits most of the cultural and political discourse on historical memory, let me introduce three central assumptions of my own proposal. First, the profound differences between memory and history should not be minimized; however, the objective, scientific status of history versus the prejudiced, partisan character of memory is *not* one of these differences. Historiography is never about history in itself, but about history *for* and *from* certain historical needs and goals. The practice of historiography is also historical and it is not extraneous to the circumstances of production that make it possible (Faber, “Debate” 178).¹ Having therefore stated this simple fact (that memory is not less or more “politicized” than historiography), it is also important to admit that memory and historiography do not relate to present circumstances identically. Memory, for instance, invests itself in those past episodes that are *not yet* perceived as entirely gone; previous events in which and through which our own historical *present* defines its own identities and potentialities (Ruiz Torres, “De perplejidades” and “Los discursos”). Whether we lament or celebrate this debate on historical memory in Spain, we should not forget that its mere existence means that for at least some demographic groups, the debate about the Spanish Civil War *is also and primordially* the debate about (some aspect of) twenty-first century Spain. Of course, this completely infuriates those who perceive the Civil War as the distant, fully superseded *other* of post-Franco democratic Spain.

The second assumption that underlies my arguments is that the memory of the Spanish Civil War is an intrinsically political memory about an intrinsically political event. I could not disagree more with the revisionist attempts at “watering down” the war’s political core, painting the three-year conflict as a misleading *façade* of political differences under which the true effectual causes (i.e. individual revenge, family enmities, unprincipled

ambitions and unscrupulous accommodations) were pitching the conflict. At best, this position concedes that minoritarian political elites agitated and instrumentalized this apolitical substratum of prosaic antagonism and unheroic survival of daily life. This sort of postulation usually lacks, above all, a minimally sophisticated theory of how a political subjectivity comes to be articulated. A politically militarized subject does not need to presuppose angelical selfishness or a pseudo-Cartesian abandonment of his/her empirical and emotional attachments to an immediate array of circumscribed relationships, facts and objects. It is not beyond this tainted involvement that political commitment takes place, but within and through it.²

In any case, what do I mean by the term “political” when I ascribe it to the Spanish Civil War and its memorialization? What I have in mind is a version of this concept, loosely based on Jacques Rancière’s *Disagreement* and Alain Badiou’s *Ethics*. This conception is restrictive because politics is not a perpetual characteristic of every single historical configuration. Politics should not be confused with what Rancière calls “police” and Badiou “the state of the situation”: the more or less successful procedural management of a system in which there may be variations but *within* the limits of this consensus. Politics demands something different, an “outside” to this consensus; a non-incorporated exteriority that destabilizes the most basic logic of a given *status quo*. As Badiou explains, there are and have been historical contexts whose most essential conformation does not include this particular experience of politics. It is precisely from this point of view from which I state that the Spanish Civil War was a political event, the foremost disagreement between non-reconcilable conceptions of history, opposing ideological starting points and diverging anthropological premises. Consequently one should be wary of proposals that, on behalf of self-predicated superior human(ist) values, invite us to remember the Spanish Civil War beyond its inherently constitutive politics. As I will argue in the next section, this is a comforting but false solution that paradoxically solves the problem by not confronting it. In fact, evoking the Spanish Civil War in well-intended, but apolitical, terms means adopting a political position that (perhaps inadvertently) reproduces basic traits of a late-Francoist agenda.

The third and final assumption of this essay is related to the (sometimes neglected) heterogeneity of the historical memory in Spain. Authors such as Santos Juliá (“De nuestras memorias”), Jo Labanyi (“Historias de víctimas” 89), Ángel Loureiro (227) and Javier Rodrigo have correctly reminded us not to discuss the historical memory as if it were a monolithic ensemble of narratives. In Spain, these critics rightly point out, there is not just *one* historical memory. Spanish historical memory should be better theorized as an unstable constellation of diversified positions and voices. There are various historical memories, and we should acknowledge this irreducible variety, whose simplification and hypostatization must be resisted. It has been argued that memorialistic plurality and the acknowledgment of this

plurality are cognoscitive imperatives of any well-informed involvement in a debate that, quite often, has been idealistically reduced and impoverished. My own reaction toward this argument is twofold.

On one hand, I could not agree more with those who distrust any naïve celebration of the historical memory debate in Spain as if this were the sign of a proto-family reunion in which “we” could finally share a common canon of (first-hand or mediated) remembrances. On the other hand, I worry about how we imagine this multiplicity. Let me say right away that if by plurality and diversity in this debate we mean the convivial juxtaposition of memories, their respectful accommodation, and the horizontal addition of memorialistic positions, I find this conception misleading. In the present day we should not conceive the Spanish historical memory as a pluralistic market of recollections where there are potential consumers (so to speak) for each one. I totally disagree with the liberal political *ethos* that sanctions diversity as the supreme value and accordingly asks for its protection and encouragement *tout court*.

This is how I would reframe this issue. Multiplicity and variety are not ultimate goals, but a starting point. In Spain today there are *already* several memorialistic agendas and I presume there will be more in the forthcoming future.³ The real point then is how to depict the relationship between these different “cultures of memory” beyond their relativist juxtaposition and a mistaken conception of reciprocal respect, which constitutes a *de facto* endorsement of a comforting lack of dispute. In my opinion, what we are missing here is a robust and unapologetic version of what Chantal Mouffe has called “antagonistic pluralism” (1–9). Although Mouffe dismisses the recalcitrant consequences of Carl Schmitt’s famous friend-enemy dichotomy, she attempts to re-inscribe the relevance of this dichotomy within our democratic domain. According to Mouffe, if we do not want to fully succumb to an anesthetic version of an already-decaffeinated version of democracy, we need to reclaim a “truly [. . .] radical and plural democracy [. . .] that draws the full implications [. . .] of acknowledging the permanence of conflict and antagonism” (8).

How is all this relevant to our discussion of the historical memory in Spain? I find Mouffe’s idea apposite because it helps us envision how divergent historical memories of the Spanish Civil War interact with each other. Their plurality is perhaps irreducible but it is moreover antagonistic, controversial and quarreling. These conflicting memories are not peacefully positioned side by side, as if displayed in a fetishistic exhibition of accumulated symbolic capital (plurality for the sake of plurality). There is a deep-rooted tension between these memories, which quite often contradict/negate each other since they belong to irreconcilable political traditions. Their own existence is, in summary, bound to the fight for legitimacy and to the delegitimation of other conflicting political memories. There is constant friction between left-wing and right-wing memorialistic

factions, and these contradictions and incompatibilities are being continuously resolved and reopened in a struggle for hegemony; that is; for a position of social ascendancy and political preeminence.⁴

The Discrete Charm of Recognition

Instead of initiating my inquiry into the paradigm of recognition with a wide-ranging definition, I am going to explore some of the aspects of this paradigm that are directly related to the most recent articulation of a collective memory of the Spanish Civil War and the subsequent Francoist repression. In this section, I will examine some cultural and political interventions that have focused on the marginalization of the experiences and memories of those who were defeated in the war and afterwards suffered repression by the regime. It is the political fate of this particular historical memory that I am interested in and will be examining in the following pages.

1. *Political targets on behalf of non-political principles.* One of the most active participants in this new arena of political action are the organizations that have been demanding, with or without governmental subsidies, a more ambitious official policy toward the republican victims of the Spanish Civil War and Francoism. As Sergio Gálvez Biesca has explained in the most thorough scrutiny of this issue, there are almost one hundred sixty-five “asociaciones, amicales o fundaciones, tanto estatales como locales” (34) (societies and foundations, both state and local). These organizations do not always pursue the same goals and, more often than not, their initiatives are not even minimally coordinated, which has been a source of mutual distrust (36–39). Despite this self-damaging fragmentation, there are some common discursive tactics that have become an almost un-questioned background for the actions undertaken by these associations. One of these tactics is the invocation of non-political initial reasons and final ends. In an typical expression of this political anxiety to depoliticize one’s endeavor, Guillermo Fouce (president of Psychologists without Frontiers—Madrid) states that the groups and individuals who demand the exhumation of the Francoist mass graves do not try to “reabrir heridas” (n.p.) (re-open wounds) and they do not really have “reivindicaciones políticas” (n.p.) (political demands). The motivations of these requests, Fouce concludes, “tienen que ver con motivaciones humanitarias básicas” (n.p.) (have to do with basic humanitarian motivations).

In a very similar vein, Victor Manuel Santidrián Arias, a prominent member of Foundation March 10, says, “creo que la memoria histórica no debe ser utilizada como arma arrojadiza en la confrontación política [. . .] este problema merece [. . .] una solución unánime” (n.p.) (I think that

historical memory should not be used as a weapon in political disagreements [. . .] [T]his problem merits [. . .] a unanimous solution). It is not totally clear what Santidrián means by a “unanimous solution,” but it is a fairly safe guess that he is likely calling for a comprehensive decision that could be supported by all political forces and parties. Both Fouce and Santidrián outline the same intellectual move. On one hand, they concur on the political nature not only of these crimes but also of their subsequent institutional silencing. On the other hand, both authors resort to a pre-political sphere in order to justify the necessity of acknowledging these killings and taking the needed official measures. They seem to be appealing to a common sense of human decency, to a basic dignity and decorum that, once it is taken into consideration, would eliminate political discrepancies or at least render them ancillary and derivative. This mode of argumentation also compartmentalizes ethics and politics in a hierarchical and somewhat vertical fashion. These authors encourage us, once we have reached the limits of political rationalization, to keep on digging toward a more profound and essential *moral domain* where political differences lose their significance and we can therefore coincide on a non-polemical appreciation of right and wrong; of what is indispensable and good, and what is not.

2. *The privatization of memory and the mantra of individual rights.* It is somewhat paradoxical to speak of the privatization of memory when a vibrant movement of associations and initiatives has taken the public stage in Spain at many levels. How can we make this new political scenario compatible with the alleged privatization of memory? Indeed, they are compatible because the privatization of memory implies a normative *mode of participation* in this public sphere. These organizations treat the crimes of Francoism as tragic events that fundamentally concern the affected families and their private suffering. The public and political facets of these offenses, their trans-individual and non-family dimension, their inevitable “correlation with” and “implication in” the trajectory of some political parties, and their ideological connection with some radical movements are usually dissolved or lost. In other words, the executions, incarcerations, kidnappings and tortures under Francoism do not point *only* to the self-referential history of some discrete individuals and their genealogical descendants (although, of course, they do so), but *also* to the non-private and collective experience of certain political platforms. It is precisely these supra-individual and collectively shared ideological affiliations which triggered the violent responses by Francoism in most of the cases.

The reconceptualization of these crimes as a semi-private issue addressed by particular individuals under the thin umbrella of humanitarian organizations would not have been possible without human rights discourse. Since I cannot adequately explain here the history of this discourse, I will tackle just two main questions. First, human rights are a crucial element of the liberal political tradition. For instance, in his *Second Treatise on*

Government, Locke mentions some inalienable prerogatives that every man *qua man* can enjoy even in the state of nature (269–78). John Stuart Mill, in his influential *On Liberty*, endorses an ontological space of negative freedom and inviolable autonomy where external interference should be categorically forbidden (15–18). One could quote similar arguments in Jeremy Bentham, Isaiah Berlin, Immanuel Kant, and Adam Smith. There are, of course, significant differences among these liberal intellectuals.⁵ However, they do all attribute an intrinsic and inalienable set of entitlements to the individual/singular human being. What I am interested in highlighting here is the type of individualization activated by this intellectual stance. The shielded, clearly demarcated singular individual is the unique and exclusive repository of rights. Defending these rights as the trans-historical and most essential political battle is hence a way of fighting for one's non-interfered self; for one's non-intruded individuality. It is not surprising that many critics have indicated the individualistic bias behind this position. Regardless of how one may evaluate this debate, the fact is that the discussion about historical memory in Spain cannot be understood without the privatizing and individualizing effect of human rights discourse.

My second observation is that several critics of contemporary Spanish culture have, in fact, noticed the success of human rights discourse in displacing and neutralizing other political vocabularies. In a decisive essay on this subject, Stephanie Golob explains this trans-national phenomenon and how its Iberian inflection appeals to the concept of “transitional justice politics” (127), which she borrows from Ruti Teitel's well-known 2000 volume *Transitional Justice*. Golob reevaluates a quite recent “set of beliefs and practices grounded in the rejection of impunity, confrontation of the past, prioritizing state accountability and aiming toward a broader societal inclusion of past regime victims” (127). She also maps both the geographical evolution of this trend (especially in Latin America) to its implantation in Spain, and the type of reparatory measures for which transitional justice looks. She admits (and this is what I want to underscore) that this new political environment is codependent on “a discourse that is hegemonic within a [. . .] globalized rights-based liberal community of state and non-state actors” (130). I agree with Golob on her diagnosis of this topic: it is a rights-based discourse, it has liberal philosophical foundations and it has become hegemonic in Spain.

3. *Victimology and identity politics*. It is difficult to grasp the recent evolution of Spanish politics without recognizing how “the persistent anxiety about victims and victimhood has been present in a variety of cultural manifestations over the past thirty years” (Naqvi 1). There are several historical factors that have propelled the configuration of the victim as an important and competitive political actor not only in Spain but also in the Western world in general. The impact of the Holocaust on European and North American cultures, the end of the Cold War and the Fukuyaman

prognosis of neoliberal final supremacy have played an instrumental role in this process, which authors such as Jean Baudrillard and, more recently, Tony Judt have noted. While the latter has expressed some concern about the overindulgences that are generated by this fixation on memories of injury (828–830), the former concludes that we are living in a “victim society” (137): “Everything is organized around the deprived, frustrated, handicapped subject, and the victim strategy is that of his acknowledgement as such” (138). What these two intellectuals share is a common concern about the enthroning of the category of victim as one of the most effective and operational “subject positions” from which to express political demands in liberal-capitalist societies.

The effectiveness and productivity of the status of victim seem to depend on the formation of a group whose internal consistency and putative sense of shared goals is based on a communal (usually painful) historical experience (Illouz 53; Gómez, “Law, Fidelity, and Writing” 141). Of course, in every single nation and/or state, there is never just one community of victims that manages to capitalize and monopolize this locus of public enunciation. Several groups usually contend for what we could call a market of victimhood. Quite often, a single traumatic event (a war, for example) may prompt heterogeneous competing constituencies of victims that tend to stress different aspects of the historical episode, insisting on the specificity of their unalienable experience and, therefore, the right to their own set of reparations. Quite palpably, the rearrangement of the public political field according to this logic “has led to an unhelpful kind of identity politics based on ‘comparative victimhood’ where victims [. . .] vie for the status of the ‘greater victim’” (Labanyi “The Politics of Memory” 123).

Labanyi’s allusion to identity politics constitutes a decisive insight upon which I would like to briefly expand. This is a broad concept that since at least the 1960s has been undergoing transformations and has experienced various degrees of appreciation. It is obvious that the type of identity politics with which the civil rights and counter-cultural movements reenergized emancipatory struggles in the 1960s cannot be equated with, for example, the identity politics that during the 1980s and 1990s complacently cohabitated with a period of neoliberal, globalized, deregularizing capitalism. In any case, as Stanley Aronowitz explains in a very insightful volume, some of the original causes of this process need to be found in 1) the demise or at least significant shrinking of Fordist production in the Western world, 2) the almost total discrediting of the Leninist-inspired party, 3) the crisis of the proletariat as a political category for mobilizing and organizing the working class, and 4) the emergence of the so-called New Left and its pluralized (sometimes post-Marxist) agenda.

This schematic overview is indispensable for grasping how the historical memory debate and the rise of identity politics in Spain have become intertwined. In particular, identity politics has worked 1) as a sort of political

matrix through which in the last ten years the victims of Francoism, their relatives and sympathizers have imagined models of structuration, and also 2) as a way of conceiving their exigencies and publicly voicing them. These groups are internally comprised of and united, *not* by (at least not primarily) pre-existing political programs or ideological attachments, but by a common identity that a past experience of human rights violations confers unto them. Their politics are a causal extension of this identity and this identity is the underlying base upon which their petitions are molded and predicated. How and when did this synergy of identity politics and historical memory happen in Spain? Properly answering this question would take too long. However, I would like to at least allude to a recent development of the process.

I am referring to the post-2004 Spanish Socialist Party's (PSOE) attempt at "redefining [the] Spanish citizen [. . .] expanding rights for full groups either historically ignored or unequally treated [. . .], underscoring the democratic state's responsibility to right past wrongs" (Golob 133). Sometimes under the banner of a reinvigorated "civic republicanism" (Martí and Pettit 69–94), and on other occasions with a disparate but complementary emphasis on multiculturalist and multi-communitarian values (Papell 163), Rodríguez Zapatero's two consecutive administrations have gravitated (until the 2009 economic crisis) toward the identification of asymmetrical collectivities that deserve to be acknowledged. Some of these groups configure themselves as politically recognizable collectivities appealing to a common experience of victimhood; that is, to (past and/or present) experiences of marginalization, exploitation and discrimination. It is against the background of this far-reaching planned pattern of social reparation and cultural recognition that we should rethink the historical memory debate and the configuration of another previously excluded and under-recognized minority (victims of Francoism), whose inclusion and recognition have accordingly been fostered.

4. *Democracy as reconciliation.* At the very beginning of this section, I mentioned the pre-political fundaments that tend to sustain the vindication of some of the organizations involved in the historical memory debate. Human rights and a self-evident sense of uncontroversial decency are usually brought into the conversation in order to represent these requests as politically non-partisan and ethically incontrovertible. This strategy tries to circumvent political rivalries in order to migrate into a more ingrained human dimension; a down-to-earth, immanent awareness of what constitutes a fundamental and non-divisive "right thing to do." Among these bottom-line criteria, there is one that is repeatedly aired as a sign of a sure concord: democracy. Critics tend to mobilize the full impact and prestige of this term ("democracy") in order to call our attention to a *non plus ultra*, one of those limit-concepts that we need to assume as an unsurpassable boundary of the conversation, a self-explanatory normative ideal around which the debate is organized. Democracy is presented not as another relevant term in the

discussion, but as *the* master signifier that demarcates, structures and holds the dialogue together, keeping it meaningful and intelligible.

I am going to flesh out this position with a few examples. After noticing “una escasez de la democracia española” (n.p.) (a paucity of Spanish democracy) and after stating that “se trata de ampliar el conocimiento del pasado [. . .] y de encontrarle un sentido en el presente” (n.p.) (it is a question of increasing knowledge of the past [. . .] and making sense of it in the present), Javier Rodrigo concludes his essay explaining that “no es lo mismo [. . .] construir una percepción colectiva del homenaje, restitución y defensa de los valores democráticos, que instrumentarla para apoyar la ‘identidad histórica’” (n.p.) (it is not the same thing [. . .] to construct a collective perception of homage, restitution and defense of democratic values as it is to use such a perception to support the ‘historical identity’). Rodrigo’s distinction is not totally clear but we can infer that he is trying to delegitimize those acts (concerning the Spanish Civil War) that do not have “democracy” and “democratic values” as their ultimate point of reference. One could quote many journalistic, literary and political writings that adopt similar stances. It is legitimate to inquire what these authors have in mind when they say “democracy” and “democratic values.” My impression is that what is being praised about democracy in this particular context is its capacity for inclusion and assimilation. In other words, when one states that the memorialistic tributes should have “democracy” as their final horizon, this simply means that the so-called process of recovery of historical memory should aim to promote such principles as integration, inclusion, appeasement and resolution. Democracy means, in this context, the duty to re-orient the whole historical memory debate in the direction, not of factional political interests, but of the non-sectarian ecumenical goal of reconciliation between adversaries, the inclusion of excluded elements, and of making opposites compatible. In this implicit characterization of democracy, common ground and compromise in the name of a greater good have the upper hand over antagonism and unmitigated opposition between different political preferences.

Against this expression of political disparities and the use of the historical memory in these ideological disputes, authors such as Walther Bernecker, Josefina Cuesta Bustillo and Jose Antonio Moreno (among many others) have voiced a middle-of-the-road desire for conciliation and an anti-polemical, non-belligerent approach to reviving memories of the Spanish Civil War.⁶ What these claims share is an instrumental conceptualization of the historical memory that paradoxically presents itself as non-instrumental. How is this dual status possible? It is an instrumental vision because the memory of the Spanish Civil War is asked to play a political role *within* and *for* the Spanish post-Francoist democratic system. There ought to be an institutionally promoted approach to this crucial past because the past (a particular version of it) should work as a tool to sponsor a set of values. In

other words, the memory of the Spanish Civil War needs to be put at the strategic disposal of a new democratic core of beliefs and norms.

On the other hand, this is a non-instrumental instrumentality, or an honorable and magnanimous instrumentality, because the Spanish Civil War, far from being taken over by a faction, would be rescued from the risk of this type of cooption and secured as a politically non-affiliated heritage that belongs to democracy and democrats beyond any particularist affiliation. The Spanish Civil War (a particular memorialization of it) would be withdrawn from the pugilistic-political ring and elevated to a higher meta-political sphere of foundational values that are not (or, at least, should not be) up for confrontation. What this position seems to be asking for is 1) the removal of the Spanish Civil War from the basic democratic dynamics of unavoidable opposition and hostility among political positions and 2) its integration into a supra-political and ultra-democratic domain that both enables and limits the democratic game of differences and clashes.⁷

5. *The judicialization of politics.* From the perspective I outlined above, we can better appreciate why some judicial mechanisms have become so decisive in the management of the thorniest historical memory issues (economic reparations, exhumations and the overturning of sentences issued under the Francoist legal apparatus). Judge Baltasar Garzón's aborted initiatives (along with his own professional ostracism) and the 2007 Law of Historical Memory are two important examples of this trend. Let me first say that Baltasar Garzón's truncated involvement in this issue shows (with painful clarity) the strict limitations of what some have called the judicialization of politics.⁸ This is a multinational trend, already quite prominent in some countries (such the United States) and emerging forcefully in others (such as Spain), which Maurice Sunkin has summarized as "the increasing emphasis placed upon law and legal procedures in central government administration" (126). Sunkin concludes that the "result is that the courts are now regularly drawn into areas of government that would have been regarded as beyond judicial competence even twenty or thirty years ago" (126). Maurice Sunkin has written extensively on this topic and I find his diagnosis accurate. However, his work tends to be quite technical. This is why it is important to incorporate a well-known evaluative appraisal of this process. I am referring to Shalini Randeira's "De-politization of Democracy and Judicialization of Politics," in which this author notes a worrying transposition: "Political mobilization in the public sphere, media campaigns, parliamentary debates and street demonstrations are increasingly displaced onto [. . .] court litigation in the national and international area" (39).

Both Sunkin's and Randeira's assessments describe a "judicial turn" in contemporary politics without which we simply cannot understand how the historical memory debate in Spain is being shaped. I contend that an originally *political* debate about a *political* conflict that *politically* overshadows many current *political* discussions is being transformed into a

technical procedure in which lawyers, public prosecutors, magistrates and constitutional law professors explain to the majority, usually in tortuous and sometimes impenetrable language, what can and cannot be expected and done. Political aspirations apropos the Spanish Civil War and its legitimate influence on Spanish current politics have been, at least partially, confined to a legalistic tête-à-tête between tribunals and (organized) citizens, or between various courts and judges that censure each other when a previous resolution is perceived as technically flawed and/or politically driven. In conclusion, different judicial instances are resolving political ambitions, but on the condition of previously depoliticizing them through the purportedly unadulterated lenses of legalistic reasoning.

6. *Recognition.* Having described some characteristics of the political paradigm of recognition, I can now offer a broader definition. Recognition has historically been an important and costly instrument for liberal thinkers. In his classic 1958 essay “Two Concepts of Liberty,” Isaiah Berlin envisages that twentieth-century politics will evolve around recognition, and that recognition cannot be confused with social class conflicts or economic demands. Anticipating, for instance, the work of political thinkers such as Charles Taylor, Nancy Fraser and Alex Honneth, Berlin explains that collective agents will struggle for recognition because what they “may seek to avoid is simply being ignored, or patronized, or despised, or being taken too much for granted” (201). From today’s perspective, Berlin’s insight is nothing short of premonitory because, as Simon Thompson has explained, recognition has become *the* fundamental feature of the post-Cold War “social democratic consensus” (1). Although recognition is not a univocal notion and thinkers differ from each other on key matters (such as its Hegelian roots in phenomenology, the role of redistribution of wealth, and the variable weight of cultural and ethnical differences), I find Taylor’s definition useful and valid: “The thesis is that our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by *mis*recognition of others, and so a person or group can suffer damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves” (25).

Everything I have described in this section needs to be reframed within this liberal-democratic search for recognition of one’s group identity. This identity can emanate from several collective ambits (an ethnic background, a shared language, a common traumatic experience, among many others). As Iris Marion Young has cleverly elucidated, as soon as we reimagine and reconfigure a political situation according to this logic, we are assuming “a situation of inequality [. . .] in which members of multiple [racial, sexual, linguistic, memorialistic] cultures dwell” (76). Consequently, the political conflict is “one in which [a] dominant group can limit the ability of one or more of the cultural minorities to live out their own forms of expression” (Young 76). For those in Spain who were humiliated by and suffered

retaliation from the military dictatorship, and for their families and civil associations, the paradigm of recognition has had significant consequences. Above all, recognition has imposed the categories of minority identity, public acknowledgment of that identity, and a minimum degree of social respect/appreciation for it as the crucial milieu where political fights are played out. In twenty-first-century Western democracies, such as Spain, many radical, communist, anarchist and socialist victims of a right-wing dictatorship, as well as their relatives and organizational networks, have refashioned their trajectories and causes as a demand for recognition. They represent themselves as *another* socio-political and cultural difference that was neglected before and after the Transition, and that seeks a dignified accommodation within the domain of liberal-capitalist reassignments of recognition.⁹

Recognition and Its Discontent

What is problematic about this picture? Addressing this question demands a basic explanation of why recognition has been, in fact, a source of discontent. In order to clarify the different layers of this dissatisfaction, I am going to explore some points that are, in one way or another, directly connected to the ideas I introduced in the section above. In other words, this section can be read as a critical reassessment of the previous one.

1) The depoliticization of the historical memory debate in order to infuse it with an altruistic aura is both unnecessary and counterproductive. It is unnecessary because one does not need to tone down the political nature of a particular aspiration in order to heighten its ethical merits. I am fully conscious of the differences between politics and ethics, and about the “ethical turn” in the political conversation that Jacques Rancière (“The Ethical Turn”), among many others, has critically evaluated. Whatever position we may adopt in this debate, we should remember two simple facts: ethics and politics are not in a relationship of incompatibility, but asking ethics to do the job of political thought and praxis is a strategic miscalculation. One does not have to put aside some of one’s political loyalties and ideological beliefs in order to cleanse and legitimize one’s own ethical position. One’s ethical preferences should be elucidated, not in an immaculately apolitical realm, nor in spite of politics or against it, but in relation to and within the discussion between diverse political alternatives. Otherwise, it seems to me, ethics becomes a safe refuge from the domain of political action and decision; an ivory tower of incommensurable “respect for” and “indebtedness to” a socio-politically decontextualized levinasian *other*.

Ethical apoliticism is, in addition, a perfect recipe for the type of harmless and predictable consensus that can hardly have substantial, long-term effects. The problem with invoking high-minded pious principles in order to advance a political cause is that this stratagem “no longer exerts a properly political or divisive effect. Instead, these events become gigantic festivals of self-congratulatory good consciousness” (Bosteels 43). What Bruno Bosteels alerts us to is the loss of political traction when in order to carry out political plans, we try to dissolve strong political disagreements in the hope of an honorable and often sentimentalized consensus. If this consensus is reached, it is destined to be as high-sounding and well-meant as it is ineffectual and imprecise. One suspects that this type of arrangement is attained because the implicated sides more likely than not do not really have to agree on anything or, at least, not on anything really consequential. This is why hardly anyone is willing to challenge grandiose moral notions (“decency,” “honesty,” “generosity”), but also why this lack of dissension does not involve the advent of a transforming political action, but quite the opposite; quietist satisfaction with a memorable frontispiece of principles.

Furthermore, this trend would not be so troublesome if we were not examining a very particular type of historical memory. As I have already mentioned, recent cultural products, social movements, non-public organizations and certain legal initiatives aspire to recognize and rehabilitate those citizens that were victimized, quite frequently because of their political activities against a conservative regime and because of their support of left-wing and radical agendas. I wonder why this fact and its implications are artfully avoided when, on behalf of the political casualties of Francoism, these same political victims are sanitized by well-intended humanitarian programs. Why are these political identities, harassed or annihilated (due to political reasons) by a regime with rival social and economic goals, depoliticized and invested with a humanitarian disguise? These questions probably admit several answers, but let me articulate just one of them. There seems to be something inappropriate, off-putting, and unseasonable about these pre-postmodern political trajectories that for several decades (before, during and after the Spanish Civil War) configured their own subjectivities around (currently) outmoded and disquieting beliefs: anti-capitalist revolution, party loyalty, class solidarity, public ownership, a real political economy and the possibility of a true historical meta-narrative break. When in the present day a neo-liberalized social-democrat reformism (both apologetic and straightjacketed) is the most radical electable option, it is not too hard to understand why Franco’s political fatalities have become the object of demands and hyperbolically nostalgic gestures that, on the other hand, usually belittle or ignore the victims’ (so-perceived unsuitable and over-the-top) political culture.¹⁰

2) The emphatic assertion of democracy in order to justify the historical memory debate is simply another camouflage assumed by this paradoxical

de-politicization of political subjects. The reason is very simple. There is hardly a more overblown and overused concept in European and North American political parlance. As Badiou puts it, “It is forbidden [. . .] not to be democrat” (*Metapolitics* 78). Democracy (in its neo-liberal form) has become the propitiatory excuse for neo-imperialist invasions, not-so-legal security measures, the deterministic imposition of free-market laws, nationalistic rhetoric about one’s democratic essence, xenophobic reactions against those “aliens” who put that essence in danger, and the excluding inclusion of illegal, cheap labor. Democracy and its defense have also simultaneously propitiated new civil rights movements, popular acts of resistance against foreign interventions, anti-globalization protests, and have renewed struggles for comprehensive labor rights. As Wendy Brown has stated in a timely collective volume, “democracy’s current popularity depends on the openness and even vacuity of its meaning and practice [. . .] [I]t is an empty signifier to which any and all can attach their dreams and hopes” (“We Are All Democrats Now” 45). Therefore, defending the memory of those whom Franco repressed in the name of democracy is, in fact, rather a vacuous and pompous gesture. In Spain, democracy is one of those tasteful, innocuous banners under which everyone is ready to march. Professing the abstract formalistic faith of democracy has become an easy *rite de passage*. It is ubiquitous and, at the same time, it means little since the critical issue lies elsewhere; the real and concrete content with which we impregnate this elastic concept.

3) The human rights paradigm and its role in the historical memory debate is no less troubling. I agree with those critics (already mentioned in previous sections) who underline the positive outcomes that this paradigm has sparked in both the Latin American and the peninsular context. Although one should recognize these achievements, I cannot help noticing that human rights discourse has also imposed severe limits on the historical memory debate. On a theoretical level, human rights are insufficiently able to channel important dimensions of (the memory of) those political activists who were suppressed by Franco’s regime. There are at least two main causes that Costas Douzinas (today’s most astute critic of human rights) has pointed out, partially following Ernst Bloch’s seminal *Natural Law and Human Dignity* (1961). Douzinas’s target is not only human rights *per se*, but also the imposition of the political grammar of human rights on political disputes that exceed what human rights can accommodate.

First of all, Douzinas maintains that human rights “attempt to legalize social struggle: they individualize political claims, turning them into technical disputes and removing the possibility of radical change, in other words, rights de-politicize politics” (94). Second, and this recrimination is perhaps even more relevant to my own argument, human rights “stabilize intersubjective relations by giving minimum *recognition* to multiple identities; they codify the liberal ideology of limited freedom and formal

equality” (95; emphasis mine). Let us focus on Douzinas’s latter proposition. Human rights follow a rationality that “low-levels down” the hopes and desires of the most politically implicated groups. Human rights address these political aspirations, paradoxically and (at least partially) emptying them, negating their subverting content.

Human rights only ensure a collection of essential social, cultural and (to a much lesser degree) economic guarantees that are not only perfectly compatible with capitalist-liberal systems, but that in fact depend on the perpetuation of these political regimes and their structural inequalities. When the political causes and histories of communists, socialists, anarchists and other anti-capitalist historical figures against whom reprisals were committed are recoded into the language of human rights and its bedrock of basic entitlements, what we lose is the distinctiveness of those central political experiences that surpass by far the boundaries of what human rights allow. These radical causes and figures are constituted and treated as *another* formal minority that needs to be reintegrated through the recognition of their most elementary prerogatives.¹¹ Beyond these primary rights administered by liberal-capitalist states, communist, socialist or anti-capitalist demands are simply disregarded. From the perspective of human rights, these claims do not exist and are accordingly discouraged. To sum up, liberal human rights do not and cannot recognize that which contradicts the logic of liberal human rights.

4) There is (as I have already mentioned) a close connection between human rights culture and the popularity of the category of victim, which authors such as Baudrillard and Judt have pointed out without enthusiasm. There are several reasons for this lack of excitement, especially when we deal with the historical memory of those political agendas whose proponents fought during and after the Spanish Civil War to provoke a break with capitalism. I have already quoted Jo Labanyi’s justified fear that victimhood is perhaps becoming a competitive social position for which various “injured” groups vie to mobilize its symbolic and material capital. The competition among communities to occupy (most successfully and efficiently) the position of victim produces a perverse type of identity politics. It is perverse first of all because it exacerbates an absurd rivalry between underprivileged groups, “emphasizing differences at the expense of commonalities and hence undermining the basis of social solidarity” (Owen and Tully 265). What Owen and Tully are concerned about is the fragmenting mark that this “comparative victimhood” (Labanyi, “The Politics of Memory” 123) leaves on the relationship between social agents that would otherwise likely share common political adversaries and many common goals. Of course, this atomization of agendas ironically undermines them all, reducing their potential and lowering their ceiling of demands. Today, this issue has no less damaging consequences on the political Left than it had in the 1930s, and a self-critical approach to the historical memory

should be aware of the great performative mistake of reconstituting the victims of Francoism, their memory and organizations as another *minority of victims* in search of their portion of recognition within the market of liberal-capitalist multiculturalism.

There is another source of concern about the representation of Franco's defeated, exiled or eliminated enemies as ontologized victims. Angel Loureiro has noted that in the last decade or so, there has been a shift in how Republicans and left-wing fighters are being represented: from "leaders, warriors, heroes" to "victims" (232). This change "seeks a new brand of solidarity that is at least as much affective as it is ideological" (232). In other words, the increasing ascendancy of victimhood also prompts depoliticizing effects. I am going to reshape some of Alain Badiou's ideas, especially from his *Ethics*, in order to inform the following argument. The problem with the category of victim, at least when we overuse it to describe Francoism's enemies during and after the Civil War, is that we lose sight of some of its connotations. Specifically, the entanglement of this category with a particular emotional tone that we can detect, for instance, in many recent popular films and novels about the 1930s and 1940s, often reinstates a handicapped subject that has been reduced to a semi-passive state.¹²

The victim appears as an unnecessarily idealized and inoffensive social entity whose peaceful agency is suddenly constrained by hostile, powerful "evil" forces. The victim was, of course, innocent before becoming a victim and is afterwards a diminished individual who lacks something and needs to be completed again. This is problematic because we do not need to imagine and conceptualize (many of) those who suffered Franco's domination as languid, quasi-inert innocent victims or as their secret counterpart: equally pure and one-sided heroes. Perhaps it is enough to remember that we are dealing with subjects who, in the context (and not in spite) of their contradictions and ambiguities, developed a political culture of class struggle and anti-capitalist resistance. This culture involved resilient ideological affinities, strong identification with certain political programs, and sometimes a committed willingness to participate in revolutionary processes. In this type of representation, purity, innocence and/or sacrificial passivity are simply beside the point.

The fact that this radical political heritage is regularly disregarded for its dogmatic, violent, intolerant core, or sanitized to please postmodern liberal sensibilities should cause us to rethink the issue. Here I can only sketch out the following idea: heartfelt remorse for or semi-open embarrassment about this heritage is biased. One could accuse this political genealogy of being intransigent, violent and doctrinaire only if one thinks that liberal, capitalist, free-market regimes constitute an unpolluted sphere of political excellence without its own set of repressive violence, discriminatory intransigence and destructive excesses. If this is going to be a real debate, it will not be one between authoritarian, rigid, violent 1930s revolutionaries and Rorty-like,

tolerant, postmodern, open, self-ironic post-Cold War (progressive or conservative) liberals. In order to accept the conversation in these terms, we would have to forget the last four decades of “democratic,” free-market (neo)liberal abuses, exploitation and deterministic/messianistic impositions around the world (Vattimo and Zabala 49–57).¹³

5) It is precisely at this point that we can get a better grasp of the contradictions inherent in the judicialization of historical memory and, particularly, the judicialization of the memory of repressed socialists, communists and anarchists. This judicialization should not, of course, be evaluated in a totally negative light. The type of recognition this judicialization has intended to produce has many positive aspects, but these aspects are only one side of the coin. The other side is that “a politics of identity that looks to law [. . .] to redress social injuries may depoliticize rather than transform relations of domination” (Markell 29). Markell’s argument could not be more pertinent to the theme of this essay. Right-wing and left-wing critics, activists, intellectuals and politicians always have the legitimate option of ignoring or even disallowing the legacy of those who fought against Franco. But if one decides to address this legacy, to invoke it and memorialize it, one cannot depoliticize this innately political tradition; one cannot assume it as if one were not interpellating a political history.

This is exactly what happens when a legal system becomes the main stage or platform for posing demands. As Markell suggests, a political fight for anti-capitalist equality, emancipation and solidarity (as well as its memorialization) transforms itself into a series of technical demands that even if they are attended leave structural relations of domination and exploitation totally unremarked and unchallenged. In order to pay judicial tribute and render judicial justice to certain political activists and combatants, law forced us to neglect their politics, that is, the ideological reasons for which they were victimized in the first place. It is appropriate to recall that they were victimized by a military regime, but it does not seem so appropriate to remember the concrete political aspirations that prompted these crimes. In conclusion, we value these victims as long as they are not truly seen as (too) political subjects.

6) Finally, I would like to say a few words about the privatization of memory. First of all, the privatization of political memories (which belong not only to some self-contained individual trajectories, but also to the social history of certain classes, movements, parties, unions and political struggles) is not surprising under liberal-capitalist systems. It is unsurprising because “liberalism’s unit of analysis [is] the individual” (Brown, *Regulating Aversion* 21). Wendy Brown accepts that in late-capitalist democracies, culture, cultural differences and the politics of culture are very important, *but only* (and this a very important precondition) a “liberalized” version of culture that has gone “through [a process of] privatization and individualization” (*Regulating Aversion* 21). The point I want to make here

is not necessarily that the liberal emphasis on personal autonomy, rights, individualistic self-determination and negative freedom is not defensible. My point is that, whether we support this agenda or not, we need to notice that there is an overriding tension between this liberal language and the political trajectories we want to pay tribute to with this same language. One may or may not feel sympathy for political values like individual atomization, a minimum degree of governmental interference and economic *laissez-faire*, but what is patent is that these ideals were not, in many cases, the values that Francoism's enemies fought and died for.

In a very revealing ethnographic account of the interpenetration of politics and memory in some rural Spanish communities, Susana Narotzky and Gavin Smith have shown how before the Civil War "collective identity [was] construed [...] through strikes and public demonstration of opposition" (215). For these authors, the 1930s cannot be understood without this intense process of working-class empowerment and anti-capitalist collective mobilization. These social shifts were mainly the product of supra-individual proposals that in fact tended to distrust the emphasis on individualism and individual liberties in order to favor, for instance, equality, solidarity, class consciousness, positive freedom, redistribution of wealth and public proprietorship. The focus of these left-wing normative ideals, which Franco forcefully fought against during and after the war, was not the unchallenged status of the individual and its propaedeutic, annexed rights. The focus was on collective problems that demanded collective agents in order to articulate collective solutions. Quite often, these solutions had to be implemented in opposition to private rights (for example, the right to unlimited accumulation of land, capital, or means of production).

When the historical memory of this ideological record before, during and after the Civil War is reformulated into humanitarian requests assimilated by a neo-liberalized capitalism through recognition, commemoration, and symbolic and legal rehabilitation, it does not seem too extravagant to conclude, as Narotzky and Smith do, that "forced privatization of past memories is progressively eroding the 'social' aspect of those memories" (219) and that this is the result of an "apoliticism [...] based on the confiscation of memories, their privatization and individualization" (219). Narotzky and Smith correctly locate this process of privatization within a larger political framework; a long history of Francoist socialization that since at least the 1950s had been discouraging political involvement and participation. Politics and "being *político*" acquired negative and threatening resonance because they were explicitly connected with dissatisfaction with the regime (220–21). On the other hand, supporting late-Francoism was not really presented as a political option, but as a commonsensical post-ideological acceptance of an increasingly technocratic government that was implementing infrastructural improvements and

material development. Politicizing oneself was a sign of a *démodé* radicalism and a capricious fixation on old national divides. According to Narotzky and Smith, this program of generalized depoliticization, which demoralized and de-radicalized (previously very strong) working-class movements and programs, has never been truly reversed even since Franco's death.¹⁴ This is why the collective memory of certain political agendas has been ignored or selectively rearticulated as a benign chance for cultural commemorations, expositions, humanitarian homages, successful (and opportunistically trendy) novels and films, decaffeinated laws, and a (more or less) majoritarian emotional sympathy for the (previously construed as) ill-treated victims.

Coda: A Secret Agreement

We should, at least, concede that the politics of memory based on recognition, whatever its achievements, is just *one* of the possible politics of memory. Let me mention some of the few (to date) examples which show a very different approach to this topic. In an insightful article, in which Sebastiaan Faber expresses his concern for the "fossilization" of "the memory of Francoist repression" ("Price" 216), he also suggests (following Naharro-Calderón) a productive way of politically revitalizing this memory: "Endowing it with an explicit contemporary relevance, connecting it, for instance, to the fate of Latin American and North African immigrants in Europe" ("Price" 216). Other authors, such as Ruiz Torres and Cuesta (26), have speculated about this same model of connections, mentioning those political movements that, albeit intermittently, have remobilized elements of the Left's historical memory in order to anchor and galvanize protests against, for instance, neoliberal globalizing measures and the imperialist wars instigated since 2001. I could not agree more with these critics. In fact, I would add that this is how political traditions are crafted and how a truly active and effectual historical memory can play an important role in this process of political re-articulation and revitalization. Collective and historical memories do not need to be treated with an archeological spirit or as a collection of commodified and culturalized narratives that we safely consume and reify with moral veneration.¹⁵

There is always the possibility of gaining political traction *in* and *through* the past, reinvigorating old aspirations and reconnecting previous and recent political challenges that are *not* so different. Walter Benjamin extensively explored this idea in his "Theses on the Philosophy of History," where he famously conceptualizes two basic understandings of history. The first is a positivist and historicist conception that approaches the past as a completed scenario of closed processes, as an ended plot that we merely

need to re-narrate and assume. From this perspective, history is about prudent resignation, and the practical acceptance of a scientifically recorded assemblage of events that experts and technicians explain to us. Therefore learning from history means comprehending and accepting its inexorable past and present trajectory, being sensible and reasonable about it, proposing reforms but not illusory breaks, avoiding counter-factual and dreamlike alternatives. The second experience of history, to which Benjamin devoted most of his manuscript, could not be more different. Experiencing history does not mandate necessity and compliance with a given plot. History always includes the likelihood of being radically re-opened and re-oriented in a very different direction. For Benjamin, these moments of rupture and arrest happen as an echo of and in correlation with previous emancipatory struggles. Past injustices and defeats are not therefore totally completed and consummated. There is always a chance to remediate them *a posteriori* since they are not disengaged and detached from current ones. In other words, a particular historical or collective memory may function (if it is not commodified and coerced) as a scenario of ideological enlightenment and political mobilization where we can grasp the intimate relation between preceding political hopes and present ones, and act upon this connection.

It would be a mistake to confuse Benjaminian temporal constellations with a mechanical identification between two different historical times, for instance the 1930s and the beginning of the twenty-first century. However, it would also be a mistake to assume that these historical phases are entirely incommensurable and that, for example, the political Left has happily moved to a whole different stage from which we can look at the 1930s with paternalistic condescension. I am conscious of the fact that in this essay I have been hinting at the opposite position; the historical memory of the anti-capitalist organizations that fought in the Spanish Civil War and resisted Francoism for several decades is, especially today, valuable and relevant. I am also conscious of the fact that, for many liberal postmodern sensibilities that abandoned anti-capitalist criticism several decades ago, this proposition is probably preposterous. In conservative quarters, mentioning capitalism and resistance in the same sentence sounds oxymoronic and anachronistic. But this is my question: is there really *nothing* to be learned from those who during the first six decades of the twentieth century critically thought about and confronted issues of inter-class exploitation, colonialism, massive commodification of life, social alienation, political repression, structural high unemployment, severe reduction of welfare benefits, liberal individualism and reactionary discourses on self-responsibility, the worsening of labor conditions and the enactment of crises that are taken as an opportunity to reinforce the financial and economic ideologies that paradoxically produced them?

I know that, for many, these ideas and topics have acquired an old-fashioned flavor, which, as Adorno tongue-in-cheek said in a similar

situation, “only prove[s] that you have become a grumpy old man who is naturally suspect to the serene young people of today” (74). As Adorno also recommended, we should resist this impression because it is misleading and because it has had very debilitating political effects. In fact, I would pose the following questions about this supposedly antiquated quality, which any radical critique of capitalism needs to continue acknowledging and responding to: where exactly does this outmoded and antediluvian flavor come from? Does it come from a historical reality that has overcome these problems? Or is it that we consider capitalism and its many tribulations an inevitable and unsurpassable *cul-de-sac* horizon we should assume and be resigned to once and for all? It seems to me that, after two semi-cheerful decades of neoliberal *fiesta*, in which almost the whole spectrum of Spanish political forces participated, it is now probably the right time to re-open a serious conversation not only about global capitalism and its monumental failures and brutalities, but also about the role of Spain (and Spanish historical memory) within this system. The late-2000 economic crisis, as we already realize, is not going to be a small bump, a temporary inconvenience in the triumphant road toward Spain’s finally realized (post)modernity. This crisis has come to stay, and its effects are going to be structural, long-lasting and excruciating for a majority of the population, especially the younger generations. This is not a mild side-effect of an otherwise efficient capitalist system. This is how capitalism essentially works; that is, through painful crises that, in a very short period of time, put countries and even whole continents in extreme situations of economic and political instability.¹⁶ From now on, it is not going to be possible to understand Spanish culture without tackling this new context of capitalist intensification and aggressive neoliberal re-entrenchment. It is precisely in this context in which the debate on historical memory should be reconsidered and in which the history of left-wing, radical thinking and activism *about* and *against* capitalism have once more become relevant. Now more than ever since the instauration of a liberal-capitalist monarchy, we can speculate about a Benjaminian “secret agreement” between those who not so long ago had to confront capitalism’s violent abuses, and those who right now have been forced into a very similar position.¹⁷

Notes

1. Even in the 1950s, when a generation of Spanish historians launched a new neo-objectivist, neo-empirical scientific methodology, this intellectual gesture constituted a political statement against the dictatorship’s main historiographical school and its “anti-naturalist” and “theological” understanding of history (Sánchez León 103–10). In other words, de-politicizing a historiographical methodology performatively constituted a political statement.

2. These de-ideologizing reappraisals of the Spanish Civil War do not consider that inter-subjective and even universalist political ideals can be articulated and expressed in and through the concrete defense of a discrete interest, against a strictly individual offense, and even as an expression of an intra-subjective frustration or fear.
3. Pseudo-Orwellian fantasies about national (or regional) governments that manage, through legislative or executive means, to successfully impose a pool of official memories and oblivion are precisely just that; Orwell-like daydreams about all-pervasive, phantasmal Big Brothers. Of course, this type of discourse usually has a tactical role to play: enervating certain segments of the political electorate.
4. It would be utterly absurd to conclude that one of these “cultures of memory” could abolish the others and, through a drastic act of exclusion, occupy the entire symbolic space in which this struggle takes place. All that these cultures of memory can aspire to is a position of political/memorialistic hegemony, which is always open to argument.
5. They establish, for instance, different types of connections between natural, human and positive rights. Their positions on the role of rights in the economic realm are not identical either.
6. Walther Bernecker interprets, for example, “los diferentes esfuerzos por recuperar un pasado prohibido o relegado [como] un paso a la normalización de la memoria histórica, es decir hacia el acercamiento de las disparidades existentes en la memoria colectiva” (53) (the various efforts to recover a forbidden or dismissed past [as] a step toward normalizing historical memory; that is, toward the discrepancies of the collective memory). And he tellingly adds that “la rememoración de estos episodios trágicos no pretende resaltar divisiones [. . .], sino reafirmar valores como unión, solidaridad, paz y libertad que eviten nuevos conflictos” (55) (raking over the memories of these tragic episodes is not an attempt to overcome divisions [. . .], but to reaffirm values such as unity, solidarity, peace and freedom that avert new conflicts). Josefina Cuesta Bustillo detects a new generation of civil organizations that although they harshly censure the blind spots of the Spanish Transition, basically try to reenergize (on an theoretical level) the Transition’s most important goal: recognition and integration of all the different political memories, experiences and trajectories. For José Antonio Moreno, president of the Asociación Foro por la Memoria, one of the duties of the new constitutional regime is to foster an official set of narratives and images of the Civil War that are consubstantial with “los valores superiores de libertad, justicia, igualdad y pluralismo político” (n.p.) (the superior values of freedom, justice, equality and political pluralism).
7. I call this domain “ultra-democratic” because it contains those nonnegotiable elements that comprise democracy’s core being.
8. In April 2010, Baltasar Garzón was forced to step down from his position at the Audiencia Nacional (Spanish National Court) after being formally accused of prevarication. In February 2012, the Supreme Court of Spain finally convicted him and sentenced him to eleven years of judicial inactivity. Although Garzón faced charges in three different cases: corruption allegations in the Banco Santander case, improper eavesdropping in the “Gürtel case,” and his overextended and inappropriate involvement in the investigation of the crimes against humanity during and after the Civil War. Although he was convicted for the second charge, it is probably the latter accusation that has had the most media resonance. His professional complicity in this controversial case is not free from contradictions and recantation, due (in part) to the strong political pressures he suffered from the very beginning. It is also fair to admit that the legal status of Garzón’s initial proceedings

was also (from a strict judicial point of view) ambiguous. Garzón is currently working as an advisor for the Colombian government and it is quite possible that, as he himself has admitted on several occasions, he will never return to the Audiencia Nacional.

9. In her groundbreaking *Cold Intimacies*, Eva Illouz states that “both individuals and groups have increasingly made claims to ‘recognition,’ that is, demanded that one’s suffering be acknowledged and remedied by institutions” (56). Illouz explains the preeminence of the recognition paradigm as a consequence of several factors I tackle in this paper; a “culture saturated with the notions of right” (56), “the extension of human rights to new domains” (62), the fact that “identity is found and expressed in the experience of suffering” (53), the socialized emergence of “trauma at the center of life narrative” (53), and a whole “therapeutic ethos” that values autobiographical verbalization and self-narrativization.
10. Jo Labanyi mentions a type of narration about the Spanish Civil War that produces “a ‘feel-good factor’ that makes readers or spectators feel morally improved by having momentarily ‘shared’ the suffering represented in the text, without going on to make any connection with the present” (“Memory and Modernity” 112). This has been, in my opinion, the predominant tone of many popular representations of the Civil War and also of many political acts by civil rights networks and organizations. As I try to explain in this essay, this “feel-good factor” has undoubtedly produced some positive political results but, in my opinion, it has produced many more political constraints.
11. I fully agree with Mari Paz Balibrea’s understanding of this problem; “The forms and conceptualizations of modernity that Republicans took with them into exile would continue in democracy, as under the dictatorship, to be residual, alternative and certainly incompatible with respect to the Spanish dominant version of it” (11). This is why Balibrea argues against the emphasis on (re)integration and (re)accommodation: “[Republican alternative modernity’s] resistance is exercised, not from a denied inside, but from a consciously excluded outside, from the radical impossibility of coming back, to re-insert or to be re-inserted” (13). From the perspective of my own paper, I would merely add that this critical inassimilable exteriority gestures toward a political break, toward the possibility of a different type of (radically emancipatory and equalitarian) modernity.
12. There are many literary and cinematographic examples of this type of counter-productive sentimentalizing and idealizing representation of the Republican victim. See Gómez’s “La misma guerra para un nuevo siglo” and *La guerra persistente*, especially the third chapter, “La utopía retrospectiva.”
13. Slavoj Žižek understands neoliberal abuses as “objective violence,” which is seen as “the ‘normal,’ peaceful state of things” (2). For Žižek, “objective violence is precisely the violence inherent to this ‘normal’ state of things. Objective violence is invisible since it sustains the very zero-level standard against which we perceive something as subjective [against other types of] violence” (2). Violence is not the topic of my argument, but it is important to note that it is, quite often, hypocritically and one-sidedly misused to dismiss radical leftist movements from the 1930s. In order to have a coherent conversation about the relationship between violence and politics, we should take into consideration several types of (radical and liberal) politics, several types of (past and present) violence, and their socio-economic effects in different geopolitical contexts.
14. Paloma Aguilar Fernández explains that “lo que indudablemente logró transmitir con éxito el franquismo fue el miedo a los desordenes callejeros, la desconfianza en nuestra propia capacidad para afrontar problemas de forma civilizada, en incluso el

temor a las consecuencias del ejercicio de nuestra propia libertad” (263) (what Francoism was undoubtedly able to transmit successfully was fear of chaos in the streets, lack of confidence in our own ability to deal with problems in a civilized way, and even fear of the consequences of exercising our own freedom). The many and real effects produced by the long and profound Francoist socialization (which systematically stigmatized some political cultures) managed (among other things) to depict “the Republican war effort and social revolution [...] exclusively as a problem of public order and of ‘crime’” (Richards 101). This type of depiction has never been completely reversed since the transition to democracy, which has cultivated the self-congratulating and abstract mystique of the “collective mistake,” the “should not have never happened” and the “never again since we are (now) better than that.” Simultaneously, it is also important to add that some of the political changes that Narotzky and Smith note in their essay were not an exclusively Spanish phenomenon, but a transnational tendency that basically transformed the left-wing political spectrum in the 1970s and, even more radically, in the 1980s.

15. Not even exhumations and corpses are, in fact, exempted from this process of commodification. As Francisco Ferrándiz has explained in a ground-breaking essay, “stimulated by new institutional modes of financial and political support [...], public interest has proved more spasmodic, as the original shocking images of piled-up bodies and skeletons [...] are increasingly absorbed into a global pool of images of horror and violence” (179). Ferrándiz’s point is essential and we should not underestimate the late-capitalist free market’s investment in violent over-the-top images that productively re-shock and re-stimulate the public’s hyper-satiated and over-saturated sensibility.
16. The 15-M Movement was the most interesting and revealing actor of the municipal and regional elections that took place in Spain on May 22, 2011. The Socialist Party’s crushing defeat in these elections simply signaled a long new conservative cycle. Mariano Rajoy’s victory in the General Elections in November 2011 confirmed this cycle. The irony of this political shift is that for almost two years, from 2009 to 2011, Rodríguez Zapatero implemented, without positive results, the neo-liberal formula that the European Bank, the Bundesbank, the IMF and various international leaders emphatically “recommended” to save the Spanish economy (the other “non-option” was/is a rescue plan). The second irony of this recent political “tsunami” in Spain is that the internationally prescribed/forced solutions for this crisis were its own condition of possibility. Spain’s current unemployment rate is 22.9 percent (March 2012) and for some demographic groups (young people, for instance) is almost 50 percent. The 15-M Movement demonstrations are simply one of the many manifestations of an unsustainable social and economic situation whose true causes have been and are still being systematically misrepresented and obfuscated.
17. In his “Thesis II,” Benjamin famously states that “the past carries with it a temporal index by which it is referred to redemption. There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one [...] Like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a weak Messianic power” (254). Michael Löwy, one of the most exciting contemporary critics of Benjamin, has offered the following interpretation of this thesis; “In Benjamin the violence of the prophetic tradition and the radicalism of Marxist critique meet in the demand for a salvation that is not the mere restitution of the past, but also the transformation of the present” (34).

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