

TORN COBWEBS OF MEMORY: INTERWEAVING FILM AND FICTION IN POST-
FRANCO SPAIN AND POST-COMMUNIST HUNGARY,
SHIFTING NARRATIVES OF THE HOLOCAUST AND DICTATORSHIP IN THE
WAKE OF POLITICAL TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Title: Torn Cobwebs of Memory: Interweaving Film and Fiction in Post-Franco Spain and Post-Communist Hungary, Shifting Narratives of the Holocaust and Dictatorship in the Wake of Political Transition to Democracy

This dissertation examines discourses on the memories of both the Holocaust and of the national dictatorships in Spain (1939-1975) and Hungary (1949-1990). In both post-dictatorial societies, the narrative shift about the dictatorial past occurs simultaneously with the re-emergence on the narratives of the Holocaust.

I analyze the narrative strategies of memoirs, historical novels, and biographical films (biopics) produced between 1964 and 2014, drawing on concepts of multidirectional and palimpsestic memory, developed by Michael Rothberg and Max Silverman. Through these recollections similar patterns of avoidance and silence can be observed in the two regions. The frequent framing of memories in terms of “us” and “them” suggests that memory discourses remain nationalized and that mental walls survive both within and across nations.

“In A Cobweb: Europe as a Hostile Space in Antonio Muñoz Molina’s *Sepharad* (2001)” looks at life-stories of “uprootedness” from all across Europe. The Spanish narrator passively relays the accounts of persecution during the Holocaust and Stalinism.

His position of ‘outsider’ mirrors the dominant Spanish discourse of neutrality during WWII.

“Buchenwald Memoirs, When Living Memory Becomes History: Jorge Semprún and Imre Kertész”, connects the works of a Hungarian Jew and a non-Jewish Spanish resistance fighter. Analyzing their first literary productions along their reflexive works three decades later highlights the different narratives on the Holocaust during and after the dictatorships.

“Empty Photo Frames and Giant Posters” brings together Javier Cercas’s *The Impostor* and Alice Zeniter’s *Gloomy Sunday*, two multigenerational novels that depict the quest of two protagonists to learn about the past of their ancestors. The well-kept family secrets symbolize how the new democracies failed to come to terms with the legacies of a grim past.

Competing Narratives of Heroism in rescuing Hungarian Jews: The films *Perlasca: The Courage of a Just Man* (2002) and the *Angel of Budapest* (2011) demonstrates the process of constructing a national Holocaust hero. The two films have identical plots, both narrate the rescue activities of the Spanish legation in Budapest during 1944, albeit with different leading heroes. By emphasizing the rescuers’ actions, these films seek to mask the complicity of Franco’s Spain and Mussolini’s Italy in the Holocaust.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Keep Quiet? Hungary

The documentary *Keep Quiet: An Anti-Semitic Politician's Astonishing Transformation* (2017) tells the story of Csanád Szegedi, co-founder of both Jobbik, a Hungarian far-right party and the Hungarian Guard, a paramilitary organization. Jobbik, or The Movement for a Better Hungary, emerged loudly in 2006.

It was during that time when Hungary, the country where I grew up and lived in for most of my life, suddenly became unrecognizable for me.¹ I was profoundly disturbed by the hatred that appeared from nowhere, or so it seemed. I could not understand what was happening. How could paramilitary troops waving quasi Arrow Cross-flags march across the streets of Budapest? Even more disturbingly, I discovered that many Hungarians, including some of my close friends, found their “radically patriotic Christian” ideas appealing.

In the 2010 elections Jobbik obtained 16.7% of the votes and became a parliamentary party. *I found this deeply disquieting, and this unsettling to understand*

¹ I have lived through some of the historic periods in Hungary that I examine in this work. This provides me with a unique opportunity to offer an inside perspective, at the same time it posed a complex challenge of interweaving academic and personal narratives. Can I, or shall I draw a strict border between my academic work and lived personal experience? This dilemma echoes that of the truthful fictions I analyze: How to blend fact and fiction, subjective and objective, and more importantly how to define those categories? Truthful fictions blur and question the boundaries between memory and history, as they seek to represent the experiences of ordinary people. I weave in my personal memories to highlight historic events or experiences characteristic of that time period.

where the new rhetoric of hatred was coming from motivated me to look at my country's past from a new perspective, and try to understand its present.

Csanád Szegedi's life story illustrates perfectly the erasures, omissions and silences that weaves through every level of society. Szegedi, a prominent leader of the far-right, finds out unexpectedly that his mother is Jewish, both his maternal grandparents are Jewish, and her grandmother was deported to Auschwitz. Neither his paternal grandmother, nor his mother ever mentioned his Jewish origins to him, not even when Szegedi was thundering publicly from the podium of an anti-Semitic party. "How come you did not tell me?" – a confused Szegedi asks his beloved grandmother. Her response: "What can a Jew do in Hungary? Keep quiet." She always wore long-sleeved blouses to hide her "shameful tattoo", she never visited the grave of her parents for four decades due to being buried in the Jewish cemetery, and she did not want anyone to find out that she was Jewish.

When Szegedi's old identity shatters abruptly, he sets out to find a new one: he turns to an Orthodox Rabbi and embraces Judaism. The orthodox Jewish community does not receive him with open arms, as many questioned his sincerity, wondering if a person could make a political transition from the far right to Orthodox Judaism. And that's what I find unsettling, once again. Even though far-right extremism and Orthodox Judaism could not be ideologically more different, I can see common patterns that may appeal to the same individual and smooth the transition; both provide a sense of community and require a strong commitment. The astonishing part of Szegedi's story to me was his

grandmother's hidden identity, and the fact that she kept hiding the truth from her grandson even twenty years after the collapse of the communist regime.

Keep Quiet: An Anti-Semitic Politician's Astonishing Transformation touches on various issues I explore, such as the silences and secrets during and following a dictatorship. What was hidden below the surface during the Communist dictatorship in Hungary? How do the secrets of the past emerge in a post-dictatorial society? Is this a uniquely Hungarian/Eastern European phenomenon or can we find similar patterns of erasure in ideologically different dictatorships?

The Silence of Others, Spain

Almudena Carracedo's documentary, *The Silence of Others* (2018) "reveals the epic struggle of victims of Spain's 40-year dictatorship under General Franco, who continue to seek justice to this day. Filmed over six years, the film follows victims and survivors as they organize the groundbreaking 'Argentine Lawsuit' and fight a state-imposed amnesia of crimes against humanity, in a country still divided four decades into democracy." (thesilenceofothers.com, Web) With this, Carracedo hopes to initiate a dialogue within Spanish society about the unresolved chapters of the Spanish past.

The Spanish Law of Amnesty that was enacted in 1977, two years after General Franco's death, effectively prevented anyone from being tried for crimes committed during the Franco dictatorship. This law remains in effect today, thus the increasingly elderly victims of Francoism and their descendants sought justice in Argentina under international law. Since the beginning of the lawsuit, in which Argentinian Judge Maria Servini investigated crimes against humanity, more than 250 Spaniards joined in to seek

justice for themselves or their loved ones. The lawsuit demonstrates that there has never been a “Pact of Forgetting” in Spain, but rather a “Pact of Silence.”

The title of the documentary *The Silence of Others* is a reference to silence, similar to the title of the Hungarian documentary, *Keep Quiet*. These titles also point to the act of avoidance and erasure of the past, and hint that despite decades of democracy, the wounds of the past are still open. In another sense, *Keep Quiet* and *The Silence of Others* also aim at different aspects of the ongoing silence. In the Hungarian documentary, it is the victims themselves who chose to keep the events of the past hidden, as it is Szegedi’s grandmother and parents who stay silent about their identity and the grandmother’s fate. In *The Silence of Others* it is the silence of “others,” those members of the society who refuse to listen to the victims of the Franco dictatorship, and who decide to remain silent instead of supporting the struggles of the frequently octogenarian descendants of the victims for justice.

Javier Cercas, a writer who dedicated most of his work to scrutinizing the legacy of the Spanish Civil War, talks about the dichotomy between the older generations who prefer remaining silent about their experience during the Spanish Civil War, and the desire of their descendants to get to know the past. Cercas points out that even though the legacy of the Spanish Civil War is a common heritage to all Spaniards “con esa herencia cargamos todos, [...] como saben todos, las familias no se hablaban de esas cosas, sencillamente de la Guerra no se hablaba en casa,” [all of us struggle with this heritage, [...] we all know that it has been an experience no family discussed at home,] because it was an incredibly cruel experience for those who participated in it. Cercas states that “y

la respuesta fue callar, un silencio legítimo, tenemos que respetarlo y tienen derecho a callar,” [the ensuing silence is a legitimate response which should be respected,] at the same time he claims that the later generations have the obligation to break the silence and find out what happened, in order to be able to deal with its legacies, “si lo conocemos, lo podemos manejar, si no lo comprendo me maneja”, while subsequent generations [can confront and conquer a past they understand, the unknown will consume them again.] (*No es un día cualquiera*. Web)

Concerning the legacies of the Franco dictatorship, and the silences that many maintained for decades following the death of Franco, Jo Labanyi expresses her “increasing disquiet at the dominance of memory studies of trauma theory” that she attributes to the key importance of Holocaust studies in memory studies. Labanyi emphasizes the importance of differentiating the unconscious process of memory from the conscious choice of remaining silent. Witnesses may remain silent for various reasons, for example to protect their descendants from knowing events they consider shameful or dangerous, (“Silence” 24), or “lack of adequate condition for memory reception by others” (28). Labanyi’s observation holds true not only in the case of Spain, characterized by “a state-imposed amnesia of crimes against humanity” but also in relation with the memories of the Holocaust. It was not trauma that prevented Szegedi’s grandmother from speaking, but fear and shame, and that is the reason why I consider that Holocaust Studies should also incorporate discussion on the many different factors that influence the decision of the victims to keep silent or share their stories.

Eastern Europeans modeled themselves on Spain and Portugal, the two Southern countries that turned from right-wing dictatorships into fully functional democracies in about a decade –or so it seemed– and “joined” “Europe,” the prestigious club, in 1986. As in Spain, the members of the political elite negotiated impunity for themselves, and silence among the victims continued. Since then, the ghosts of the past escaped from the bottle in Spain, and re-emerged occasionally in Hungary. These two different post-dictatorial societies continue to grapple with the traumatic memories of their past. What can the new forms of memory repression and memory recovery concerning different traumatic events teach us about the ways we narrate the past?

Interweaving Memories

The theoretical foundations for my work, Max Silverman’s theory of palimpsestic memory and Michael Rothberg’s theory of multidirectional memory, focus on the interconnected and dynamic nature of memory. Rothberg’s concept of “multidirectional memory” eliminates competition between memories and suggests we focus on the interactions and intermingling among them instead. He challenges widely held views “that the public sphere in which collective memories are articulated is a scarce resource and that the interactions of different collective memories within that sphere take the form of a zero-sum struggle for preeminence.” (3) Max Silverman’s palimpsestic memory reinforces this concept by acknowledging the layered nature of memory. He summarizes this argument as follows:

Palimpsestic memory brings to the politics of memory the challenging idea that memory does not function according to the linear trajectory of a particular ethno-cultural group and lead inexorably to the distinction (and

often competition) between different groups; it functions instead, according to a complex process of interconnection, interaction, substitution and displacement of memory traces in which the particular and the universal, and memory, and history, are inextricably held in an anxious relationship. rather than see them as opposites, leaving us with the choice of either 'objective' (universal) history or 'personal'(relative) memory, the ambivalent space of the palimpsest, which overlays individual and collective meanings, gives us a different way of understanding this relationship. (*Palimpsestic Memory* 28)

Palimpsestic memory challenges traditional separation of history and memory, stating that the overlapping and interaction of the two provide a new interpretation for the past. Indeed, this blurring of history and memory will be a prominent feature in all the artistic productions analyzed in the present work. Silverman uses the phrases “complex process of interconnections,” interaction, “inextricably held in anxious relationship,” “overlays individual and collective” to reinforce the concept of a dynamic, intertwined relationship. The process of interactions challenges the idea of maintaining separate versions of national histories, and proposes that even seemingly competitive pasts result from the same processes of interaction, showing similar narrative strategies. This form of memory does not only transcend geographic and ethno-cultural borders, but also questions the linear conception of historical time.

Silverman continues arguing that artistic creations serve as the best means to demonstrate this intricate relationship:

...artistic works may be better suited than historical or sociological method to making visible the complex interaction of times and sites at play in memory, as a fundamental feature of imaginative (poetic works) is to overlay meaning in intertextual space and blur frontiers between the conscious and the unconscious, the present and the past, and the personal and the collective. Correspondences, substitutions and transformations – the very essence of literary imagination – can open up an alternative history (though one announced by the post-war generation of theorists of

modern violence) which challenges the compartmentalized narratives we habitually receive. (28-29)

Artistic productions may indeed be better suited to interweaving complex narratives, but do they in fact present a less compartmentalized narrative? Are the different traumatic memories represented as interconnected or competing? Antonio Muñoz Molina's *Sepharad*, as well as the reflections of Imre Kertész and Jorge Semprún on literary creation certainly blur the frontiers between the present and the past, as the protagonists are constantly transported back to the past through both conscious and unconscious memory work. The shadows of the past are haunting them.

Silverman considers the haunting of the past in the present as the foundations of memory work. He summarizes the interaction of the present and the past as follows:

First, the present is shown to be shadowed or haunted by a past which is not immediately visible but is progressively brought into view. The relationship of the past therefore takes the form of superimposition and interaction of different temporal traces to composite structure, like a palimpsest, so that one layer of traces can be seen through, and is transformed by the other. Second, the composite structure [...] is a combination of not simply two moments in time (past and present) but a number of different moments, hence producing a chain of signification, which brings together disparate spaces and times. (3)

Silverman explains that a dynamic connection exists between the present and the past, the legacies of previous periods constantly shape and influence the present. He illustrates this point by giving the example of street posters, where we find several different posters underneath the most recent cover, taking us back to earlier historic periods. Despite being invisible at the present moment, the layers beneath are still present and can easily be made visible. Silverman's image of superimposed poster layers is easily understandable, but one wonders how posters overlaid upon each other can enter into a dynamic relationship.

The exterior layer covers all the previous posters, the layers underneath are both made invisible and preserved. Yet, they can only enter into a relationship with each other when the layers are torn down. It is possible that the same thing happens when we dig into the past, tearing down the façade of the present and seeing what's behind/under it. Hence, discussions of the past can be contested: it's easy to make assumptions about the underlying layers when the surface covers them, but once we scratch the surface, the emerging reality may be different.

Rothberg and Silverman apply their theories to connect Holocaust and post-colonial studies. Yet, I argue that these theories can and should be applied within Europe, as it is a confined geographic space where different memories coexist. The recent rivalry for a unique place in commemorations among the different victim groups of the Civil War that includes Spanish Republican refugees in France, who were deported to Nazi concentration camp for political reasons, as well as victims of Communism and Nazism in Hungary signals that the perception of memory as a “zero-sum game” still persists.

Our discourses about human communities in general always acknowledge the interconnectedness and interwoven nature of our existence. Yet, our discourses about particular historical events and places always refer to “them,” as the culprits. To give just one example of the interwoven, in Antonio Muñoz Molina's writing about a city the phrases conceive the idea of a human community as a textile, interconnecting past and present: “Casi en cada calle se yuxtaponen las secuencias visuales de varios siglos. Las cosas hechas para durar han mejorado con el tiempo. Las más recientes se incorporan al tejido de la ciudad sin historicismos ni mimetismos.” (241) [The visual imprints of

several centuries are juxtaposed in nearly every street. Whatever was made to last, improved with the passing of time. The most recent ones blend into the texture of the city without historicism or mimetism.] He uses the expression “tejido de la ciudad,” texture of the city, referring to a living space of human community that is interconnected and ready to incorporate new elements while preserving the old ones. Indeed, in everyday speech we often use the Spanish expression ‘tejido social’ or ‘social fabric’ in English to express the interconnectedness of societies.

To give further examples, our language is full of phrases referring to the interweaving ability of words: we “pick up the thread of a conversation, or lose it: “perdemos el hilo de la conversación.” Scholarly publications analyzing literature commonly use phrases, in which they link writing about the past with weaving: “amplio número de novelas [...] han tejido sus ficciones en torno al tema central de la memoria histórica, especialmente aquella referida a la guerra civil y al período franquista.” (Suárez 11) [a significant number of novels [...] weave their fiction around the central topic of historical memory, especially that of the Franco period and the Civil War.] Literary critics Hans Lauge Hansen and Juan Carlos Cruz also use the expression ‘dar tejido’ to raise some important issues regarding contemporary historical novel in Spain: “...qué tipo de conocimiento se adquiere a través de los discursos literarios y, además, cómo éste se distingue y diferencia del resto de los discursos sociales con los que cohabita y dialoga hasta dar forma del tejido de la cultura escrita de una determinada sociedad.” (*Memoria novelada* 26) [...what kind of knowledge do we acquire through literary discourse, what’s more, how does this discourse differ from other social discourse with which it

coexists and enters into dialogue.] The phrase ‘dar tejido’ would translate as “to give shape” in English, nevertheless, the Spanish original does involve the concept of actively engaging to create an interconnected unit we are weaving together. Their suggestion raises the question: How does fiction (historical novels) contribute to cultural memory and in what ways does it differ from non-fictional discourse (historiography, journalism)?

In Kertész’s *Fiasco*, as in various other literary works, there is a poetic image of silence and complicity weaving together individuals: “the woman’s tense face, [...] gradually relaxed and slackened, as if she had grown weary of the silence which had descended them, or perhaps suspected him of harbouring a secret complicity woven between them, as it were, by their silence.” (195) This quote strengthens the argument that there are invisible threads connecting us in several ways, at the same time it raises questions regarding interweaving: Can you weave silence and complicity in your textile? What do they do to the texture?

Interweaving is an immanent part of our discourses about the past. Nevertheless, analysis suggests that most artistic representations which should counterbalance the official narrative discourses of “us and them” also fall into the trap of projecting a competitive and divided view of the past. The reason for this remains the preponderance and omnipresence of the national narrative discourses. After all, we define identity in relationship with others; we identify ourselves in opposition to other groups. These identity definitions become problematic when we also associate positive values and actions exclusively with our community, while negative values and actions become attached to “them,” the members of the ‘other’ community, who belong to a different

country, nation, part of Europe, religion, ethnicity, gender, or who profess different values within a community.

Europe is permeated with discourse about WWII and the Holocaust, nevertheless these narratives are all too often framed in the simplistic terms of “us” and “them,” “us” being innocent and “them” being pronounced guilty by the general public. During the Cold War Europeans used the Iron Curtain as a pretext to be frozen, to avoid having to look at their past and facing their inner divisions. The division made it possible and easy for Easterners and Westerners alike to constantly employ discourses of ‘us’ and ‘them’ and comfortably allocate the blame on each other for forty years.

While academic scholarship demonstrates that the situation is far more complex, the recent success of populist discourses in Europe and all across the globe reveals that the conception of binary divisions persists in large parts of the general public. These discourses present themselves not only with respect to Western and Eastern Europe but within nations and small communities as well. Europeans still fail to speak about the ways we share the ugly past, even after such important events as the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War.

Certain elements of the binary division are present in all the works in question in this study, albeit in different ways. In Chapter 1, “*Sepharad*” “we” stands for the victims and the potential victims. The readers are included in the category of potential victims, repeatedly addressed directly, and invited to imagine themselves in the shoes of the victims. “They” are the perpetrators of different nationalities. In Chapter 2, “Buchenwald Memoirs”, Semprún and Kertész talk from the point of view of the victim, and present-

day readers naturally identify with them. To give an example, the narrator /protagonist Semprún explicitly addresses the role of the German inhabitants living near Buchenwald and witnessing the camp, and actively initiates conversations for example with a German guard, and a German girl he meets, each time pointing out their complicity.

In Chapter 3, “Giant Posters and Empty Photo Frames,” a Hungarian family is living in an isolated house, surrounded by railway tracks, where all others, representing the rest of Europe, travel, so we may perceive a distinction between us Hungarians and the rest of Europe. Yet, Zeniter’s *Gloomy Sunday* stands out among the works considered for the present work, as the only one not presenting an ultimate division between good and bad, and even though Imre, as a Hungarian, expresses a feeling of inferiority, it is a subjective feeling, that is not based on moral grounds. In contrast, Cercas’s *The Impostor* presents a heroic battle between truth and lie, moral categories, where the writer represents the ultimate hero searching for the truth.

It is perhaps in Chapter 4, “*Perlasca* and *The Angel*,” where we witness the most simplistic divisions between good and bad, between us, the rescuers, and them, the perpetrators; paired with stark competition between the Italian and Spanish national narratives. The Spanish film clearly draws on the earlier Italian one, and substitutes the Italian Giorgio Perlasca, with the Spanish Angel Sanz Briz, as the lead rescuer.

Literary studies scholar Aleida Assman illustrates the inability of the member states of the European Union to agree on a shared version of their past with the controversies around trying to create a House of European History in Brussels. After more than ten years, several expert teams and various scandals, the House of European

History finally opened in 2017. Why is it such a controversial project? According to Assmann:

Given the massive and extended periods of violence in the history of Europe, this past is far from being agreed upon and mastered; on the contrary, it continues to haunt the present with periodical eruptions and controversies, scandals and taboos. Despite the scrupulous ongoing work of historians, there is as yet no end in sight to occasions for renewed collisions and contestations along national borders when it comes to interpreting, representing, and commemorating the European past. The long shadow of Europe's violent past is continued under the heading of Europe's "memory wars". ("Europe's Divided Memory" 26)

At the moment European narratives of memory are predominantly framed on the national level. The 'periodical eruptions and controversies, scandals and taboos' exist both between and within the states of Europe, as cultural memory is dynamic and discourses on memory change constantly. Nowhere are the changes in discourses about the past more evident than in countries which experience a sudden change in their political system, for example a transition from dictatorship to democracy. The suppression of traumatic memories to a certain degree characterizes all European societies, but in democracies these memories usually surface in a gradual way. In countries which lived under a dictatorship this process is more abrupt and apparent, thus can be studied more readily.

In oppressive regimes the state promotes a single narrative. Historical research in state institutions is predominantly conducted from a national point of view, where national means the current state borders. It's very problematic in a continent where borders were frequently shifting. We encounter many contrasting national interpretations for the same events, since national discourses have an eminent role in times of conflict..

Once again, this contributes to the fragmentation of memory and to portraying other nations as “the enemy.” Aron Rodrigue, a historian dealing with the history of Sephardic Jewry, affirms that Holocaust commemoration and Holocaust studies are defined by “the tyranny of the nation state paradigm.” According to Rodrigue history as a discipline is organized around the nation state. He quotes oft-heard phrases such as “Polish Jewry,” “Lithuanian Jewry,” “Greek Jewry” and names a few ways these narratives are flattening out other narratives: the stories of trans-national, “stateless” communities, for example the Sephardic Jews and the Roma do not make it into the central “grand narrative” and their stories remain unheard. As a scholar of Sephardic Jewry, he finds difficult to work across boundaries and talk about closely-knit communities that the shifting borders of the twentieth century separated abruptly. He uses the example of the largest Sephardic community in Europe, that of Thessaloniki in Greece. Thessaloniki used to be part of the Ottoman Empire for five centuries, then it became part of Greece following the Balkan Wars in 1912. Thus, the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki had a completely different experience than Greek Jewry, since they lived under Turkish jurisdiction for nearly half a millennium and under Greek jurisdiction for a mere 30 years. Rodriguez’s example demonstrates perfectly the tendency to project current national borders back in time and forge a myth of continuity between the past and the present.

Who we were forms part of our identity today both as individuals and members of a collective. Jay Winter gives a good account of Maurice Halbwachs’ concept of collective memory:

For Halbwachs, civil society is bound together in associations that tell stories about what they do and who they are. The same happens in families. We are never the first to know who we are; our parents tell us our names. Collectives of all kinds are defined by the narratives they fashion about their past. Change the collective, and stories (and identities) change. (“Human Rights and European Remembrance” 47)

Families constitute the smallest communities within each society, thus they serve as the first collective to define one’s experience of being part of a community, and as the nucleus to transfer memories. Families are the smallest in a group of concentric circles that form one’s identity, and they are the building blocks of forming larger communities. In the present work I analyze how the families reflect or resist the narratives of the larger concentric circles. Families represent the private realm, whatever happens within them symbolizes either the lack of, or the existence of a counter-narrative to official discourses. Their role is especially significant in oppressive regimes, where the state promotes a single narrative.

Halbwachs never intended his concept of *la mémoire collective* to be translated as national memory. He meant instead the memories shared by different groups of people, whose sense of their past told them who they were. Halbwachs was the theorist of the narratives of civil society, not of the state. (47)

Yet, for most everyday people living under oppressive regimes, neither family nor collective narratives were readily available. For me, the image of fragmented family and collective histories is best captured by a dining-room wall where family photos are mixed with empty photo frames. Can literature narrate and invent stories that include both the lives of the people in the family photos and the stories of the empty photo frames?

Torn Cobwebs of Memory

“No, I am seeking something else. I gather what I would call knowledge of the spirit. I follow the traces of inner life; I make records of the soul. For me the path of soul is more important than the event itself. The question of “how it was” is not so important; it does not come first. What disturbs and frightens me is something else: What happened to human beings? What did human beings see and understand there? About life and death in general? About themselves, finally? I am writing a history of feelings... A history of the soul... Not the history of a war or a state and not the lives of heroes, but the history of small human beings, thrown out of ordinary life into the epic depths of an enormous event. Into great History.”

Svetlana Alexievich: The Unwomanly Face of War

This dissertation examines how the memories of the national dictatorships in Spain (1939-1975) and Hungary (1945-1990) interact with European memory discourses, specifically with the memory of the Holocaust. Spain and Hungary share histories of dictatorship and Holocaust responsibility, and both attempt the erasure of their past after the transition to democracy. In both post-dictatorial societies the narrative shift about the dictatorial past occurs simultaneously with the re-emergence on the narratives of the Holocaust. This dissertation is a contribution to the cultural history of Europe for which I deploy an intervention into historiographical debates, with a close reading and intertextual analysis of prominent works of “truthful fiction” (a term coined by Michael Lackey²) or fictionalized truth that have addressed the memory of the Holocaust and of totalitarianism in different ways. I analyze memoirs, historical novels, and biographic films. Each of these bears on memory and experience, exemplifying a notion of history that is not about “facts” but about experience and recollection. Like Svetlana Alexievich

² Lackey uses the term “truthful fiction” to denote biographical fiction, a subgenre, that he contrasts with historical fiction. I use truthful fiction in a wider sense, including not only biographical fiction, but also other forms of artistic representation, where truthfulness is of crucial importance, for example in narratives about the Holocaust. All authors in the present work address the relationship of fiction and reality in their works, and as we will see in the later chapters, they consciously opt for a form of truthful fiction.

in her writings, I am also looking for the “traces of human soul” and the “history of small human beings.” In the works this dissertation considers, a struggle with the ghosts of the past and a search for an individual and collective identity that acknowledges a traumatic past are central to the life of the protagonists.

The legacies of the dictatorship experience influence how national discourses relate to the master narrative(s) of the European Union. Hungary joined the European Union in 2004, along with several other East European states. During the previous decade, bureaucrats in Brussels carefully reviewed their “application packages” designed to make sure that would-be member countries met the economic and political standards of “Europe.” Since the European integration process started as a neoliberal economic project, the main driving force behind ever deeper integration has always been the economic aspect. Consequently, the subsequent enlargement processes and negotiations focused primarily on economic and legal aspects of integration. The negotiations centered exclusively on the present and future, and on imposing “European norms and values” on the newcomers. The European Union represented the “real Europe” with its values of liberal democracy, and most countries were eager to leave the past behind and “return to Europe.” During the transition process to democracy, when Hungary aspired to join the European Union, Hungarians looked at Spain, a country that successfully joined the European Community following the end of the right-wing Franco dictatorship.

A shifting of the center of gravity of Europe to the East and an incorporation of the dictatorship experiences of Eastern European countries have gained increasing

momentum in current academic discourses about cultural memory. Michael Rothberg cites a keynote lecture by Jay Winter, delivered in 2010:

If you shift the center of gravity of Europe from Paris to Warsaw, it looks different. And it has to be done. Shifting the center of gravity of Memory Studies from Paris to Warsaw [...] would ‘allo[w] for a reconfiguration of European space’ and would ‘deal with the notion of a common European past’ in an original and valuable way. (“Between Paris and Warsaw” 81)

Winter and Rothberg shifts the center of gravity to the East to allow for a reconfiguration of European space. Looking at the center and periphery together allows us to re-examine Western and Eastern European identity in connection with each other, and reconceptualize the notion of Europe. I propose to shift the center of gravity *to the East and South* because it allows for a reconfiguration of the European memoryscape that incorporates the traumatic past of both left-wing and right-wing dictatorships. This bifocal perspective proposes an alternative understanding of the European past by challenging the triumphant Western European narratives of a democratic post-war Europe. Shifting the center *to the East and South* also allows us to establish affective affinities between two supposedly peripheral regions that are rarely studied together, find common patterns of memory repression and memory recovery, and listen to voices that remained marginalized due to their relative isolation during the forty-year-long dictatorships in Hungary and Spain. This connective approach offers an innovative perspective on Holocaust studies, Spanish cultural studies, and Eastern European studies.

Ever since the collapse of communism comparative studies in economics, legal and political studies have proliferated among the countries of the Iberian Peninsula (Spain and Portugal) and the Eastern bloc. Most of them have taken an outside approach

and all of them have focused on the institutions of these countries. My comparative study in literary analysis pays attention to how ordinary people lived through the chaotic events and brings their own narratives to the forefront.

During the 1990s fundamental changes occurred in the way Europeans remembered the Holocaust. The fall of the Berlin Wall (1989) and the collapse of the Soviet Union (1991) not only transformed Eastern European narratives about the immediate past, but also produced the globalization of Holocaust memories. (Levy and Sznajder, 18) By the end of the last millennium, the memory of the Holocaust gained new prominence in Europe and turned into a “fundament of European identity,” as a “future-oriented memory,” a lesson to learn from, and a warning for the future. Each European nation was prompted to incorporate the Holocaust into national curricula and engage in commemorating the Holocaust.

Spanish discourses on the Holocaust significantly differ from other European discourses since the extermination of European Jewry did not take place in the territory of Spain, and the Cold War made it possible for the Franco regime to project an image of Spanish neutrality both inside and outside Spain. Alejandro Baer explains that after the defeat of the Republic in 1939, thousands of Republicans fled to France. Nonetheless, the outbreak of the Second World War and the occupation of Southern France by Nazi Germany soon revealed their refuge to be temporary. Franco’s Spain denied recognizing them as citizens, and approximately nine thousand Spanish Republicans were deported to Nazi concentration camps from Vichy France in 1940. During the Franco dictatorship neither the Holocaust nor the fate of the deported Spanish Republicans were ever topics

of discussion, and the situation did not change until the very end of the twentieth century. Nonetheless, the deportation of Spanish Republicans to the Nazi concentration camps, where they witnessed the annihilation of Jews, constitutes the most direct link between the Holocaust and Spain. (“Voids of Sepharad” 97)

During the Franco dictatorship there was only one way to remember the Spanish Civil War (1936-39), as a fight against evil, where the only dead to be remembered were those of the right-wing parties, the Nationalists or the Fascists. As Paul Preston, a historian dealing with the Spanish Civil War and the Franco dictatorship, observes: “By dint of totalitarian control of the education system and of all the means of public communication, press, radio and the publishing industry, the Franco regime made a powerfully sustained attempt to brainwash its people. An entirely homogeneous and impermeable version of the long- and short-term origins of the Civil War was imposed upon the Spanish people.” (*The Spanish Holocaust* 520) After the death of Franco a ‘Pact of Silence’ was self-imposed. The nature and effect of the Pact of Silence have been widely debated in Spain and elsewhere. Paloma Aguilar, a political scientist, emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between the political, cultural and social aspects of the ‘Pact of Silence.’ In the cultural realm, there has actually never been a silence, because artistic productions dealing with the Spanish Civil War appeared in great numbers from early on. Nonetheless, the majority of the population was not interested in “opening wounds.”

This pattern would eventually change, when the generation of grandchildren embarked upon a journey to better understand their family histories and the past of their

countries. At the beginning of the new millennium Emilio Silva and Santiago Macías founded the Asociación para la Memoria Histórica [Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory] with the aim of excavating mass graves of the Spanish Civil War, in order to bury loved ones together with their families. Emilio Silva represents the generation of grandchildren who broke with the silence of their grandparents (and parents) by engaging in “unearthing the past.” A “memory boom” erupted and hundreds of novels, movies and history books dealing with the legacies of the past suddenly appeared. The renewed focus on the past peaked between the first excavation of mass graves in 2000 and the economic crisis of 2008. Assigning start and end dates to a process is always hard and somewhat controversial. For example Jo Labanyi regards 1998, when Judge Baltazar Garzón secured the arrest of Augusto Pinochet in London, as the gateway to the Spanish memory boom, since human right violations in Latin-America “triggered renewed attention to Francoist repression and allowed for a critical reflection on the Spanish transition.” (“Politics of Memory” 27) I opt for 2000, the year when the first mass graves were opened in Spain, since this event drew national and international media attention, and initiated a debate on the Spanish past that finally broke through to the political realm.

In 2007 the Socialist Zapatero government passed the Law of Historical Memory, and Spanish society continued to be passionately interested in the legacies of the Civil War. The unexpected global economic crisis in 2008, which hit Spain particularly hard, and the resulting insecurity forced the inhabitants of the Iberian Peninsula to return from the past and look around in the present. The economic crises and fatigue with the ruling

elite resulted in a series of spontaneous protests and demonstrations that eventually transformed the political scene.

Santos Juliá, a historian, explains, that the significance of the memory-boom consisted in its insistence on making demands for the present. The past became a moral compass and “hacer tal o cual cosa, o dejar de hacerla, puede ser calificada de olvido y hasta traición de muertos,” [to do something, or stop doing something may be classified as forgetting, or even betraying the dead.]³ (20) The moral imperative behind the memory boom in Spain is to rehabilitate the victims of the Spanish Civil War and the Franco dictatorship. The memory boom did not mean breaking the silence about the past, since the Spanish Civil War and the Franco dictatorship were debated both in the public sphere and among historians, in addition, artistic productions about the Spanish Civil War and the Franco dictatorship have regularly appeared from the years of political transition.

Paloma Aguilar Fernández emphasizes that even though the Spanish Civil War and the Franco dictatorship are interrelated, the politics of memory related to them have been separate and different processes. While the events and the legacies of the Spanish Civil War, and the early years of the Franco repression inspired numerous artistic productions and historical research, the late Franco period and the political transition to democracy did not raise similar attention. This work focuses on the legacies of the Franco dictatorship and the transition period to democracy in order to fill the existing gap.

Simultaneously with the process of looking back to its own past, Spain also joined the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust in 2000, and started officially

³ A similar consideration lies behind many Holocaust testimonies and eye-witness accounts.

commemorating the Holocaust. As Alejandro Baer observes, the heightened interest in the country's own traumatic past paved the way to a greater interest in the Holocaust, and the debates about the Holocaust have in turn influenced the Spanish battles of memory. ("Voids of Sepharad" 100) This is a classic example of Rothberg's multidirectional memory, since the two different conversations have mutually influenced each other.

The same pattern of oblivion and silence can also be observed in Eastern Europe. During 1944, 75% of Hungarian Jews were deported to Nazi concentration camps and exterminated. During the dictatorship the Holocaust was taught in both history and literature classes. However, the uniform teaching of history in public education pretended the Holocaust happened in another time and place. The state discouraged discussion with or about survivors living among us. Jewish communities were made invisible during the communist regime.

After 1989, new narratives of the Holocaust and of the communist dictatorship emerged simultaneously. As communism collapsed, the interpretation of the recent past radically changed and the history books previously used were thrown out. For example, the anti-Soviet uprising in 1956, which previously was called counter-revolutionary, gained new significance and became labeled a heroic revolution. The legacy of the dictatorships remains present in both Spain and Hungary: these post-dictatorial societies remain profoundly divided, there is no dialogue between the opposite sides, the terms "enemy" and "adversary" are interchangeable.

This dissertation entails four chapters, framed by an introduction and concluding remarks. These chapters consider Antonio Muñoz Molina's *Sepharad* (2001), Imre

Kertész's *Fatelessness* (1975), Jorge Semprún's *The Long Voyage* (1964), Alice Zeniter's *Gloomy Sunday* (2013), Javier Cercas's *The Impostor* (2014), *The Angel of Budapest* (2011) and *Perlasca: The Courage of a Just Man* (2002). In Chapter 1, "In A Cobweb/Trapped: Europe as a Hostile Space in Antonio Muñoz Molina's *Sepharad* (2001)," we examine a "novel" that more closely resembles a collection of short-stories in which the independent life-stories weave together loosely through the concept of "uprootedness." The "novel of novels" brings together narratives of the Holocaust and dictatorships from all across the continent: the story of a Hungarian Jew, who survived the Holocaust thanks to the intervention of a Spanish diplomat; a nun who escaped from Francoist Spain; a Spanish doctor who accidentally bumps into the villa of an ex-Nazi on the Spanish coast; as well as various historical figures who also appear as narrators. The many shared experiences of hate, loss, and hurriedly abandoned homes challenge the idyllic image of a peaceful and democratic Europe. The Spanish narrator performs the role of spectator to European history, as if Spanish fascism did not have any connection to World War II and the Holocaust. I argue that his position of 'outsider' sustains the Francoist discourse of Spanish neutrality during WWII. The first-person narrator identifies himself exclusively with the victims, thus portraying "us" as potential victims. By inadvertently creating an image of 'us' the (potential) victims, and 'them' the perpetrators the novel reiterates an omnipresent discursive pattern and fails to address how millions of everyday Europeans became culpable of crimes.

Chapter 2, "Buchenwald Memoirs, When Living Memory Becomes History: Jorge Semprún and Imre Kertész" offers different perspectives on the Shoah by bringing

together the works of a Hungarian Jew and a non-Jewish Spanish resistance fighter. I examine Semprún's *The Long Voyage* (1964) and Kertész's *Fatelessness* (1975), the authors' first literary productions about the terrors of the Nazi camps, in conjunction with *Literature or Life* (1994) and *Dossier K.* (2006), their later works about their insights into the process of literary creation. Analyzing their first literary productions along with their reflective works three decades later foregrounds the different perspectives on the Holocaust during and after the dictatorships, and allows me to trace the narrative shifts in the representation of the Holocaust. Both Semprún and Kertész reflected on the possibility and artistic means of representing the Holocaust, as well as the process of remembering, that are key issues in this work.

This chapter features the moments of transition: arrival to and return from the Nazi concentration camps. These transitions symbolize the unfolding of normality, and question the possibility of "taking the journey back," that is to say of reintegrating into a society that prefers to put a thick carpet of forgetting over the horrors of the Holocaust. These instances reveal how the interconnectedness of society is broken and lets us perceive the tragedies on both the individual and collective levels. For resistance fighters the act of being imprisoned was a consequence of their actions. In contrast, Jewish people were imprisoned for their identity. I argue that this difference defines the narrative strategies they later chose and their almost opposite perception on the process of literary creation. Similarly to most Jewish survivors, Kertész's narrative starts with the deportation of the protagonist's father and gives little detail about everyday life before its abrupt shattering. Semprún emphasizes repeatedly his experience in the resistance and

links it to his imprisonment. The stark difference between the Jewish and non-Jewish experience before the concentration camp diminishes after returning to an unwelcoming society, as both authors struggle with the impossibility of sharing the horrors and continuing life the ‘old way.’

Chapter 3 “Giant Posters and Empty Photo Frames, New manifestations of memory repression and memory recovery in post-Franco Spain and post-Communist Hungary” focuses on national dictatorship experiences, and depicts the quest of two protagonists, an awkward Hungarian teenager and a Spanish writer, to learn about well-kept secrets of the past. *The Impostor* by Javier Cercas (2014) and Alice Zeniter’s *Gloomy Sunday* (2013) portray how the generations that lived through the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War in Hungary either reinvented their past or kept silent about it. For example, the Hungarian grandfather in *Gloomy Sunday* never talks about the suicide of his wife or his role in the deportation of Jews, and when he finally writes a letter to his family shortly before his death, the letter vanishes in a fire. In *The Impostor* Enric Marco claimed to have been deported to the Nazi concentration camp of Flossenbürg as a Spanish Republican. He was regarded as a quasi-national hero until 2005, when a historian discovered that he worked in Nazi Germany of his own free will in the framework of a Francoist program to support the Third Reich. These secrets reveal how the new democracies failed to come to terms with the legacies of a grim past.

Chapter 4, “Competing Narratives of Heroism in Rescuing Hungarian Jews: The films *Perlasca: The Courage of a Just Man* (2002) and the *Angel of Budapest* (2011)” studies biopics that demonstrate the process of constructing a national Holocaust hero.

The two films have identical plots, both narrate the rescue activities of the Spanish legation in Budapest during 1944, albeit with different leading heroes. The Spanish narrative centers on Angel Sanz Briz (1910-1980), the “Spanish Schindler,” and the Italian narrative portrays Giorgio Perlasca (1910-1992), the “Italian Schindler.” The lives of the Italian Perlasca and the Spanish Sanz Briz were intertwined for a few weeks; nonetheless the films about their life remain competitive and strongly influenced by national leanings. While both films romanticize central characters, the Italian movie offers some nuance, as it more faithfully reflects the tragedy of Hungarian Jewry with scenes that are graphic representations of violence against them. In contrast, Sanz Briz arrives in time to save every single person under his protection, images of violence remain scarce, and the murders we do witness are not related to the systemic destruction of Hungarian Jewry. By emphasizing the rescuers’ actions, these films seek to mask the complicity of Franco’s Spain and Mussolini’s Italy in the Holocaust and to make sure they join the debate on the Holocaust ‘on the right side.’

The recent flare up of nationalism all across Europe and the increasingly heated debates within state boundaries indicate the re-emergence of the buried past. In this context, it is necessary to understand how the past experiences of these countries differ from the mainstream European experiences. Together with these characters and narrators, Natan Sznajder reminds us that traumatic memories remain haunting and unsettled. Sznajder gives us a most insightful perspective on the memory of the Holocaust in the eastern and southern fringes of Europe while observing that in these countries the

memory of their particular dictatorship experiences often competes with the memory of the Holocaust:

European expansion largely ignores the divergent historical memories of existing (and prospective) EU member states. Faced with such nonrecognition, new member states in the East and also in the South seek legitimacy for their particular experiences and memories, most notably, by displacing the Holocaust with their own victimhood in Stalinism in Eastern Europe or Francoism in Spain. Thus at first sight it seems that these countries are telling their stories from a different angle, even though these stories are often not dissimilar. Sometimes national comparisons can obscure common ground. (“European Memory” 63)

As Western European powers were complicit in the creation and persistence of Eastern and Southern dictatorial regimes, they were reluctant to engage in a transnational conversation about their particular historical memories. The recent Southern and Eastern dictatorship experiences have not become part of the common European heritage, instead they were regarded as contradictory to “European democratic norms.” This resulted in competing narratives of victimhood between the particular dictatorship experience of these countries and the Holocaust, as Sznajder also states in the following quote:

As the Western European presumption that narratives of the Holocaust can provide the foundation for a shared European identity has clashed with the memory politics of post-Stalinism/post-Francoism, state-imposed commemorative practices have become the subject of fiery debates, contributing to the renationalization of European memories, which in turn is, of course, divisive. (63)

Eastern and Southern Europeans feel left out from a common European historical narrative since the countries of Western Europe appropriated the term European, and defined post-war Europe as a community of democratic countries. In order to maintain this illusion, these countries erased the problematic legacies of their Nazi and colonialist pasts by announcing the “birth” of a new Europe, at the same time they declared the

dictatorships of Europe as “non-European.” As the political and economic power of Western Europe grew, they were able to sustain the narrative of a democratic Europe, and project themselves as a model to be followed for the post-dictatorial societies. This explains in part the reluctance of certain segments in post-dictatorial societies to face the legacies of the Holocaust and advocate for a competitive notion of victimhood. Sznajder continues by establishing common patterns between the memory battles in these supposedly peripheral regions:

On the other hand, the existence of memory can create common ground; the memory of Civil War victims in Spain or Jewish victims in Poland, or victims of Stalinism in the Baltic States represent, of course, not the same story, but they all tell a story of haunting and of the persistence of the past into the present. And if our memory is understood as storytelling, it is certainly possible to find common ground, even as a binary discourse celebrates Western universal postnationalism and condemns the persistence or return of ethnic, religious, and/or national particularism in large parts of Europe (or anywhere else). (63-64)

In other words, the countries emerging from different dictatorships in the southern and eastern ‘peripheries’ of Europe struggle to find a way to understand and commemorate their own traumatic past in the wider context of a continent that also struggles to understand and commemorate its shared tragedy, the Holocaust. Today, we can no longer talk about “Western European post-nationalism” as the “ethnic, religious and/or national” did return in large parts of Europe. Brexit or the Catalan aspirations for independence would be just two examples to illustrate the renewed appeal of nationalism. Sznajder also acknowledges that memory may be understood as story-telling, and what better means than literature do we have to tell stories?

The present work analyzes cultural productions that represent three different approaches to the Holocaust in Spain. Antonio Muñoz Molina's *Sepharad* uses the "void"/memory of Jewish Spain to bring together Spanish, Nazi, and Stalinist stories of persecution. Javier Cercas's *The Impostor* investigates and problematizes the relationship between the deportation of the Spanish Republicans and the Holocaust through the story of a fake survivor. The *Angel of Budapest* engages with the Holocaust from the perspective of a Righteous Gentile, who rescued thousands of Hungarian Jews. Each of these discourses share an important element: they approach the Holocaust through the figure of the victim and aspire to be associated with them. These artistic productions represent Spaniards as sharing or witnessing the fate of the victims, and participating in their rescue.

Chapter 1 on *Sepharad* and Chapter 4 on the efforts of the Spanish Legation in 1944 to save the lives of Hungarian Jews in Budapest put Hungary and Spain in direct conversation. Chapter 1 brings together narratives of Stalinist and Nazi persecution all across Europe from a particular Spanish perspective. In Hungary the conversations and memory battles on Nazism and Stalinism have been ongoing ever since the collapse of communism. Hungarians either suffered from or participated in the crimes of Nazism and Stalinism, and the country has been struggling with both legacies. Chapter 4 connects the two countries through the location of Budapest. It brings together the narratives of the Holocaust and the dictatorship because the films represent the Holocaust, and at the same time, we follow how the rescue activities are appropriated first by the Franco dictatorship, and later in the twenty-first century. Chapter two compares the narratives on

the Holocaust from a Spanish and Hungarian perspective, and examines the reception of these narratives both during and after the dictatorships. Chapter 3 analyzes two novels on the transition process to democracy in Spain and Hungary. Both novels represent the transition period, and the (re-)emergence of long-buried secrets both in relationship with the Holocaust and the respective dictatorships. These two chapters show the strong interconnection between the memories of the dictatorship and the Holocaust in both countries, as well as interweave the experience of transition to democracy in Spain and Hungary.

‘Why torn cobwebs of memory? Could you give a simpler title?’-many ask me. I opted for this title because the metaphor of torn cobwebs represents the complexity of memory work and the multiple ways we can interpret the process of remembering. The fragile web represents the interconnectedness of the multiple threads, which form a complete whole. If one part breaks, the whole web becomes damaged, it is not possible to establish a hierarchy between the different threads, all are necessary to form a solid structure. Looking from the perspective of the spider, it represents a destroyed home. Looking from the perspective of survivors, the writers and subsequent generations it represents a work in progress, a damaged web, which may / might / should be woven together, or it may also represent a thick layer of forgetting which hides whatever is behind it, and needs to be broken completely to shed light on the long forgotten past. From the perspective of the victim or “prey” it represents invisible danger, a trap without escape, which reflects the situation of millions of everyday people who became trapped in twentieth century Europe. My intention is to connect the different experiences and

examine the shared patterns these discourses on memory present, despite commemorating vastly different historical events.

Spain and Hungary: Different Histories, Shared Experiences

In 1931 it would have been extremely difficult, or rather, completely impossible to predict how Europe would look two decades later. The coalition of the Republican and Socialist Parties in Spain had just won the elections, leftist reforms were underway. In contrast, Hungary, together with most of Eastern Europe, was dominated by a right-wing authoritarian regime. A few years later, some forces were not afraid of provoking war, as several parties counted on a quick victory. The Spanish Civil War and World War II both shattered and re-configured the continent.

Both the Soviet-style communist dictatorship in Hungary and the Francoist dictatorship in Spain started with a dreadfully high degree of repression. The imposition of a communist dictatorship in Hungary and the military victory of the Nationalists in Spain resulted in the eradication of any possible political opposition; both regimes permitted a single political party in the country: the Falange in Spain and the Communist Party in Hungary.

What do the left-wing Soviet-type dictatorships of Eastern Europe and the right-wing dictatorship of Franco in Spain have in common? Despite their different ideologies regarding nation, religion, gender and economy, the different kinds of dictatorships on the peripheries of Europe share many characteristics. For example, the role of the Church in post WWII Eastern Europe and post-Civil War Spain was fundamentally different. In Eastern Europe Marxist-Leninist ideology viewed the Church as an obstacle to the

construction of socialism. Though the Catholic Church maintained a continuous presence in Eastern Europe, attending mass or getting married in a church could have serious consequences. In contrast, Spain took up the role of defender of the Catholic faith and Catholicism profoundly influenced the norms of public and domestic conduct. Abortion and divorce were prohibited. The family was considered the basic unit of Spanish society. Women were confined to the role of housewives, dedicated to their families.

In contrast, in the countries of the Eastern Bloc, women and men had equal rights in theory. Women had every right to work outside the home and in fact, they had the obligation to work. Domestic chores and child-rearing were not considered “work,” which meant that after working eight hours, women went home and cooked dinner, cleaned, played with the kids and did the washing. Women in the Eastern Bloc were free to wear miniskirts and divorce their husbands. However, they were not free to choose their preferred way of life either.

Pío Moa, a prolific extreme right-wing writer, defends both the person of Franco and the Francoist institutions in his works. His books *Los mitos de la guerra civil* and *Franco, un balance histórico* were both best sellers in Spain. One hundred thousand copies sold are a dismal sign of the survival of Francoist ideology. In Moa’s opinion Stalin and Franco represent opposite political ideologies: “Stalin y Franco representaban formas mentales, morales y políticas opuestas”. (*Franco, un balance histórico* 11) Despite Moa’s claim, living under a dictatorship, be it left-wing or right-wing, does offer similar experiences. Especially similar are the imposing of an ideology from above, and requiring the population to strictly adhere to the rules and norms. As I grew up during

communism we were not allowed to express our own opinions about anything, and especially not about anything related to politics. We were not allowed to differ. Generations grew up having a completely shared experience. Of course, we did differ, but our dissent and non-conformity were confined to our homes. I very quickly learned that nothing is to go outside the walls, I was taught to remain silent.

Even though in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War both Spain and Hungary became internationally isolated, their international situation diverged significantly in the early fifties. 1953, the year of Stalin's death, was a time of fleeting hope for Eastern Europe. Yet, despite Nikita Khrushchev condemning the Stalinist cult of personality in the 20th Congress of the Communist Party, repression did not ease for many more years in Eastern Europe. In fact, Soviet troops intervened in Hungary to suppress the anti-Soviet popular uprising of 1956, and crushed subsequent intents of reform or rebellion in the region. Czechoslovakia tried to loosen the grip of communism in the spring of 1968, which resulted in the military intervention of the Soviet Union and the troops of the Warsaw Pact. The area behind the Iron Curtain remained as isolated as ever, and firmly under Soviet domination.

Spain, in contrast, gained international recognition. As the Cold War intensified, the US government was willing to look away from the repression occurring in Spain in order to gain military presence in the Mediterranean, and the Franco regime gained new international legitimacy in 1953 by consenting to have US air-bases and a naval base in Spain. Francoist Spain signed a concordat with the Vatican in the same year. Catholicism became a state religion in Spain, and the Vatican conferred moral legitimacy on the

regime in return. By 1959 Franco had given up on his autarchic economic policy and opened Spain up to the international market. The technocrats of Opus Dei implemented a new, neoliberal economic policy. The state redesigned the image of Spain as a tourist destination, and prosperous tourists from all over Western Europe were flocking to the beaches of Spain. The traditionalist Catholic country was suddenly hosting women in bikinis, and Spaniards had contact with a different way of life on a daily basis. The impact was tremendous, and transformed Spain in both cultural and social senses. The “dictadura” or hard dictatorship turned into the “dictablanda” a softer dictatorship, where the repressive state system became less visible in many peoples’ everyday lives. The “economic miracle” of the sixties resulted in growing prosperity. State censorship gave way to self-censorship, and overt manifestations of mass repression eased.

In the seventies both Francoism and communism seemed to be entrenched. Few hoped for any changes in the near future. Both systems were firmly institutionalized, and meant for eternity. However, a gradual transformation started after Franco’s death in 1975. The carefully negotiated transition meant that there has been neither an open dialogue nor any judicial procedures related to the previous dictatorial period. The same way as in Spain, the road to the first democratic election was negotiated between the representatives of the old power and the newly prominent members of opposition in the countries of Eastern Europe, as well. As in Spain, the members of the political elite negotiated impunity for themselves, and silence among the victims continued. Chapter 3 explores more in detail how the silence of the dictatorships continued during and beyond the transition process.

The Berlin Wall fell in 1989, initiating the collapse of communism in every country in Eastern Europe. The changes coincided with my high school graduation. *Freedom was in the air. I looked at the election ads every day when going to school. I loved them. There were two different pictures. One was Erich Honecker kissing one of the Soviet leaders, I don't even remember which one. The other was a young boy and girl kissing. "Which do you want?" the slogan asked. Which one I wanted was crystal clear. I was young and full of hope. I was so certain that the new party represented me, they were nearly the same age as me, they were students of law and suddenly, they were sitting at a round table deciding how to have free elections. I loved the spring breeze and I loved the river bank. Now, when I am so far away, I love thinking back about my enthusiasm, which I have long lost. The innocence and the faith in human goodness... The young liberals, the admired party of my teens is in power now. They are not so young and they are not liberal any more. Sometimes I ask myself whether there was any way of suspecting it back then. Was it my eternal naivety, or was it unexpected for them, too?*

While Spain and Hungary shared a history of negotiated political transition from dictatorship to democracy, there was also an important difference: political and economic transition did not coincide in Spain. By the time political transition began, Spain has already embarked upon an economic policy leading to market economy and consumer society. Economic and political transition happened over the course of years, and not overnight as in the countries of the East. Tony Judt draws our attention to a key difference in the economic aspects of the political transition in Southern and Eastern Europe emphasizing that “the path from authoritarianism to democracy in Portugal and

Spain accompanied accelerated modernization of a backward agrarian economy,” a process “which the rest of Europe was familiar from its own past.” (*Postwar* 685) The Spanish economic transformation happened later than in other European countries, but it was not fundamentally different. In contrast, the economic transformation from a communist economy to capitalism in Eastern Europe had no precedent. (685) The socialist, state-planned economies had to find a way to capitalism without any theoretical or practical help: Eastern Europeans paid a high prize for this lack of knowledge, as they experienced the effects “on their skin.” In contrast with previous expectations, the democratic transition processes and the introduction of the market economy did not translate into economic prosperity overnight, on the contrary, large segments of the population lost the ground from under their feet.

The fact that Spain already had neoliberal economic structures in place facilitated the process of joining the European Community. It also explains why the incorporation of Spain into the European Communities was widely perceived as a success story both within and outside Spain at the time. Sadly, economic integration had a negative effect on memory: “once Spain was integrated into the world market, the memories of the Civil War and the dictatorship became superfluous, even counterproductive, and amnesia set in.” (Resina 104)

The “Spanish success story” continued until 2008, when the global economic crises hit Spain hard, and caused a sudden experience of economic insecurity, in many ways similar to the Eastern European experiences of the 1990s. *Todo lo que era sólido* [*All That Was Stable*] (2013), the title of Muñoz Molina’s essay collection about the

economic crisis of 2008 evokes other moments of insecurity and reflects on the fragility of democracy in Spain.

In contrast with the initial Spanish success story, the incorporation of Eastern European countries was a cumbersome process from the beginning that created resentment on both sides. Imre Kertész explains the disillusionment of Eastern Europeans with the European Union in an interview with Stefan Theil for *Newsweek* magazine:

We might be growing back together economically, but there are a lot of psychological traumas we haven't dealt with. The old nationalisms that exploded in the Balkan wars are an example of that. And Eastern Europe doesn't trust the EU, which waited much too long after 1989 to reach out. Back then we were all enthusiastic about a reunited Europe, and what happened? Instead we all watched powerlessly as Europe let genocide happen once again. We might have a Europe of financial and economic ties, but a European spirit, an identity that binds us together beyond our individual nationalisms, has yet to be born. ("A Voice of Conscience" 12/29/2002)

Kertész criticizes the European Union for "waiting too long" after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and for not intervening to prevent genocide in the Balkans in the 1990s. This lack of support reinforces Eastern European feelings of betrayal by the West, and maintains the previous dynamic of mutual distrust. Kertész skillfully points out the major shortcoming of the European Union: the lack of a common European identity, and the failure to prevent wars and mass killings right at the European Union's doorstep. The statement widely attributed to Jean Monnet, one of the founding fathers of the EU rings true: "If I had to do it again, I would begin with culture."

The period following the fall of the Berlin Wall in Hungary and the collapse of existing Socialism, as it was called in the East, or Communism from a Western perspective, and the beginning of the twenty-first century in Spain show strong parallels.

Both societies experienced a profound economic insecurity at a time while they were engaging in new forms of memory recovery about the preceding dictatorial period. Simultaneously with the on-going memory work about the traumatic national past, new narratives about the Holocaust entered public discourse. The discourses on the memory of the Holocaust and dictatorships mutually influenced and strengthened each other, at the same time these discourses were perceived as competing in various segments of society, and sometimes even among organizations representing the victims.

Analysing literary narratives that focus on the struggles with the ghosts of both traumatic pasts and putting the experiences of the so-called peripheries of Europe into conversation brings us one step closer to foregrounding the feeble cultural identity component.

Idea of Europe: Glances from the East and South

Today most of the central institutions of the European Union may be found in Brussels, a city belonging to the west and north of Europe. Brussels proudly claims the title of the capital of the European Union, or indeed the capital of Europe, since the terms “European Union” and “Europe” are often conflated. Strasbourg or the French capital Paris, do not need to struggle constantly reiterating their Europeanness either.

This is not the case with the eastern and southern parts of Europe. Spaniards and Hungarians both identified themselves as not quite belonging to Europe in the recent past, as part of the population continues to identify themselves as belonging to the periphery. In the case of Spain this peripheralization is North/South oriented, whereas in Hungary it is West/East oriented. Indeed, our basic confusion when talking about East, West, North

and South in Europe goes back to the fact that we use geographic terms, but we do not use them in a purely geographical sense. East, West, North and South are not neutral terms designating the geographic location of certain landmarks. Instead, we associate certain cultural, historic, or “development” and “progress” related meanings to them. Anthropologist Maurizio Albahari draws our attention to the power relations inherent in these geographical terms and the hierarchical nature of our ideas of Europe. Certain areas are perceived as “more European” than others. Maurizio Albahari quotes Daniele Conversi who sums up the essential experience of all Europeans, the more East or the most South we look, the “less European” we find the inhabitants of a geographic space. Conversi talks about nations, since our perception of the divisions of Europe continues to be national:

French nationalists perceive the Italians to be less European and more exotic and Mediterranean, while Italians perceive their neighbours, the Slovenes, to be the advancing edge of a purportedly undifferentiated Slavic tide, in turn Slovenes feel to be more fully-fledged Europeans than their Croatian neighbours, who in turn feel more Westernized and civilized than the Serbs, who in turn feel immensely superior to the Albanians, who in turn feel more European than the Turks.

I agree with Conversi that European nations perceive their Eastern neighbors as “less European”, and their Western neighbours as “more European.” For example, many Hungarians passionately refuse to be included among the nations of the Balkans, or advocate for using the term Central European in relation with Hungary, as opposed to Eastern European. Of course, these objections stem from sharing the perception of the East as “less developed” and the West as “more developed.” In this dissertation I use the term Eastern European, because it is more widely used in the United States, where I

currently live. While it is a geographic misnomer, it serves to designate countries with a common experience of belonging to the Soviet sphere of interest.

Conversi observes that the notion of Orientalism, explored by Edward Said, a literary scholar of postcolonial studies, plays a definitive role in the perception of Europeanness:

The trip Eastward from Greece, to Turkey, to Iran, to the Indian Sub-continent and further East is a trip towards ever-deepening Orientalism – specular images of the advancing tide of Westernization. Its habitual victims are not the distant colonies and races, but next-door and ‘next-of-kin’ neighbours. [...] This points to the fact that we still live in a hierarchically imagined and defined world, where the West is the center of everything, and everything is measured by vicinity to that model. [Conversi 2000]

The notion that “the West is the center of everything” remains omnipresent in current discourses within the European Union. Edward Said’s concept of orientalism does not only define the perception of the colonized regions by the British colonizers, it can also be used as we turn towards the East within Europe. The ‘next-door and ‘next-of-kin’ neighbours are the ‘habitual victims’ due to the fact that neighbouring countries in Europe compete for the same resources and territories, resulting in centuries-long armed conflict between them.

Kevin Platt, a scholar of Russian and post-Soviet literature and culture, summarizes the perception of the “West” from the vantage point of Eastern post-Socialist countries. Platt starts out with the example of post-Soviet Latvia, and going westwards, he confirms the existence of East/West hierarchies, and adds a crucial element by demonstrating that Europe lacks a center or core which truly corresponds to its democratic ideas: “Like a series of stacking dolls, European societies depend on a series

of gradated distinctions between the Western center and the Oriental periphery, stretching away endlessly to the East, for self-definition. But there is no doll in the center.” (“Occupation versus Colonization” 140) The stacking dolls of Pratt, where the central doll is missing, symbolize perfectly what I consider the most troubling failing in contemporary European discourses and gap in the ‘imagined community’ of Europe: the perfectly democratic Europe does not exist, thus the peripheries of Europe compare themselves with a non-existent idea(l) of Europe. Platt states that while in Western Europe a sense of Europeanness is given, Eastern Europeans are struggling to re-affirm their European identity:

In Paris or London, the view across the water generates a reassuring illusion of the givenness of European modernity, but the view to the East, through buffer zone after buffer zone, pierces the illusion of the purely modern. If there is a universal history and a common memory to be had here, it is the history of the necessary acts to forgetting about the colonization of the self that produced modern nations in the first place (140-141)

As we have already seen, Europeans look West (and North) to find models of perfect democracy, but it is exactly the countries on the shores of the Atlantic Ocean, the Westernmost part of Europe that struggle with the legacies of their colonial past. The illusion of a democratic Europe erases the colonialist past of Great-Britain and France. The Bulgarian Alexander Kiossev’s metaphor of self-colonization reflects the asymmetrical relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, but in contrast with the external domination of colonial powers, it refers to “having succumbed to the cultural powers of Europe and the west without having been invaded and turned into colonies in actual fact.” (“The Self-Colonizing Metaphor” Web) This form of domination conquers

the imagination of peripheral countries that idealize the West and “dream about Europeanization.”

Tony Judt, who calls the European Union a ‘grand illusion’, also affirms that Europe does not refer to a geographic space any more, it refers to an idea of Europe, or rather to a utopia of Europe:

... Europe today is not so much a place as an idea, a peaceful, prosperous, international community of shared interests and collaborating parts; a ‘Europe of the mind,’ of human rights, of the free movement of goods, ideas, and persons, of ever-greater cooperation and unity. The emergence of this hyper-real Europe, more European than the continent itself, an inward and future projection of all the values of the ancient civilization but shorn of its darker qualities. (*Grand Illusion* 4)

Judt and Pratt both use clever metaphors to illustrate that apart from the very concrete reality and requirements of a neoliberal economic transition, “the free movement of goods, ideas and persons,” the other requirements for “Europeanness” belong to the realm of a dream: a “hyper-real Europe” or empty center.

Just to give some examples, during the second half of the twentieth century many Eastern and Southern Europeans lived under dictatorships, France struggled with the legacies of colonialism, and it would be hard to find a single country that truly embodies the democratic values the European Union champions. The current definition of “Europeanness” refers to a dream, and not to the lived experience of any particular country.

Shifting our center of focus to the South and East and incorporating the narratives supposedly peripheral to the European self-image provides us a new perspective on European identity. Instead of maintaining the myth of a Europe of “milk and honey” and

classifying a significant part of the continent as “not really European,” the term “European” should include the real experiences of Europeans. Phrases like “return to Europe” exemplify how parts and experiences of Europe have simply been excluded from the triumphalist discourses.

Despite the predominance of the East-West divide in contemporary European discourse, the North-South division remains present, as well. As Judt explains “Mediterranean Europe was markedly different from North-West Europe; religion had far greater salience than politics in the historic boundaries within and between states. In Europe before World War Two, the differences between North and South, rich and poor, urban and rural, counted more than those between East and West. (*Postwar* 195) The North/South distinction within Europe (and Spain) remains a thorny issue. The nineteenth century French saying ‘Africa begins at the Pyrenees,’ reflects a widespread notion that Spain has more in common with Africa than with Europe. In the prevailing binary logic, instead of celebrating Spain and the Mediterranean region as crossroads and links to the Southern Mediterranean, it is oftentimes regarded as somehow ‘lacking in Europeanness.’

Tony Judt sums up the most painful experience of Eastern European scholars and everyday people: being either completely ignored or only seen as a shadow of and a buffer zone around Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. Eastern Europeans are proud of their heritage, culture and languages, but also completely ignored by most Westerners:

You cannot understand us, [...] and your Western leaders, when they have deigned to take us into account, have abandoned us. (Yalta, Munich, Sarajevo...) And, adding geographical insult to historical injury, you have the nerve to classify us as ‘Eastern’ Europe when it is you who dwell on who we are (or were, until you threw us to the wolves) Central Europe.

We speak and read your languages, your poetry, your plays and novels.
What do you know of ours? (*When the Facts Change* 86)

Judt imitates the anger Eastern Europeans feel towards their Western counterpart. The sense of abandonment is particularly strong in contemporary Poland, but other Central and Eastern Europeans also have deep historic wounds. For example, Czechs resent that 1938 France and Great-Britain agreed to the annexation of Sudetenland by Nazi Germany, in order to “appease” Hitler and avoid war or that in 1945, the Allied Powers agreed to create a Soviet sphere of influence within Eastern Europe. This is when ‘Central Europe’ turned Soviet-controlled ‘Eastern Europe.’ All nations in the region consider Europeanness as a key element of their identity:

And Bucharest, Zagreb, Sarajevo, and Belgrade have all been variously proposed in recent years as quintessentially ‘European’ cities, precisely because they stand guard at the frontier where European civilization encounters (and rebuffs) the barbarians to the east and south.

We know what it means to be European, they all insist, because our Europeanness has for so long been under threat. We have sacrificed and suffered so that Europe, your Europe, might live and thrive. Why aren’t you listening? Why don’t you see? (86)

The national narratives within Eastern/Central Europe strikingly resemble each other. Since Bucharest, Zagreb, (or Budapest) lie in historically contested areas and all served as the frontiers between the competing Habsburg and Ottoman Empires, they all constructed their narratives around a similar experience. For example, Hungarians proudly recall that the church bells ring at noon in order to commemorate the 1456 Siege of Belgrade, at the Southern border of the Hungarian Kingdom that resulted in the retreat of the Ottoman army and resulted in halting the Ottoman Empire for half a century. Naturally, similar versions exist in neighbouring countries. The part about guarding the

frontiers against the barbarians from the East and South sadly illustrates that Eastern and Central Europeans share the prejudices of Westerners about the east and the south.

Both Hungary and Spain have a cultural tradition of distinguishing themselves as the heroic gatekeepers of Europe, who successfully defended the Continent from Islam: the Northern Christian Kingdoms of the Iberian Peninsula between the tenth and sixteenth centuries are often portrayed as the defenders of Christian Europe against the Arabic invaders. Likewise, Hungary is portrayed as the defender of Europe and Christianity against Ottoman Turks during the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Present-day anti-immigration discourses easily tap into and get reinforced by these historic discourses. The populations of these countries are responsive to this rhetoric because fighting heroically against the invading Muslim forces remains a part of the foundational myths of the two countries, with various key literary texts memorializing these events. The figures of Santiago Matamoros or El Cid in Spain, and Gárdonyi's historic novel, the *Eclipse of the Crescent Moon*, which narrates the siege of the Castle of Eger, form part of the everyday image Hungarians and Spaniards most often encounter about Islam.

These narratives are easily mobilized and re-appropriated in both countries for political purposes. During the Franco dictatorship, the country's ideology drew on the medieval imaginary of a "united and Catholic" Spain, where Ferdinand and Isabella, the Catholic Kings conquered Granada, the last city under Muslim rule on the Iberian Peninsula in 1492, and expelled the Jewish inhabitants of the Iberian Peninsula. The traces of this imaginary survive in some segments of Spanish society today. The ultra-

right party, Vox, that first gained 11% of the votes in the regional elections of Andalusia in 2018, echoes this imaginary by promoting the idea of “Reconquista” and choosing Covadonga, as the place to initiate their campaign for the general elections. Here they repeated their previous success, and entered parliament.

In Hungary Viktor Orbán evoked a similar medieval imaginary, when he portrayed the country as the defender of Christian Europe in 2015, and initiated an anti-Islamist campaign. Hungary refused the proposed quota system of the European Union to accept refugees and at the same time executed a new public campaign against György Soros, adding anti-Semitic elements to its xenophobic campaign. These Spanish and Hungarian examples illustrate the fundamental role cultural myths play in the construction of national identity, and demonstrate the relative ease of transforming these narratives into official state discourses.

CHAPTER II: (TRAPPED) IN A COBWEB:
EUROPE AS A HOSTILE SPACE IN ANTONIO MUÑOZ MOLINA'S
SEPHARAD (2001)



Weaving Metaphors "Spider" <http://www.otdowntown.com/city-arts-news/20171026/weaving-metaphors/1>

Lost Homelands

Antonio Muñoz Molina was part of a new generation of Spanish writers who emerged during the transition process from dictatorship to democracy. Muñoz Molina's first novel about the Spanish Civil War, *Beatus Ille* (1986), intended to break the silence of the official discourse about the Spanish Civil War and the Franco dictatorship that followed the death of Franco. Various other novels, essay collections and articles followed, and Muñoz Molina soon became a prominent figure of contemporary Spanish literature. Today, he is a Laureate of the Prince of Asturias Award (2013) for Literature.

During the award ceremony he compared fiction to science, stating that observing life inspires both fiction and science to fulfill their shared mission of explaining and predicting human behavior.

Muñoz Molina's *Sepharad* appeared in 2001. The title of the novel refers to the Jewish name of the Iberian Peninsula in the Middle Ages and evokes the 1492 expulsion of the Jewish population from the territories of the freshly united Catholic kingdoms of Castile and Aragon. During almost half a century (711-1492), Christian Kingdoms and the Muslim Caliphate and its fragmented successors fought to dominate the Iberian Peninsula. At the height of their power, the Moors crossed over the Pyrenees, during the last stage of their rule they only dominated Granada and its surroundings. In 1492, the Catholic Kings, Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabel of Castile conquered the city of Granada, and within a few decades Catholicism became the only accepted religion in Spain.

Sepharad symbolizes the fate of the Jewish community in Spain, a collective experience of losing one's homeland. The Sephardic Jews, who were forced to choose between converting to Christianity and leaving Spain in 1492, formed communities of diaspora in other parts of Europe after leaving their homeland. It is important to note that Spain was not the original home of the Jewish community; their arrival was due to an earlier expulsion. As David Wacks summarizes, the Jewish community perceived themselves as living in diaspora during their 1000-year-long stay in the Iberian Peninsula: "As elsewhere in Europe, Africa, and Asia, Jews considered themselves to be living in diaspora, descendants of those Israelites who were exiled from Judea first by the Babylonians and subsequently by the Romans. Their religious and literary culture

expressed a diasporic consciousness.” (“Translation in Diaspora” 351) The expulsion from Spain constituted the start of a double diaspora experience for Sephardic Jews, and meant a simultaneous longing for two different homelands: the ancient Biblical land and Spain. In *Sepharad* the specific Jewish experience of diaspora and the concept of Galut are almost entirely missing.

Scholars specializing in Sephardic studies often criticize Muñoz Molina for not reflecting the specific experience of Sephardic Jewry. For example, Adolfo Campoy-Cubillo remarks that

the publication of Antonio Muñoz Molina’s *Sefarad* [...], in which Sepharad becomes a generic term to refer to the diasporas provoked by Nazism and Stalinism that traumatized Europe during the first half of the twentieth century, seems to, paradoxically, silence Sephardic identity once more. By inserting Sephardic experience in the genre of Holocaust literature, and expanding it to represent the persecution of communist dissidents, Muñoz Molina would have seemingly failed to bring to light the complex transnational, multiethnic, experience of the Sephardim. (84)

I agree with Campoy-Cubillo’s argument that *Sepharad* does not focus on the particular experience of Sephardic Jews. In the life-stories of *Sepharad* the emphasis falls on the individual experience of losing the idyllic homeland instead of the collective. I believe that the sense of not belonging to a community any longer, where one had perceived oneself to be an inalienable part, connects the Jewish communities of medieval Spain to the persecuted Jewish and non-Jewish individuals of the twentieth century. Sepharad denotes a geographic location, but at the same time, as many place names, the term acquired new layers of meaning, serving as a metaphor for exclusion, persecution, exile, and longing for the lost homeland.

Sepharad, a “novel of novels,” comprises seventeen independent and intermingled life stories, told by ordinary people and prominent intellectuals who become trapped in the cataclysm of twentieth century European history. In this work of “faction,” a term used by the writer Javier Cercas to imply the mixing of facts and fiction, characters’ journeys through space and time reflect their often-failed attempts to escape from the tragedies and calamities of war, genocide and dictatorship, which forced millions to leave their homelands in Europe during the 1930s and 1940s. There are many different protagonists -real and imagined- looking back on their lives and sharing their stories with an attentive listener. A powerful sense of loss and uprootedness accompanies and connects the fragmented stories. Both the book and the individual “novels” contain multiple stories and have several narrative voices. The narrators come from different countries, and their experiences relate to different historical periods and oppressive regimes. Is this book about Spain, the whole of Europe, the Soviet Union or Nazism? Is it about the past, the present, the past-in-the-present? Is it about the Jewish experience or the Spanish urban character? The answer is all of the above.

Alejandro Baer suggests that the “forgotten traces of Sepharad” provide a strong connection between Spain and the Holocaust, since this “specifically Spanish memory of the Holocaust would allow for critical reflection on the present.” (“Voids of Sepharad” 114) Baer recalls the image of the “Land of Three Cultures,” the peaceful co-existence of Christians, Jews and Muslims in medieval times, and contrasts this tolerance with the periods of intolerance, such as the reign of the Catholic Kings or the Franco period. Muñoz Molina’s book does exactly what Baer suggests, it focuses on the “forgotten

traces of Sepharad,” and links the expulsion of the Sephardic Jews to the Franco period, to modern forms of social exclusion in Spain, to the Shoah, and to the persecutions of Nazism and Stalinism, the two destructive totalitarian regimes of twentieth-century Europe.

I interpret Sepharad as a metaphor for exile and not belonging, since the term evokes the expulsion of the Jewish population from its Iberian homeland. Throughout the novel we follow through various examples the process of exclusion of certain members of a community. The life-stories illustrate the stark contrast between the perception of the individuals, who consider themselves to be an inalienable part of a community, and their reality of suddenly becoming an outsider or persecuted enemy. The associations revolving around the concept of non-belonging constitute the common thread between the life-stories of *Sepharad*. Some of the stories narrate Jewish experiences of persecution under the Nazi oppression, such as Victor Klemperer’s dilemma whether to leave Nazi Germany, or stay, while in others the author evokes various images that have been related to the Jewish experience in different periods and cultures.

The novel draws a parallel between the postmodern experience of leaving one’s place of birth and moving to the big city or to a different country, and that of the Jewish community, who have lost their homeland first in Israel, then in Spain, and were forced to live in a diaspora, far from their community. Other association around the concept of exclusion include references to being sick, or being at the margins of a neoliberal society for being poor. Several stories relate to Spanish connections to Nazism, such as the

experience of Spanish Blue Division soldiers, fighting alongside the Nazi German troops in the Soviet Union.

The best metaphor to explain how the stories relate to each other and how the idea of the novel was conceived comes from the first-person narrative voice of the author. The intra-narrator, to use the term of Juan Carlos Galván, (*Voces Silenciadas*) compares the fragments of life-stories narrated in *Sepharad* to the photos/screenshots displayed on the billboards of the cinemas, to lure the audience inside to watch the entire film:

He intuido, a lo largo de dos o tres años, la tentación de la posibilidad de una novela, he imaginado situaciones y lugares, como fotografías sueltas o como estos fotogramas de películas que ponían antes, armados en grandes carteleras, a las entradas de los cines. En cada uno de ellos había una sugestión muy fuerte de algo, pero desconocíamos el argumento y los fotogramas nunca eran consecutivos, y eso hacía que las imágenes fragmentarias fueran más poderosas. (211)

[For two or three years I have flirted with the idea of writing a novel, imagined situations and places, like snapshots, or like those posters displayed on large billboards at the entrance to a movie theater. That these stills were never in narrative sequence made them all the more powerful. (140)]

The snapshots are all taken out of the film, and must have a connection between them, but without watching the entire movie, we are not able to establish the relationship or the chronology between them. The stories stand alone, as random photographs or snapshots of traumatic life experiences. There is no plot that develops across the stories. The fragmentation, the loose thematic connection, as well as the lack of a clear beginning and end to the stories means that there is no hierarchy, and more specifically, there is no hierarchy of suffering between the different life-stories. This explanation clarifies why I treat the independent life-stories that loosely belong together through the thread of

uprootedness and exclusion as if they were snapshots from a larger European history of exclusion and persecution.

Sepharad explores the theme of belonging and non-belonging, as well as the diverse voluntary and forced motivations for leaving or staying in one's homeland. While in *Sepharad* the connecting thread between the multiple life-stories remains implicit, other writers, such as György Konrád, a Hungarian Jew, who left his native town one day before all the Jewish inhabitants were deported, and survived the Holocaust in Budapest, summarizes the possible reasons for leaving one's homeland in an article titled "The One Who Leaves":

Some émigrés leave to avoid being killed, and some are expelled from their country. Some leave because they find the place where they live to be petty and provincial and seek a more expansive and promising environment. Some leave because hate, fanaticism of whatever sort, has swept through their environs, a nationalistic, religious, or political exaltation that has made life at home most unpleasant. Some leave because they have migration in their blood, because they are curious, yearning for new surroundings, another spot on the globe—a rich spot or a poor spot, it matters little, just any place where people have read, or heard, or imagined something. (327)

Konrád could have well written this article about Muñoz Molina's book, which means that leaving one's homeland is a universal phenomenon. In *Sepharad*, we find examples for leaving because of all of these causes, Jews leave to avoid being killed by Nazi fanaticism, Spanish Republicans escape to the Soviet Union to avoid Franco's repression, tourists travel because curiosity is in their blood, and some leave their provincial birthplace to find better opportunities in Madrid. Konrád's beautiful summary demonstrates that although people leave for different reasons, their experience of loss and "uprootedness" unites them.

The Holocaust, the Spanish Civil War, World War II, the persecution during fascist and communist dictatorships, as well as life in today's postmodern urban environment, all contribute to the abrupt collapse of normality and the loss of a home or homeland. The following quote from the life-story *Oh you, who knew so well* captures this experience

Uno habita todos los días de su vida en la misma casa en la que ha nacido y en la que el cobijo cálido de sus padres y sus dos hermanos mayores le parece que ha existido siempre y que va a durar siempre inmutable, igual que las fotografías y los cuadros en las paredes y los juguetes y los libros de su dormitorio, y de golpe un día, en unas horas, todo eso ha desaparecido para siempre y no deja rastro. (147-148)

[You live all the days of your life in the house you were born in, a haven where you always had the warm protection of your parents and your two older sisters, and you expect to have that forever, just as you expect to have the photographs and paintings on the walls, and the toys and books in your bedroom. Then one day, in a few hours' time all that disappears forever, without a trace. (92)]

Books, toys, photographs, paintings are everyday objects, which can be found in any family home with kids and are easy to relate to our everyday experiences. The use of second person by the narrator involves us, readers. We feel we are addressed and identified as possible targets. The use of multiple oppositions underlines the sharp contrast between normalcy and social collapse. Everyday life is represented respectively with the adverb of time 'forever' expressing permanence and the presence of material objects, photographs, painting, toys, books, whereas social collapse results in the sudden loss of all those objects and a sense of security, 'in a few hours' time, and without trace.' The protagonists are vulnerable and powerless; their fate depends on good or bad luck, since the rules of logic and common sense do not apply in times of war and dictatorships.

The sudden disappearance of their everyday spaces and/or homes leaves the narrators in an empty, hostile space for the rest of their lives.

Place and space play a fundamental role throughout these life-stories. Yi-Fu Tuan, a human geographer, conceives space and space as ideas that “require each other for definition”. (*Space and Place* 6) According to Tuan, space represents openness, freedom and threat, while place stands for stability and security. Space is related to movement, while “place is pause; each pause in movement makes possible for location to be transformed into place.” (6) Tuan argues that experience and knowledge transforms one’s feelings about place and space. This conceptual framework helps me to map out an alternative geography of Europe that reflects the experience of the uprooted and excluded. Furthermore, interpreting place and space as interconnected categories blends in smoothly with the general framework of interweaving.

Various ‘novel’ titles denote places, such as *Copenhagen*, *Valdemún*, *Berghof*, *Cerbère*, *America*, *Narva* and *Sepharad*. Others refer to the idea of (non-)movement across space, such as *Those Who Wait*, *Wherever the Man Goes*. Even those titles that do not have an apparent link to place/space/movement at first sight demonstrate a strong connection with spatial concepts. *Silencing Everything* is the second part of the quote “How death comes, silencing everything” (64), that reflects a conception of death in spatial terms, as an entity being capable of movement.

The relationship of the protagonists to place in *Sepharad* reveals the omnipresence of hurriedly abandoned or vanished homes, chaotic train travels, and impenetrable borders that challenge the idyllic image of a democratic Europe, projected

in the official discourse of the European Union. The vivid and troubling memories of the narrators remind us that we live together in the shadow of the Holocaust and of the grim legacies of dictatorships. Though there is no consensus on the definition of place and space, according to the most widely accepted interpretation place includes human experiences and relationships, thus the objective space transforms into a subjective place. Place gains prominence in this novel, and I argue that taking a closer look at how places reflect the emotions and memories of the protagonists helps us deconstruct the dominant Spanish narrative that Spain and Spaniards were benevolent and empathetic observers while the distant tragedies of Europe unfolded.

Memory, Space and Place

The conceptualization of place and space has played a key role in academic debates from the last decades of the twentieth century. A wide variety of theoretical approaches co-exist, scholars of cultural studies and literature increasingly contribute to the interpretation of these concepts representing frameworks such as Marxist, post-structural, post-colonial and feminist. Space theory helps us to better understand the relationship between space and time, structures of power, social relations, as well as categories like class and race. Scholars rely heavily on spatial theories to define basic concepts such as globalization, capitalism, consumer society or (virtual) networks. This is why humanities and social studies scholars, for example, Benedict Anderson, Raymond Williams, Judith Buthler, Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak and Jean Baudrillard, to name just a few influential ones, have all incorporated spatial thinking and spatial theory in their work. The present work focuses on the interaction of memories and uses a memory

studies framework, nonetheless it is important to recognize that spatial theories and spatial theorist, such as Yi-Fu Tuan inform the way I conceive the emotional relationship between people and the places they inhabit.

Alejandro Baer and Natan Sznajder conceptualize memory in spatial terms. Memories have the capacity to travel and change place: “What matters for the vantage point we are exploring here is: what does the concept of trauma, and with it the travelling and ever-returning ghosts of the past, mean?” (21) Today, in the global age, when even print media is becoming a means of communication of the past, and we are able to follow events in real time anywhere around the globe thanks to the internet and television, local narratives can easily reach a global audience. Globalization helps to put the traumatic pasts into conversation, thus diverse traumas and their legacies cross the national borders interact with each other in the global sphere. The following quote reinforces the interpretation of memory as a spatial concept: “memory travels rather easily (like ghosts) from the site of the event of the destruction of European Jews to other sites like the Spanish victims of Franco’s political murders to the Argentinian Disappeared and to their descendants.” (18) Antonio Muñoz Molina’s book illustrates perfectly the way memories travel, interact and extend.

Another example to demonstrate the spatial dimension of thinking and remembering comes from Jorge Semprún, whose work I will analyze in Chapter 2: “Una idea me atravesó –si es que las ideas atraviesan el cerebro, el espacio de la memoria, como los peatones y los coches atraviesan las encrucijadas–, cruzó mi mente, en todo caso, la idea absurda.” (170) [Another idea crossed my mind, – if we can say that ideas

cross the mind, the place of memory, the same way as passers-by and cars cross an intersection—, in any case, an absurd idea crossed my mind.] As Sempún reflects on the process of thinking, he explicitly compares the movement of ideas to the movements of persons and motorized vehicles, bringing up the possibility that invisible elements also circulate in our midst.

Sharing stories and personal experiences with people who have the ability to move across space makes the spatial propagation of memories possible. Alexis Grohmann regards *Sepharad* an “errant text” in part because of its wandering or travelling element, though he also explores the meanings of “errant” as a digressive narrative and concludes that *Sepharad* is a ‘travelling text’ “involving long distance mental as well as actual travel that regularly produces vertigo in the mind of the narrator(s), as well as in that of the readers.” (233) We may add an additional layer to this interpretation if we perceive ghosts the same way as Joan Ramón Resina does, as “devious” or that “err” or stray because they disorient others. (2) The ghosts of a traumatic past remain present in all of the life-stories narrated, and this haunting as well as the “ethics of never again”⁴ ties together the various stories, narrated in different historical and national contexts. The ghosts of the past, which many cultural critics and even some historians perceive as existing phenomena also have the ability to move across time and space. These ghosts oftentimes accompany the protagonists/witnesses, or even appear in the lives of others, who did not personally experience the traumatic events. The traumas in the diverse geographic locations may arise from different historical contexts.

⁴ A central concept in Jewish philosophy, as well as in Baer and Sznajder’s work.

Displacement, loss, and the persistence of sad memories among the survivors and their descendants constitute the link between them.

Memories and historic knowledge also shape the inhabitant's and the general public's emotional relationship with a place. In times of war, borders turn into impenetrable barriers, for example the historic memory of the Spanish II Republic turns Cebrero, a village on the French-Spanish border into a hellish place. One of the protagonists of *Sepharad* describes the border as follows during his overnight train trip: "Cerbère, Cebrero: algunas veces las estaciones nocturnas parecen el ingreso del reino de Hades, y sus nombres ya contienen como un principio de maleficio: Cebrère, donde los gendarmes franceses humillaban en el invierno de 1939 a los soldados de la República Española, los injuriaban y les daban empujones y culatazos; Port Bou, donde Walter Benjamin se quitó la vida en 1940." (48) ["Cerbère, Ceberus. Sometimes stations at night do resemble the entrance to Hades, and their names contain curses: Cerbère, where in the winter of 1939 French gendarmes humiliated the soldiers of the Spanish Republic, insulted them, pushed and kicked them; Port Bou, where Walter Benjamin took his life in 1940."] (28)

Nonetheless, the hostility of the environment/space does not exclusively result from the historical context; present day postmodern urban life and the dissolution of small communities contribute to the perception of the environment as hostile. The hospitality or hostility of the environment depends on the social situation of those who contemplate it. For example, the coast of Andalusia represents a welcoming and hospitable place for a middle-class Spanish family at the same time that it represents a

hostile space for refugees. The following examples illustrate this duality. First, the middle-class experience:

Pasamos en aquel lugar sólo diez días, y apenas hicimos otra cosa que bañarnos y tomar el sol, leer tumbados en la playa o junto a la piscina del hotel, salir de vez en cuando en un coche alquilado a cenar o dar una vuelta por el pueblo. [...] Había una Concordia entre nosotros tres que se correspondía con la hermosura exterior del mundo, [...] con la pureza de la forma de una concha o el sabor y el aroma de un pescado asado sobre las brasas que tomábamos en una terraza junto al mar. (293-294)

[We had only ten days there, and did almost nothing but swim and sunbathe, read on the beach or by the hotel pool, go out occasionally in a rented car to have dinner or drive around the town. [...] In everything that we did there was perfection, a harmony among the three of us that corresponded to the external beauty of the world, to the full moon and the wind at sunset the first night we walked down to the beach and huddled together to protect ourselves against the cold, corresponded to the purity of the form of a shell, and to the taste and aroma of fish roasted over coals that we ate on the terrace of a restaurant beside the sea. (193)]

The beach, the hotel, the swimming pool, the rented car which facilitates their movement, and the restaurant with grilled fish embody a comfortable, well-off life. This is the only instance of the novel when a hotel is associated with a vacation, and not represented as a transitional stopping point during persecution. The next quote reveals that a less beautiful reality lurks below the perfect surface, that of refugees/immigrants from Africa, who risk their lives to reach the shores of Europe:

La contemplación estética es un privilegio, y seguramente una falsificación: la costa hermosa y oscura que vemos nosotros esta noche desde la terraza del restaurante, en la que proyectamos relatos y sueños, aventuras de libros, no es la misma que ven al acercarse a ella esos hombres hacinados en las barcas sacudidas por el mar, al filo del naufragio y la muerte en las aguas más tenebrosas que las del ningún pozo, fugitivos de piel oscura y de ojos brillantes [...] A algunos de ellos el mar los devuelve hinchados y lívidos y medio comidos por los peces. (300)

[Aesthetic contemplation is a privilege, but sometimes a lie: the beautiful dark coast we are seeing this night from the restaurant terrace, the scene onto which we project tales and dreams, adventure from books, is not the coast seen by those men crowded into boats rocked by the sea, on the verge of capsizing and dying in waters murkier than any well, dark-skinned fugitives with glittering eyes, [...]
Some are returned by the waves, swollen and livid and half eaten by fish.
(196)]

The fundamentally different perceptions of place reflect the inequalities within today's consumer society and reveal the invisible frontiers between the privileged and the marginalized. Nonetheless, the gaze belongs to the privileged protagonist, who contemplates a place where refugees land frequently, demonstrating a certain degree of faraway compassion, but he does not go further than recognizing the co-existence of widely different perspectives and experiences. The position of the narrator, a Spanish doctor in this case, symbolizes the prevalent narrative position of a compassionate and distant observer, who feels obliged to acknowledge the tragedies of others while enjoying all the privileges gained in today's neoliberal society: the citizenship of the European Union and the prestige of a well-paid job.

Throughout this novel the concept Sepharad attains different meanings for the inhabitants of Spain and other countries. Spaniards always long to return to their place of birth, the inhabitants of Madrid invariably demonstrate a strong bond with their native towns, and return to visit them on a regular basis. Various geographic locations within Spain remain hospitable, they evoke nostalgia for the warmth of their family, the strong sense of community, the customs, the food and even the landscape of their birthplace. Spaniards who live abroad during a period of their life invariably return to their native land, the daughter of Spanish Civil War Republicans, who grew up in the Soviet Union

after the Civil War returns as a retiree, the members of the Blue Division also return from the Soviet Union, and even Sephardic Jews, who never lived in the land of their ancestors, find a happy home there.

In contrast with the constant longing of Spaniards, the inhabitants of other countries have no desire to return to their homeland. They explicitly express not wanting to set foot in those territories again, where their families vanished during the Holocaust. Germany, Poland and Hungary are repeatedly signaled out as places intrinsically linked to the extermination of European Jewry. To give one example, Señor Salama, who escaped from Budapest with his father, after his mother and sisters had been deported to a Nazi extermination camp remarks: “Nunca podré pisar esa parte de Europa, no soporto la idea de quedarme mirando a alguien de cierta edad en un café o en una calle de Alemania o de Polonia o de Hungría y preguntarme que hizo en aquellos años, qué vio o con quién estuvo.” (150) [“I can’t bear to set foot in that part of Europe, I can’t bear the idea of standing and looking at a person of a certain age in a café or on a street in Germany or Poland or Hungary I wonder what they were doing during those years, what they saw, whom they’d sided with.” (98)] The relationship is determined exclusively through the lens of the Holocaust; no positive connection is possible. The representation of places outside Spain lack differentiation, they become hostile spaces in their entirety due to the atrocities committed in the past. These places remain sterile, as if the beauty of nature, delicious food or colorful traditions existed only in Spain/Sepharad.

Erich Hackl, an Austrian writer and author of the novel *The Wedding in Auschwitz* (2006) criticizes harshly Muñoz Molina’s representation of Central European locations

and protagonists. “How would Spaniards feel if someone wrote a historic novel about Spain, featuring real locations and personalities, without consulting a single source in Spanish?” – he asks. Hackl states that Muñoz Molina’s novel contains various biographical errors and misrepresents both historic figures and the context of Central Europe. Hackl mentions Milena Jesenská, Willi Münzenberg, Margarete Buber-Neumann, Evgenia Ginzburg, Viktor Klemperer, Jean Améry, and compares evoking “Améry en 1935, sentado en un café de Viena, vestido con pantalón corto y calcetines altos y peto tirolés.” [Améry sitting in a Viennese café in 1935 dressed in Tyrolean Lederhosen and long socks] to an Austrian novel representing “García Lorca vestido de torero en un bar de Granada” [García Lorca sitting in a bar in Granada dressed as a bullfighter]. Hackl expresses his indignation that Muñoz Molina equates “Hitler with Lenin,” “Fascism with Communism,” and that he uses the protagonists as “testigos de su visión de la historia: los toma como rehenes” [witnesses to his vision of history, he takes them hostage]. Hackl claims that Muñoz Molina does not understand the historic period in question since the novel is based on a binary division between perpetrator and victim. Furthermore, Hackl considers that Muñoz Molina portrays Sepharad and the Jewish community expelled from Spain as the main theme of his novel on the one hand because they are victims, consequently good, and on the other hand because they remained loyal to Spain and preserved the Spanish language in the exile for centuries. Hackl regards the novel’s emphasis on the “exaltación de la lengua como más alta expresión de la identidad colectiva” [exaltation of language as the ultimate expression of collective identity] as a troubling form of Castilian nationalism.

In his response to Hackl, Muñoz Molina refuses Hackl's claims regarding the equating of Nazism and Stalinism, and addresses the biographic issues of the historic figures in detail, citing the books where he found the relevant information. He states that the representation of public figures is always historically accurate, whereas he used artistic freedom to create ordinary protagonists. Muñoz Molina claims as well that Hackl confuses the narrator(s) with the author. Yet, his response does not make any references to the representation of Central Europe or the historic specificities of Nazism and Communism in Central Europe. I mentioned earlier that there is a marked contrast between the portrayal of Spanish and other European spaces, and I agree with Hackl that *Sepharad* presents an inaccurate picture of Central Europe. Focusing on the representation of places and the narrators' relationship with the places surrounding them in the current analysis will help me demonstrate the contrasting representations of places inside and outside Spain.

Dagmar Vandebosch calls our attention to another fact that contributes to the different portrayal of Spanish and Central European spaces. Vandebosch explains that the Spanish experiences, based on a series of oral testimonies from witnesses, are narrated as fiction, whereas the "references to the lives of the victims of Nazi and Stalinist persecution are based on written documents and testimonies," alternating narration and essayistic reflection in them. This difference adds to a more colorful representation of the Spanish stories and locations, since there is a direct connection, as well as the possibility of a mutual dialogue between the author and the narrators.

Dan Diner, a German historian, articulates a similar critical view as Hackl and Vandebosch, stating that “this is a Spanish story through and through. The forced construction lacks an authenticity otherwise so characteristic of Molina’s work. It seems to be borrowed, a strained quest for a narrative passage between the Spanish experience on the periphery and the great and horrible historical narrative of the European center. Diner adds that “his political tale, the grand narrative, is reduced to a thin re-narration. It fails to convince either historically or by imagined and reconstructed events.” (“The Holocaust in Spanish Memory” 35) In the eyes of Central European critics, Muñoz Molina fails to understand and represent the region accurately. The lack of authenticity presents a serious problem in a novel that places a huge emphasis on historic veracity, and results in a contrasting representation of “warm” and varied Spain, and “cold” and flat Central and Eastern Europe that lacks any positive aspects. Muñoz Molina reiterates a Spanish narrative that perceives Central and Eastern European events and places as so near, yet so distant.

In A Cobweb, Europe as a Hostile Place

So, I belong nowhere now, I am a stranger, or at most a guest everywhere. Even the true home of my heart’s desire, Europe, is lost to me after twice tearing itself suicidally to pieces in fratricidal wars. Against my will, I have witnessed the most terrible defeat of reason and the most savage triumph of brutality in the chronicles of time.
(Stefan Zweig, *The World of Yesterday*, xii)

The sheer quantity of the stories told, the anonymity of some protagonists and the reflections generalizing particular experiences suggest that these traumas are ever present on the continent of Europe: “No eres una sola persona, y no tienes una sola historia, y ni tu cara, ni tu oficio ni las demás circunstancias de tu vida pasada o presente permanecen

invariables,” (443) [“you are not an isolated person and do not have an isolated story, and neither your face nor your profession nor the other circumstances of your past or present life are cast in stone.” (289)] and “Eres [...] encerrado en una geometría siniestra de barracones y alambradas, la geometría y geografía natural de Europa en estos años.” [“You are [...] imprisoned in a sinister geometry of barracks and barbed wire, the natural geometry and geography of Europe during those years” (295)] The expression “geography of Europe” clearly refers to Europe in spatial terms. The geographical space of Europe is conceived as hostile, defined by the existence of “barracks and barbed wire,” which evoke the Holocaust, military life, and communism. The barbed wire impedes escaping from the oppression of these highly regulated, potentially murderous environments. The hostility of the environment or “sinister geography” originates from human activity, as both the barracks and barbed wire fences are constructed by humans. In the life-stories narrated in *Sepharad*, the hostility of space always results from human activity; the obstacles and difficulties the protagonists face nearly always emerge from the human-built environments.

In *Sepharad* most narrators live together with the traces of the past. Their memories transform their everyday spaces into hostile spaces, for example when a Sephardic Jewish mother returns to France with her daughter after the end of World War II to find surviving members of her family, and the door of a hotel room does not open. At that moment, the mother vividly relives the terror of escaping with her daughter during the war: “unos minutos después, su madre, ya fuera de control, con la boca desencajada y los ojos vidriosos de miedo, el miedo que tuvo en la huida de cuatro años

atrás y del que había salvado a su hija, golpeaba la puerta con desesperación y pedía socorros a gritos.” (67) [“A few minutes later, her mother, now out of control, her jaw hanging loose and her eyes glassy with fear—the fear she’d suffered during the flight that had saved her daughter four years before—beat on the door with desperation, yelling for help.” (42)] After managing to get out of the room, mother and daughter decide to leave the country immediately. On the train they find out from a fellow-passenger that the building functioned as the headquarters of the Gestapo during the war: “– Era un buen hotel antes de la guerra – les dijo. Pero yo no lo pisaré nunca más. Durante la ocupación los alemanes lo convirtieron en cuartel Gestapo. Ocurrieron cosas terribles en esas habitaciones. La gente pasaba por la plaza del pueblo y escuchaba los gritos, y hacía como si no escuchara nada.” (69) [“That was a good hotel before the war,’ he told them. ‘But I’ll never go in it ever again. During the occupation the Germans converted it into a barracks for the Gestapo. Terrible things happened in those rooms. People passing through the town plaza heard screams, though they acted as if nothing were wrong.” (43)] The building, which stands on the square for decades transforms from a ‘good hotel’, a place associated with the pleasure of travelling, into a monument to the sufferings of the victims and the indifference of the witnesses. The feeling of uneasiness or guilt about the past converts the building in a hostile space in the present. In this case, the hostility of space is manifested by the locked door for the mother, who associates it with the inability to escape.

Hotel rooms throughout the frequent journeys form a leitmotiv of the book and appear as hostile spaces for the travelers. Hotels embody a spatial change by nature, an

unknown and transitory foreign space. They offer a transitional step for the refugees, who had to leave behind the security of their home, which shattered their illusion and ability for feeling protected forever. Their hostility stems from the feeling of transition, from haunting memories of the past, or from unexpected present encounters with the past. The hotels of the past serve foreigners as a brief stopping point amidst their persecution. The following quote narrates the experience of Jean Améry, a prominent essayist and Austrian Jew, who first escaped from Vienna but was later captured by the Nazis in Belgium:

Ni aunque tú escondas entre las multitudes fugitivas de la guerra ni detrás de muros de hormigón coronadas de vidrios rotos y marañas de alambre estarás a salvo. Escaparás de tu país y te convertirás en un apátrida y una mañana al despertarse en la habitación del hotel para extranjeros donde malvives escucharás altavoces que gritan órdenes de tu propio idioma y verás por la ventana los mismos uniformes de los que creías haberte salvado gracias a las fronteras y la lejanía. (75-76)

[Not even hiding among the throngs of refugees from the war, or behind a cement wall topped with broken glass and a tangle of barbed wire, will you be safe. You escape your country and become stateless, and one morning when you wake in the room of a hotel for foreigners, where you are living in miserable conditions, you hear loudspeakers shouting orders in your language, and out of the window you see the same uniforms you thought you had saved yourself from by crossing borders and distance. (48)]

‘Statelessness’, ‘foreigners’, ‘hiding’ and ‘miserable conditions’ all express the sadness of leaving one’s country behind, while broken glass and barbed wire evoke the Nazi concentration camps, despite being associated with protection. As the quote demonstrates, your enemies also have the ability to move across space and reach you. Armies and troops in particular move across space more easily, since they have weapons

and form part of an organized multitude. The Nazi occupation of Europe during World War II turned countries formerly considered safe-havens such as France, the Netherlands or Belgium into traps. The refugees in contrast encounter multiple barriers; they are either alone or form part of a small nuclear group. Armies predominantly consist of young males, but refugee groups have women and men of all ages, together with children. Even though the members of the same army do not know each other, a chain of command and a firm structure directing their movement still exist. The refugees in turn have to confront complete chaos, move independently, and cannot rely on a well-established structure to help them. Their helpers and guides oftentimes risk their lives to provide support for them. Once again, we can observe the different role hotels play in the lives of Spaniards and foreigners. Spaniards use hotels first and foremost in the present, as a place to stay during their travels.

In Muñoz Molina's novel we perceive everything through the eyes of the multiple narrators. Persecution, fear and anxiety in the present, the memory of a past persecution or loss, and even empathy with the victims of atrocities may transform the surrounding places into hostile spaces. The following quote illustrates the spatial dimensions of the change in the lives of people, persecuted for political reasons:

Crees saber quién eres y resulta de pronto que te has convertido en lo que otros quieren de ver en ti, y poco a poco vas siendo más extraño a ti mismo, y tu propia sombra es el espía que te sigue los pasos, y en tus ojos ves la mirada de quienes te acusan, quienes se cambian de acera para no saludarte y te miran de soslayo y con la cabeza baja al cruzarse contigo. Pero la vida tarda en cambiar, y al principio uno se niega a advertir las señales de alarma, a poner en duda el orden y la solidez del mundo que sin embargo ya ha empezado a disolverse, la realidad diaria en la que empiezan a abrirse oquedades y zanjas de oscuridad, en la plena luz del día, en los espacios usuales de la vida, la puerta en la que en cualquier

momento pueden retumbar unos golpes, el comedor en el que los niños toman merienda o hacen los deberes de la escuela y en el que el teléfono va cobrando una presencia enconada y ominosa. (83)

[You believe you know who you are, but suddenly you've become something others want to see in you, then you've become a stranger to yourself, and your own shadow is the spy following your footsteps, and in your eyes you see the look of your accusers, those who cross the street to avoid saying hello or lower their head when they pass. But life is slow to change, and at first a person refuses to notice the alarm signals, to question the order and solidity of the world that has begun breaking apart, the everyday reality in which large holes, pits of darkness even at midday, begin to open, where at any moment you may hear loud pounding at the door of the dining room where your children have lunch or do their homework, and the ring of telephone cuts the air like an icy steel blade, like a fatal shot. (53)]

The perception of place depends on the emotional state of the observer, fear transforms everyday places into a hostile environment. To cross the street is a spatial expression of marginalization, and even fear acquires a spatial dimension when it is represented as a shadow, following in the footsteps of the persecuted. Persecution gradually invades the spaces surrounding the victim; first it's only on the streets, and then it enters the home. The dining table, as well as the many other everyday pieces of furniture mentioned elsewhere, embodies the routine of everyday life. Similarly, having lunch and doing homework represent everyday activities and a well-functioning social order, where the members of the family are integrated into society's institutions and children fulfill their obligations by doing homework. The persecutors, who are often representatives of the official authority, break into the private space and disrupt the life of a family by a "loud pounding on the door."

Those Who Wait, one of the life-stories is inspired by Victor Klemperer's memoirs, *I will Bear Witness: A Diary of the Nazi Years*. Victor Klemperer, the German-Jewish professor, who decides to remain in Nazi Germany and wait during the 1930s. The growing antisemitism transforms the cityscape gradually; signs of hostility appear in the streets first, then gradually making their way to the homes:

...su sillón preferido, la normalidad que ha conocido siempre, que sigue durando a pesar de los golpes en la puerta de los vecinos o el disparo que ha segado en un instante una vida o la pedrada en los cristales de la satería o la tienda de ultramarinos del vecindario, en cuya fachada aparece groseramente pintada una estrella de David y una sola palabra [...]: Juden.” (72-73)

[It's hard [...] not to be crushed by the thought of losing your home, your books, your favorite easy chair, the normalcy you have always known; hard to endure the pounding on the neighbor's door or the shot that in an instant has cut short a life, or the rocks thrown through the windows of the tailor's shop or the neighborhood grocery where one morning a coarsely painted Star of David appeared along with a single word [...]: *Juden*. (46)]

The favorite armchair represents a space, associated with certain privileges, where one is able to sit down and enjoy reading a book. At the same time, it symbolizes tradition and the habits of normality. Violence changes space. Anti-Semitism appears in material manifestations of hostility--for example, anti-Jewish inscriptions on the walls--changing the space and inspiring fear. The actual manifestations of violence and hate always have a spatial dimension, either in the abstract form-- for example, graffiti--or a concrete form-- for example, a closed door. The environment of terror and fear transforms each space into a potential source of danger; thus, the perception of place changes profoundly.

The violence in the street is usually directed at a group of people. In contrast violence targeting individuals inevitably reaches their homes. *Those Who Wait* refers to

the omnipresent fear that permeates everything in dictatorships, where “en cualquier momento pueden venir a buscarte, que tal vez ya figura tu nombre en una lista mecanografiada de presos o de muertos futuros, de sospechosos, de traidores.” (71) [“at any moment they could come to you, that your name may already be on a typed list of prisoners or future dead, or suspects or traitors” (45)]

Fear and anxiety turns everyday places into hostile spaces. The following quote illustrates that even the noises of everyday life gain new significance and signal danger: “Has oído de noche pasos en la escalera y en el corredor que llevan a la puerta de tu casa y has temido que esta vez vinieran por ti, pero han cesado antes de llegar o han pasado de largo, y han sonado en otra puerta los golpes, y el coche que has oído alejarse más tarde se ha llevado a alguien que podías haber sido tú.” (73) [“At night you’ve heard footsteps on the stairs and in the hall that lead to the door of your apartment, and you feared that this time it was for you, but the footsteps stopped before they reached your door, or went by, and you heard the pounding on another door, and the car you heard drive away later took someone who could have been you.” (45)] Committing violence against a person also means violating the personal space, thus the surrounding space transforms into a hostile environment, for example the corridor, which instead of providing access, now transforms into a pathway the oppressors can use to reach their victim.

The life-story *Those Who Wait* includes both the idea of movement and the lack of it. The individual in the process of waiting remains at the same place, yet the person or thing s/he is waiting for will arrive. This arrival may be spatial, if the awaited subject is a person or object, but it may also be temporal, if it is an event. The possibility of

interpreting waiting as both a spatial and temporal concept affirms the scientific axiom that time and space are one and the same. As Klemperer's life-story illustrates, the ultimate dream of many Europeans, to possess one's own home, may not always constitute a blessing: "Pero el profesor Klemperer no piensa marcharse de Alemania, por lo menos por ahora, porque adónde va a ir, a su edad, casi con sesenta años, con su mujer enferma, ahora que han comprado una pequeña parcela en la que proyectan construir una casa. *Tanta gente emprendiendo nuevas vidas en otros lugares, y nosotros esperamos aquí, con las manos atadas.*" (74) ["But Professor Victor Klemperer does not plan to leave Germany, at least not at this time, for where will he go at this age, almost sixty, and with a wife who is ill, and now that they've bought a small bit of land where they hope to build a house? *So many people beginning new lives other places, and here we are waiting, our hands tied.*" (47)] The small piece of land and the house to-be-built represent the illusion of a protected place, but the aspirations of everyday life may not help in times of crisis and terror.

"No frontier is a refuge; all close like traps on the feet of the haunted" ⁵

In *Sepharad* borders and border towns represent an obstacle to the refugees escaping; they provoke fear and expose the vulnerability of the individuals. Borders emanate the hostility of a separation line, almost impossible to cross between persecution and the desired freedom. The perception of borders, as zones of connection is completely missing from *Sepharad*.

⁵ *Sepharad* 143

The hostility of space oftentimes expresses a political change. In the following quote, we may observe this change through the eyes of Willi Münzberg, persecuted for political reasons:

En 1933 este hombre, Willi Münzberg, llegó a París en la primera oleada de fugitivos de la persecución nazi, después del incendio del Reichstag, en el que había tenido un escaño de diputado comunista. Pero entonces escapó en un gran Lincoln Continental negro, conducido por su propio chófer de uniforme: no a pie, como ahora, cuando ya no tiene nada ni es nadie, cuando no sabe dónde está su mujer y ni siquiera si está viva ni si podrá volver a verla. (188)

[In 1933 this man, Willi Münzberg, came to Paris with the first wave of fugitives from Nazi persecution after the fire in the Reichstag, where he had held a seat as a Communist deputy. That time he escaped in a large black Lincoln driven by his chauffeur, not on foot, like now, when he has nothing and he is nobody, when he doesn't know where his wife is or if she's alive or if he will see her again. (125)]

The large black Lincoln Continental and the chauffeur represent a privileged position of power that contrasts sharply with the later border crossing on foot, where the Münzberg couple share the fate of millions. As a Member of Parliament, and part of the political elite, Münzberg receives help to leave the country, when the political situation changes. When he loses the backing of the Soviet Union, he becomes insignificant, "he has nothing and he is nobody," and vulnerable to fate, the same way, as millions of ordinary people.

... en medio del gran desorden de la guerra, ella también una figura diminuta entre las multitudes que escapan, en el censo imposible de los desplazados y deportados, millones de personas arrojadas a los cambios de una Europa súbitamente retrocedida a la barbarie, multitudes aguardando en andenes de estaciones, en los muelles de ciudades litorales, amontonándose junto a las verjas o las puertas cerradas de las legaciones extranjeras para conseguir pasaportes, papeles, visados, sellos administrativos que pueden estampar en el destino de cada uno la diferencia entre la vida y la muerte. (188)

[Both of them are caught in the chaos of the war, she too a tiny figure among the fleeing multitudes, in the uncountable census of the displaced and deported, the millions of people forced on the highways of a Europe suddenly thrown back to barbarity. Crowds wait on platforms, on the docks of seaside cities, line up on sidewalks outside the closed doors of foreign legations to get the passports, papers, visas, and administrative seals that can stamp on their destinies the difference between life and death. (125)]

The “tiny figures” illustrate the total vulnerability of everyday people during the “chaos of the war,” and provides a vision of Europe, “suddenly thrown back to barbarity.” The adjectives fleeing, displaced, deported, forced all include a reference to persecution. Moreover they are paired up with numerals denominating a huge crowd, such as multitudes, uncountable census and millions. The highways of Europe indicate that persecution is omnipresent in Europe, drawing a sad image of the continent that contradicts the triumphant narratives of twentieth century progress and development. The closed doors of the foreign legations, and the docks of the seaside are spatial representations of impenetrable borders. At the same time these closed doors symbolize how difficult it was to get help from third parties.

Growing up in communist Hungary, five miles from the border with non-allied Yugoslavia, the iron curtain, an impenetrable barrier defined my childhood and adolescence. *My grandmother lived in a border town in the North of Hungary. Hungary and Czechoslovakia was divided by the river Ipoly. I have memories from kindergarten of desperately wanting to cross the river. It had so little water it seemed possible to step over. My grandmother repeated over and over that it was strictly forbidden because the*

other bank of the river belonged to Slovakia and there were soldiers guarding the border.

I was very scared of those invisible soldiers, and hated borders which stopped me.

Even today, the core emotion I associate with passing borders is that of fear. The lack of interior borders within the European Union is a fairly recent phenomenon, a few years or a few decades earlier, border crossings used to be traumatic events. The next quote narrates the experience of a musician, who passes a border outside the Iron Curtain for the first time. The legacies of his trauma are omnipresent:

Volvía a España desde París en un tren nocturno que llegó al amanecer a la frontera de Irún. [...] Pero estaba nervioso, sobre todo, porque era la primera vez que iba a entrar en España con su nueva documentación, el pasaporte y carnet de identidad que le habían entregado muy poco tiempo antes. [...] Recordaba las horas de angustia y miedo en los puestos fronterizos de los países comunistas, la revisión lentísima de papeles y los signos de alarma cuando estaba a punto de cruzar la frontera y parecía que un defecto burocrático en algún documento lo iba a dejar atrapado. Decidió no volver a dormirse. [...] Tenía como tantas veces en su vida, la sensación de no compartir la normalidad de las personas que le rodeaban, los viajeros españoles o franceses que dormían con toda tranquilidad en el departamento, seguros del orden de las cosas, perfectamente instalados en el mundo, a diferencia de él, que siempre había tendido a sentirse un intruso, y no dar nada por garantizado y temer siempre que sobreviniera lo imprevisto. (519-520)

[He told me how he was coming back to Spain from Paris on a night train scheduled to reach the border at Irún by dawn. [...] And he was nervous: it was the first time he would enter Spain with the new identity papers, which he had been given only a short time before. [...] After hours of anguish at border posts in Communist countries, the laborious review of papers and the flash of alarm each time some bureaucratic flaw in a document held him up, he decided not to go back to sleep. [...] Meanwhile the Spanish and French passengers slept tranquilly in their compartment, sure of the order of things and perfectly allied with their world, unlike him, an intruder who took nothing for granted and always feared the unexpected. (334)

The train journey is fraught with anxiety and fear due to the border crossing. Travelling abroad was extremely difficult during the communist dictatorship, the protagonist evokes anguish and fear, as an inalienable part of crossing a border. It was extremely difficult to obtain documents for travelling, as the authorities aimed to impede even travelling to other countries of the communist bloc. The expressions “laborious review of papers” and “bureaucratic flaw” refer to the functioning of a police state, maintaining close control over its citizens. As I know from personal experience, crossing a border could involve several hours of waiting and a thorough search of one’s personal possessions. The memories of the strict control haunt the protagonist, who cannot regard himself as a full member of a free society and fails to believe in his new freedom. We will observe the same feeling of non-belonging in Chapter 3, when the Hungarian Imre looks with envy on the passing trains, that he cannot board, and whose travellers throw their trash in his family’s small garden. The association of trains with fear and bitter memories remains an omnipresent experience in the Europe, portrayed in *Sepharad*.

“The great night of Europe is shot through with long, sinister trains”⁶

During the nineteenth century, the development of capitalism and the construction of railroad networks, as well as other means of transport, contributed to bringing distant places closer and promoted free trade. Trains connect locations and symbolize our ability to move between them in a non-hostile environment. Nonetheless, by the end of the twentieth century, the positive meaning faded, and trains took on an image of being

⁶ *Sepharad* 29

sinister. This profound transformation of perception is linked to the Holocaust, when millions of European Jews were transported to the extermination camps by trains.

Throughout Muñoz Molina's novel the representation of trains as a means of escape and deportation contributes to demonstrating the hostility of the European space. I argue that in the context of the persecutions and totalitarianisms of twentieth century Europe, borders and trains lose their traditionally connective role, and function as means of separation in the novel. Some scholars, for example Vandebosch, regard the role of train travels in more positive light, claiming that these travels "end up drawing a rhizomatous map of the continent stretching from Leningrad to Spain, France to Hungary, and Denmark to Greece." ("Transnational Memories in Antonio Muñoz Molina's *Sepharad*." 614) While trains serve as a space for sharing personal stories and train travels function as a means of interconnecting and spreading different memories, the trains do not link these spaces, but separate them. There is no connection between France and Hungary, France and Denmark would be a more apt example, but the Safras, the protagonists of the life-story *Copenhagen* take the train out of France with the intention of never returning again.

Evgenia Ginzburg's journey to the forced labor camps of Siberia would be another example to illustrate how the movement of trains across the European space carries a negative connotation:

La gran noche de Europa está cruzada de largos trenes siniestros de convoyes de vagones de mercancías o ganado con las ventanillas clausuradas, avanzando muy lentamente hacia páramos invernales cubiertos de nieve o de barro, delimitados por alambradas y torres de vigilancia. (49)

[The great night of Europe is shot through with long, sinister trains, with convoys of cattle and freight cars with boarded-up windows moving very slowly toward barren, wintry, snow- or mud-covered expanses, encircled by barbed wire and guard towers. (29-30)]

The image of night implies darkness, danger, vulnerability, and makes me think of Ellie Wiesel's famous memoir, *Night*. The "great night of Europe," the convoys of cattle and freight cars, barbed wire and guard towers evoke both the image of the Holocaust and of Stalinist persecution. The desolation and barrenness of the wintry landscape mirrors the hostility of the human environment.

Instead of serving as places of encounter, train stations function as places of separation. In the following story, the daughter of Spanish Republicans who was evacuated to Russia, narrates her story of being evacuated again during World War II:

Cuando empezó la invasión de los nazis y nos iban a evacuar de Moscú iba por la estación de la mano de mi madre y hubo un tumulto y la mano se me soltó, y me vi perdida entre tantos miles de personas, [...] y eché a correr como una loca sin ver siquiera hacia dónde, porque tenía los ojos lleno de lágrimas, [...] y ya me parecía que estaba perdida para siempre, en aquella estación que era más grande y la más llena de trenes que yo había visto nunca, entre toda aquella gente que daba vueltas en remolinos, queriendo marcharse. (383)

[When the Nazi invasion began and we had to evacuate Moscow, I went through the station holding my mother's hand, but in the confusion she let go my hand, and I found myself among thousands of people, [...] so I began to run like a crazy person, not seeing where I was going because my eyes were filled with tears. [...] It seemed to me I was lost forever in that station, the biggest I have ever seen, with so many trains and people frantic to leave. (248)]

The figure of the lost child reinforces the feeling of helplessness and vulnerability, her presence in the large crowd reveals that her experience is not unique. Thousands of people try to escape from a trap at the same time, and the chaotic situation makes them

feel even more trapped. The traumatic experience of train stations is a reoccurring element, at a departure of a train is where she sees her brother alive for the last time:

fue a despedirse de mí, porque a su escuadrilla la mandaban al frente del Leningrado y no paró de reírse y de cantar canciones españolas conmigo [...] y cuando el tren ya estaba arrancando dio un salto de estribo y volvió a abrazarme y a besarme y saltó de nuevo al tren y se agarró a la barandilla como si se montara a un caballo, me hizo adiós con la gorra en la mano y ya no volví a verlo nunca [...] Pero mi hermano sé que murió como un héroe. (367-368)

[Then he came to say good-bye because his squadron had been ordered to the Leningrad front, and he never stopped laughing and singing Spanish songs with me, [...] and when the train was pulling out he hopped down and hugged and kissed me again, then jumped back on the train and grabbed the handrail as if he were swinging on a horse, and he waved goodbye with his cap in hand, and I never saw him again. [...] But I know my brother died a hero. (238)]

The train takes her brother to battle and death, as he is singing Spanish songs. The songs demonstrate his attachment to Spain and his childhood, at the same time the act of singing contrasts vividly with the muteness of death. The everyday gesture of saying farewell at a train station transforms into an eternal loss and mourning. Once again, the train serves to take people to death. The vivacity of the gestures of farewell, hopping on and off the train, and the overall happiness, described in great detail turns abruptly into “I never saw him again,” portraying the abruptness of death.

Charlotte Delbo, a survivor of Auschwitz, describes beautifully the contrast between the traditional use of trains and the arrival of millions of deportees to the train stations of the death camps:

People arrive. They look through the crowd of those who are waiting, those who await them. They kiss them and say the trip exhausted them. People leave. They say good-bye to those who are not leaving and hug the children. [...]

But there is a station where those who arrive are those who are leaving
[...]
All of them took what they loved most because you do not leave your
dearest possession when
you set out for far-distant lands.
Each one brought his life along, since what you must take with you, above
all, is your life. [...]
And when they have gotten there [...]
They expect the worst—not the unthinkable. (Delbo 4-5)

Delbo underlines the contrast between the normality of everyday life and the reality of the extermination camps. Normality is represented by an everyday train station where people come and go. Familiar words like “station” and “arrival” suddenly lose their original meaning because the rules of normality are no longer applicable in Europe.

In *Oh you, who knew so well*, Señor Salama, travels to Poland to fulfill the request of his late father, and finds a rusty railway station sign in the middle of the forest, and no monument or place of remembrance:

Decía el señor Salama, en Tánger, que fue a visitar el campo de Polonia donde las cámaras de gas se habían tragado a su madre y a sus dos hermanas, y que sólo había un gran claro en el bosque y un cartel con un nombre de estación de ferrocarril abandonada, y que el horror que no quedaban ya huellas visibles estaba sin embargo contenido en ese nombre. (142-143)

[In Tangiers, Señor Salama told of going to Poland to visit the camp where the gas chambers swallowed up his mother and two sisters, and of having found nothing but a large clearing in a forest and a sign bearing the name of an abandoned railway station, and how the horror of the fact that there were no visible traces of the camp was somehow contained in that name, in the rusty iron sign. (93)]

The state of the material environment, oxidized, hardly visible and rotten, transmits the process of deterioration which characterizes historical memory, as well. The material signs of forgetting provoke a profound anxiety in the Holocaust survivor, whose mother

and sisters perished in the gas chambers. Nonetheless, in this case, it's not about the forgetfulness of the later generations. The Nazi troops demolished the extermination camp before withdrawing, in order to make the proofs of mass extermination disappear. All other premises of Nazi extermination camps in the territory of Poland were converted into memorials, Sobibor is the only one, where a rusty sign serves as the single remainder of the tragedy.

Today, trains convey the image of travelling to death for many Europeans. A narrator in *Sepharad* invites the readers to imagine the experience of traveling to an extermination camp or a forced labor camp, evoking the memoirs of well-known Holocaust survivors such as Levi:

Cómo sería llegar a una estación alemana o polaca en un tren de Ganado, escuchar en los altavoces órdenes gritados en alemán y no comprender nada, ver a lo lejos luces, alambradas, chimeneas muy altas expulsando humo negro. Durante cinco días, en febrero de 1944, Primo Levi viajó en un tren hacia Auschwitz. Por las hendiduras en los tablones, a las que acercaba la boca para poder respirar, iba viendo los nombres de las últimas estaciones de Italia, y cada nombre era una despedida, una etapa en el viaje hacia el norte y el frío del invierno, nombres ahora indescifrables de estaciones en alemán y luego en polaco, de poblaciones apartadas que casi nadie por entonces había oído nombrar, Mauthausen, Bergen-Belsen, Auschwitz. (48)

[What would it be like to arrive at a German or Polish station in a cattle car, to hear orders shouted in German over the loudspeakers and not to understand a word, to see the distant lights, wire fences, and tall, tall chimneys expelling black smoke? For five days in February 1944, Primo Levi traveled in a cattle car toward Auschwitz. Through cracks in the wood planks where he pressed his lips to breathe he glimpsed the names of the last stations in Italy, and each name was a farewell, a step in the voyage north toward winter cold, toward names of stations in German and then Polish, isolated towns no one had yet heard of: Mauthausen, Bergen-Belsen, Auschwitz. (29)]

The image of the train is associated with suffering deportation, torture, barbed wire and camps. Interestingly, in *Sepharad* the direction of the journey toward the north suggests an additional element of hostility to the unknown destination: cold and snow. The wintry landscapes subconsciously remove the suffering from the Mediterranean, which includes Spain, and relocates the hostility to the north. In *The Angel of Budapest*, it is always snowing when Jewish Hungarians are deported, even though the deportations do not occur in winter.

The separation and distance between the steppes of the Soviet Union and Spain is reiterated in a different story, where we hear about the train journey of an evacuated Spanish child to the North of Russia: “Parecía que se iba a acabar el mundo, porque nos evacuaron lejísimos, yo no sé cuántos días estuvimos viajando en tren, días y semanas, y siempre en la nieve, y yo pensaba, cada vez me voy más lejos de España, y de mi padre y mi madre.” (367) [“it seemed the world was coming to an end. They evacuated us and sent us a long way away, I don’t know how many days we traveled by train, days and weeks, always in the snow, and I thought, I am getting farther and farther away from Spain, from my mother and father.” (237-238)] Could the constant associations of snow and the Holocaust in the Spanish artistic representations mean a distancing of Spain from the extermination of Jews and Stalinist persecutions? To what extent is the hostility of a space perceived through the lens of nationalism?

Spanish Experiences of Postmodern Urban Exclusion

During the twentieth century Jews were often associated with cosmopolitanism, and the urban experience. During the Stalinist period the phrase “rootless cosmopolitans” was used to refer to Jews in the Soviet Union. Interestingly, the same description of Jews appeared even earlier in Germany. As Levy and Sznyder explain, Jews were portrayed as the symbols of rootless urban modernity in Germany as early as the beginning of the twentieth century. (45) Werner Sombart, a German sociologist draws a parallel between the city and the desert, the two habitats of the Jews, according to him: “The big city is a direct extension of the desert—both are equally far removed from the steaming clump of native soil and both force its inhabitants to become nomads.” (46) German and Soviet anti-Semitism equally portrays Jews as rootless, and urban. Muñoz Molina builds on these narratives when he connects the Jewish experience of exclusion and uprootedness with that of the Spanish urban character.

Scrutinizing the relationship of the narrators with their birthplaces reveals that Sefarad holds a different meaning for Spaniards and foreigners. Spaniards invariably long to return to their birthplaces, foreigners, in contrast never do. The reasons for alienation and the loss of the original home differ, too. In other parts of Europe Nazi or Stalinist persecution is the principal reason for leaving one’s homeland and the narrators have no desire to return. Spaniards, in contrast, leave their home to find better opportunities in the big city, due to illness, or to participate in the war voluntarily.

In *Sepharad* the only hospitable place is the place of birth, where one grows up in the bosom of the family. If one needs to leave this place, either voluntarily or due to

external circumstances, all other places will remain hostile spaces. The lack of personal connections and alienation transform the great, postmodern city into a hostile place. Yi-fu Tuan describes the city as a “frightening place. Built to rectify the apparent confusion and chaos of nature, the city itself becomes a disorienting physical environment.” (*Landscapes of Fear* 146) The main sources of chaos in the city according to Tuan are “violent conflicts among urban magnates, and the creation of fortified landscapes of fear; dangers from, and anxiety about strangers in an urban milieu,” and “distaste for and fear of the poor.” (157)

In the following episode, when Sacristán, one of the multiple narrators of *Sepharad* crosses Chueca square in Madrid, we witness both the ‘anxiety about strangers in the urban milieu’ and a ‘distate and fear of the poor.’ Sacristán refers to a nickname, the shoemaker of the village gave to the then adolescent narrator, who grew up there. The Chueca neighborhood represents the transformation of urban spaces in Madrid. During the decades of the 1980s and 1990s, Madrid underwent a profound transformation, as a result of urbanization plans. Following the death of Franco, there was a strong aspiration to transform Madrid, and turn the third-grade national capital into a global metropolis. The elimination of the slums and their subsequent incorporation into the texture of the city brought with it the marginalization and exclusion of the lower classes, especially that of the working class. The neoliberal process of rapid urbanization represents an unsustainable form of development, with high social costs. (Keynote, Robbins) On the pages of the novel, the Chueca neighborhood still resists the exclusively neoliberal and hetero-normative use of space. Nonetheless, by the time of this writing, Plaza Chueca has

already transformed into a fashionable neighborhood, the many bars in the middle of the square attracting the well-to-do urban middle classes. In most afternoons, a huge crowd sits around the outside tables in the square, sipping wine and talking animatedly. In the following quotes we may observe a neoliberal gaze, for the protagonist, who fully accepts neoliberal values; the Plaza de Chueca symbolizes the vices of the modern city. Here he describes the drug addicts and the homeless without empathy:

Una mañana, en la plaza de Chueca, que yo cruzaba con el corazón en el puño, con la mirada recta, para no ver lo que sucedía alrededor, el trapicheo de la droga, el espectáculo de aquellos individuos sonámbulos, hombres y mujeres, con caras de muertos y andares de zombis, de enfermos de algo terrible, me encontré con mi paisano [...], al que cuando yo era pequeño le llamaban Mateo Zapatón. (24)

[One morning, while I was crossing Chueca plaza with my heart in my fist and my eyes straight ahead in order not to see what was around me—the drug dealers, the people with terrible diseases, the spectacle of sleepwalking men and women with faces of the dead and the shamble of zombies—I ran into my paisano Mateo Chirino, the man who was called Mateo Zapatón when I was young. (11)]

The narrator criticizes the impersonality of the big city, but at the same time he passes through the square “with my heart in my fist” and “eyes straight ahead,” without compassion or any intent to help. In truth, the protagonist cannot be said to be fully integrated into the neoliberal system, since he is unemployed. Nonetheless, he perceives this situation as provisional, and he still possesses the neoliberal symbols of success, such as a car, an elegant suit and the lack of time. As Abraham Joshua Heschel, a Jewish theologian puts it: “Technical civilization is man’s conquest of space. It is a triumph frequently achieved by sacrificing an essential ingredient of existence, namely time.” (ix) Chueca square exhibits the losers of neoliberal development, embodying the anxieties of

the protagonist, who also fears the future, since he does not have a job and steady income. He perceives the city as a hostile space because he cannot avoid being confronted with the obvious signs of poverty and vulnerability. In consequence, he changes his attitude, and instead of contemplating his present living space, he cultivates relationships with his compatriots, and faces towards the past, in order to avoid integrating into the hostile landscape of his unforgiving present. In fact, the protagonist continues: “Con un sobresalto de alegría vi en medio de una ciudad hostil esa cara venida de mi infancia, vinculada a mis recuerdos más dulces de mi ciudad y de mi vida.” (32) [“it gave me a little start of pleasure to see that face in the middle of a hostile city, a face tied to the sweetest memories of my hometown and childhood.” (16)]

When the already middle-aged protagonist and the aging shoemaker accidentally cross paths in a Madrid square, the elderly man neither recognizes nor remembers the story of Sacristan, who in turn experiences a growing anxiety over losing his roots and becomes more isolated in the big city, since his identity is concealed in the nickname as a representation of his connection to his birthplace and childhood. Thus, identity acquires a spatial dimension. It is an external quality which only makes sense within the limits of a small community, and it is lost during displacement, when, in the process of moving to a new place, the individual becomes incapable of self-identification. Identity in this interpretation comes from the community and not from the self.

The first sentence of the ‘novel of novels’ reads as follows: “Nos hemos hecho la vida lejos de nuestra pequeña ciudad, pero no nos acostumbramos a estar ausentes de ella.” (11) [“we have made our lives far away from our small city, but we just can’t get

used to being away from it.” (1)] The most important elements that one misses in the new place are the use of language, the local expressions and the way of speaking, and the traditions, “nuestra Semana Santa,” “nuestra arquitectura monumental,” or the food, the cuisine, “nuestros panecillos de aceite” or “nuestros hornazos de Pascua” and “la sabrosa abundancia de todo lo que nos faltaba y añorábamos tanto en Madrid: butifarras y chorizos de matanza, “borrachuelos espolvoreados de azúcar.” (12) [‘our Holy Week’, ‘our monumental architecture’, ‘the delicious abundance of all the things we have missed and yearned for in Madrid: *butifarras* and *chorizos*, sausages from the recent butchering, *borrachuelos*, sparkling with sugar.’ (2)] The links to the native land remain strong, the parents strive to pass their love of the land and its traditions to the new generation: “Nos gustaba volver con nuestros hijos pequeños y nos enorgullecía descubrir que se emocionaban con las mismas cosas que nos habían ilusionado en la infancia a nosotros.” (21) “sentíamos consoladoramente que la vida estaba repitiéndose, que en nuestra ciudad el tiempo no pasaba o era menos cruel que el tiempo tan angustioso y trastornado de la vida en Madrid.” (21-22) [“we liked coming back with our children when they were small, and we were proud to find that they were fond of the same things that had enchanted us in our childhoods,” “we were consoled by the sense that life was repeating itself, that time didn’t pass in our city, or that it was less cruel than the nerve racking and jumbled pace of life in Madrid.” (8-9)]

Valdemún tells another story of longing for the lost homeland, and contrasting the uprootedness of life in Madrid with the familiar protection of the close-knit childhood community. *Valdemún* denotes a fictional place, resembling a small town in the country.

This story centers on women; men play a secondary role, even though the narrative voice is sometimes that of a husband who reiterates his wife's thoughts. The couple is travelling to Valdemún to take their farewell from the aunt of the woman, who is agonizing on her deathbed. The aunt took care of the adolescent children when their mother died prematurely. The hospital, where the mother of the children died in Madrid, appears as a hostile space, and provides a stark contrast to the deathbed of the aunt, who dies peacefully in her home, surrounded by family members. The death of the mother happens in Madrid, an impersonal, urban space, far from her homeland. She dies preoccupied with the future of her children, which adds to the hostility of the hospital environment. In the following quote we may observe an idyllic depiction of nature, where the fertility and abundance of the landscape contrasts with the sterility and deprivation of the hospital:

Tenía siempre sed y murmuraba cosas moviendo los labios agrietados, que tú le humedecías con un pañuelo empapado de agua, y se imaginaba o soñaba a sí misma sentada en la orilla del río, a la sombra de grandes árboles estremecidos por una brisa tan fresca como la corriente, el agua limpia y rápida en la que ella hundía los pies desnudos, en alguna mañana de verano de su primera juventud. (109)

[She was always thirsty, and she mumbled words, working parched lips that you moistened with a wet cloth, and she imagined or dreamed she was sitting on the bank of a river in the shade of large trees swaying in a breeze as cool as the current, the clean, swift water where she dabbed her bare feet one summer morning in her early youth. (71)]

The freshness of water is juxtaposed with the burning heat of the room. Summers that are pleasant in the country become insufferable in the big city. At the same time, illness represents just another mode of exclusion from society. Even illness has a spatial dimension, as the sick belong to the world of the hospital:

Pero ya entonces, cuando volvió a casa, se le notó que perteneció al hospital, que en unos pocos días se había vuelto extranjera al lugar y las cosas que hasta entonces fueron el contorno de su vida. Se movía de una manera rara por la cocina o el salón, pálida y con su bata de enferma, como si no supiera encontrar su camino y se extraviara en el pasillo o delante un armario abierto.” (110)

[...but once she was back home, it was obvious that she belonged to the hospital, for in the few days she had become a stranger to the place and things that had once formed the framework of her life. She would walk with a strange air in the kitchen or in the living room in her bathrobe, as if she couldn't find her way, get lost in a corridor or stand before an open closet. (72)]

“Walking with a strange air” in one’s home represents the ultimate experience of non-belonging. The phrase, a “stranger to the place and things that had once formed the framework of her life,” emphasizes the alienation, and parallels the transformation of the everyday surroundings of the persecuted.

Beds express the vulnerability of people in general, since they are either connected to sleeping at night, when people are more vulnerable and the ghosts of the past frequently appear, or to illness. Beds, as well as the hospital, symbolize the spatial dimension of illness, both in *Valdemún* and *Berghof*. The patients of the doctor lie in the bed to be examined and listen to the diagnosis: “Tendido en la camilla el paciente se vuelve más vulnerable, se rinde de antemano a la enfermedad, al examen de médico, al que ya ve al otro lado de la línea invisible, la línea definitiva que separa a los sanos de los enfermos, recludos en el gueto de su miedo, de su dolor y tal vez, casi lo peor de todo, su vergüenza.” (269-270) [“On the cot, the patient becomes more vulnerable, surrenders to the illness, to the doctor’s examination, to what he already sees on the other side of the

invisible but definitive line that separates the healthy from the ill, deep in prison of his fear, pain, and, perhaps, worst of all, shame.” (179)]

To be sick means to find oneself on the wrong side of an impassable divisionary line, the sick are enclosed within the ghetto of their fear. The ghetto and the fear evoke the Jewish ghettos of World War II, and the vulnerability of the sick evokes the vulnerability of people trapped in the wars of the twentieth century. This connection becomes explicit in the following quote: “ya excluido, expulsado de pronto de la comunidad de los normales, como un judío que leyera en un café de Viena el periódico donde se publicaban las nuevas leyes raciales alemanas.” [“Now the patient is excluded, expelled, from the community of the normal, like a Jew in a Vienna café reading the newspaper in which the new German race laws have just been published.” (180)] Falling sick results in an exclusion from the society of the healthy, and mirrors the exclusion of European Jews from society as a consequence of the anti-Semitic laws. *Valdemún* evokes the Jewish experience by portraying both the separation from one’s homeland and the subsequent exclusion from the new community.

Spaniards as Bystanders

The role of Muñoz Molina in the novel of novels is similar to that of Scheherazade: like Scheherazade, Muñoz Molina is both the story-teller and a character in the novel. *Scheherazade*, one title of a life-story in *Sepharad* evokes the tale in *One Thousand and One Nights*. Scheherazade starts telling a captivating tale to the Sultan during the night, and leaves it unfinished. The Sultan does not execute her in the morning because he wants to hear the end of the story. Night after night, during one thousand and

one night, Scheherazade keeps telling stories. In the end, the Sultan falls in love with her and marries her. The tale of Scheherazade reiterates the importance of storytelling, the most important task of a writer as well as the ability of stories to forestall death.

There are abundant references to long conversations with the protagonists of the life-stories, for example in the following quote we witness an intimate conversation between the writer and one of the narrators: “Él se echaba a reír y me hacía un gesto para que bajara la voz, no fuera a enterarse su mujer. Tus preceptos y también tus memorias, maestro insigne, a no ser que lo cuentes todo a mí y me nombres tu biógrafo oficial.” (434) [“...he laughed and motioned for me to keep my voice down and not let his wife hear. ‘We need your memoirs, maestro, or else tell me everything and let me be your official biographer.’” (282)] Precise details are provided about the location and circumstances of the encounters to convey authenticity and the impression of a first-hand experience: [“There is no noise now in the restaurant. Without realizing it, we have lingered until we are the only ones left. A waiter helps my friend into his navy-blue jacket, which accentuates the stoop of his shoulders. Watching him walk ahead of me towards the exit, I remember that he is a man of eighty.” (316)] Since many of the narrative voices, and stories shared come from European memoirs about the Holocaust or communist persecutions, oftentimes only available in languages other than Spanish, we also get a glimpse into reading the books: “Se me cierran los ojos, el libro casi se me desliza entre las manos.” (186) [“I have put the book on the night table and turned off the light.” (125)], or to give another example “En las noches en las que he aguardado vanamente el sueño en la oscuridad he imaginado los insomnios de ese hombre, Willi

Münzberg.” (192) [“During the nights when I lay in the darkness, waiting in vain to fall asleep, I have imagined the sleepless hours of Willi Münzberg.” (128)] The narrator connects himself with one of the protagonists of the many life-stories related in the pages of *Sepharad* through the sleepless night both of them experience and wonders about the feelings of the persecuted Münzberg.

The figure of the narrator / listener remains crucial throughout the novel. The narrative “I” carefully explains the process of the creation of the novel, and serves as the link between all the stories. The narrator/listener is in a privileged position, since he possesses access to various first-hand testimonies. He is like the spider in the cobweb, moving all the interwoven threads. The first-person singular narratives evoke a strong emotional response from us, readers. In addition to the personal aspect, the readers are frequently invited to imagine themselves in the shoes of the victims, frequent assertions of the intra-narrator like “I feel their anguish”, the evocations of situations of exclusion familiar to the contemporary reader, and the frequent use of the pronoun you seek to elicit a strong emotional response, affect and empathy from readers. Various scholars, such as David K. Herzberger and Nicola Gilmour analyze the novel in terms of the unsettling empathy it aims to create, while others have criticized the novel for “over-identification” and taking on alien suffering. But beyond empathy is inquiry about the narrator’s projection of himself solely as a possible victim, and his position of an outsider and empathetic observer. Juan Carlos Galván observes that *Sepharad* uses complex narrative and rhetorical strategies to facilitate the identification of the victims and the readers through empathy: “Dicha identificación la concibe el autor de *Sefarad* ahondando en la

complejidad y fragilidad identitaria de los personajes, incluida la del intra-autor, y por extensión la del propio lector que se adentra en los relatos de la novela.” (174) [The author of *Sepharad* conceives said identification by delving into the the complex and fragile identities of its protagonists, including that of the intra-narrator, and by extension even the readers themselves enter into the tales of the novel.] I agree with the interpretation of Carlos Galván, who considers “el intento por parte de la voz narrativa identificarse con la víctima” (174-175) [the narrative voice seeking to identify with the victims] as the most problematic aspect of the novel.

This position of listener –and consequently that of the reader– signifies a comfortable and convenient process of observing or witnessing. The readers are repeatedly asked to identify themselves with the victims and imagine how it feels to lose one’s home and family. Whereas I consider important the ability to put oneself in the shoes of the victim, millions of ordinary people were not victims, but perpetrators, thus the automatic assumption of victimhood remains debatable. Furthermore, this position does not invite readers to engage critically with the discourses of Spanish neutrality during the Holocaust. The Holocaust is represented as a distant European event, which Spaniards may accidentally witness, but they are never involved as perpetrators.

The observer/witness or the author does not have the agency to change or influence the story, an aspect that Muñoz Molina emphasizes in the author’s note: “*He inventado muy poco en las historias y las voces que se cruzan en este libro. Algunas las he escuchado contar y llevaban mucho tiempo en mi memoria. Otras las he encontrado en los libros.*” (597) [“I have invented very little in the stories and voices that weave

through this book. Some of them I was told and have carried in my memory for a long time. Others I found in books." (383)] This claim reinforces the sense of authenticity, while at the same time assigning a passive role to the witness, which results in an unconditional and uncritical acceptance of the narratives told.

The positioning of the intra-narrator may be best illustrated by a scene in Göttingen. In one of the stories, a famous writer –who may be Muñoz Molina himself– stops by a teahouse to relax a bit during his busy official schedule in Germany. While he sips his tea he starts wondering what the people around him might have been doing half a century earlier:

Había gente mayor, sobre todo, más mujeres que hombres, matrimonios de jubilados prósperos...y el tono general era como de sólido y civilizado deleite,...y manos que levantaban tazas de té con el meñique extendido, risas prudentes, conversaciones vivaces... y con una revelación súbita y arbitraria... en cada cara de hombre y mujer quería imaginarme los rasgos y las actitudes de cincuenta o sesenta años atrás... y estas facciones ajadas y apacibles las veía jóvenes y crueles, las bocas con dentadura postiza que tomaban pequeños sorbos de chocolate o de té se abrían en gritos de entusiasmo fanático, las manos...que sostenían tan pulcramente las tazas se alzaban oblicuas como bayonetas en un saludo unánime: cuántos de mi alrededor habrían gritado *Heil Hitler* qué habría en la conciencia, en la memoria de cada uno de ellos (559-561)

[Most of the clientele were older, prosperous retired couples ...the general tone was one of solid and civilized pleasure, ... lifting teacups, prudent laughter, lively conversation ... and I imagined every face, man's or woman's, as it might have been fifty or sixty years back ... those placid features became young and cruel, the mouths sipping chocolate opened in cries of fanatic enthusiasm, the hands ... so elegantly holding tea cups shot up like bayonets in an unanimous salute. How many of those around me had yelled *Heil Hitler*? What was on their conscience, in their memories? (358-359)]

The tearoom captures an image of contemporary European society. It is a prosperous and affluent environment, filled with people enjoying the peacefulness of the present

moment, and conveniently pretending the past never existed. The possible identification of the narrator and the author, the abundance of physical details about the surroundings and appeal to the three senses of sight, hearing, and taste strengthen our impression of witnessing the scene ourselves. The coffee house becomes a hostile space as the writer conjures up the past and imagines himself in the shoes of the victim. The memories of the past transform the peaceful coffee house into potentially hostile territory.

The Spanish narrator, the alter ego of Muñoz Molina, imagines himself as a potential victim, and as he wonders whether the elderly people were perpetrators, he conjures up the Nazi past in a German coffee house. The narrator puts himself in the position of an outsider and judge, who could only have been a victim, and by no means a perpetrator. At the same time, Muñoz Molina expresses his outrage in a 2017 newspaper article when his conversation partner refers to Spain as ‘FrancoLand’:

Una profesora alemana me dijo que, según le acababa de contar alguien de Cataluña, España era todavía “FrancoLand”. Le pregunté, tan educadamente como pude, qué sentiría ella si alguien decía en su presencia que Alemania es todavía Hitlerland. Se ofendió enseguida. Tan calmadamente, tan pedagógicamente como pude, le aclaré lo que no tiene que aclarar nunca ningún ciudadano de ningún otro país avanzado de Europa: que España es una democracia, tan digna y tan imperfecta como Alemania, por ejemplo, y tan ajena como ella al totalitarismo; incluso más, si atendemos a los últimos resultados electorales de la extrema derecha. (“FrancoLand.”)

A German female professor told me that someone from Catalonia had assured her that Spain was still “FrancoLand.” I asked her, as nicely as I could, how she would feel if someone said to her that Germany was still Hitlerland. She felt immediately insulted. With as much calm as I could manage and in an educational tone, I clarified what no citizen from another democratic country in Europe has ever been forced to clarify: that Spain is a democracy, as worthy and as flawed as Germany and as far away from totalitarianism; even more so, if we look at the latest election results achieved by the far right. (Web)

The real-life author is offended by the use of the term Francoland, and the suggestion that the ghosts of Francoism continue to be present in Spain, as he reflects about the referendum on Catalan independence and criticism regarding the total rejection of negotiation by the government in Madrid. He justifies his outrage by explaining that calling Germany ‘Hitlerland’ would be offensive to Germans, who live in a democratic country today, and claims that Spanish democracy left its totalitarian past behind.

In another life-story, titled *Berghof*, an encounter between a Spanish doctor and a dying German Nazi reinforces the positioning of Spaniards in relationship with the Nazi atrocities committed: they are the innocent witnesses, who are invariably shocked to find out about the atrocities committed around them. Berghof in the novel designates one of the many German villas on the Spanish coast, but it evokes Hitler’s residence in the Alps in Bayern, the Nazism and the memory of millions of European Jews murdered in the extermination camps. The protagonist of the story, a Spanish doctor, discovers a luxury villa on a small hilltop during family vacations on the beach in Andalusia. Nature rarely appears hostile throughout the stories, but this time even the path to the villa signals danger:

Tropezaba en ramas troncadas que le herían las piernas y tenía miedo de perder pie, de encontrarse sin saberlo muy cerca del precipicio. [...]

Iba tan agitado paso entre los matorrales de jara y de esa planta cuyos pinchos se clavaban como picos de rapaces, que tardó en comprender que estaba escuchando ladridos copiosos y feroces de perros. A unos metros delante de él, invisible hasta entonces, había un muro encalado y muy alto, coronado por una hilera de fragmentos puntiagudos de cristal. Lo fue siguiendo sin encontrar ni una puerta ni una ventana, dobló una esquina y en un instante se quedó paralizada de terror y de vértigo, el cuerpo entero aplastado contra la pared de cal: justo un paso por

delante de él estaba el filo vertical del acantilado, y muy abajo el fulgor y el bramido de la espuma contra la roca en la que se levantaba el búnker. (304)

He stumbled over fallen branches and feared he might lose his footing, get too near the edge of the cliff. [...] He was so absorbed in the task of pushing through the thorny brush that he was slow to hear the ferocious barking of dogs. A few meters in front of him, invisible till that moment, was a high whitewashed wall topped with jagged glass. He followed it, without coming to a door or window, until he turned the corner and immediately froze. In terror and vertigo he pressed his body to the wall: only one step away was the edge of the cliff and, far below, the splendor and the foam crashing upon the rock that was the base for the bunker. (198)

Both the natural and the constructed environment transmit imminent danger and anticipate the subsequent tension: the wildly barking dogs, the unexpected horror, and the completely closed complex, protected by impenetrable barriers evoke the Shoah and the arrival of European Jews in the Nazi extermination camps. The fallen branches and thorny brush signal danger, but it is the unexpected gaze into the abyss that represents the jaws of death. The villa belongs to an ex-Nazi German soldier:

En una pared hay un gran retrato al óleo de Hitler, rodeado por dos cortinajes rojos que resultan ser dos banderas con esvásticas. En el interior iluminado de una vitrina hay una guerrera negra con las insignias de las SS en las solapas [...], no hay nada que no sea nazi, que no conmemore y celebre el III Reich. Lo que yo percibo como confusa proliferación tiene un orden perfecto y catalogado de museo. Y mientras tanto el hombre sigue jadeando en el suelo. (308)

[On one wall is a large oil painting of Adolf Hitler, bracketed by two red curtains that turn out to be two flags with swastikas. In the illuminated interior of a glass case is a black jacket with the insignia of the SS on the lapels [...], there's nothing here that isn't connected with the Nazis, that doesn't commemorate and celebrate the Third Reich. What I first perceived as confusion is actually in perfect order that suggests museum cataloging. Meanwhile, the man lies gasping on the floor. (201)]

The discovery of the doctor contrasts starkly with the idyllic vacations of the middle-class family, who enjoy the illusion of perfection. This time, it's not the ghosts of the past that haunt the present, but the sinister past itself, which occupies a privileged place (a luxury villa on a hilltop, with a panoramic view of the Mediterranean Sea) in the present. The room, full of Nazi relics and the dying ex-Nazi, embody the impunity of the crimes committed by the Nazis. Past and present live together, and their co-existence is not limited to the haunting memories, the past occupies a space in our world, as the presence of the Nazi relics demonstrates.

The Spanish doctor, who enters the German villa by accident, becomes shocked when he sees the Nazi relics. He is an innocent witness, who becomes aware for the first time of the disturbing presence of the past. He is a doctor, a profession associated with saving lives, and this is yet another shocking encounter between the innocent Spanish bystander and Nazism.

The life-story *Silencing Everything* gives another example to illustrate the representation of Spaniards as innocent bystanders. In this tale, the narrator, an ex-soldier of the Spanish Blue Division, wakes up during the night: “He despertado rígido de frío y no sé dónde estoy y ni siquiera quién soy. [...] Lo que me ha despertado es una sensación de peligro, un reflejo de alarma tan poderoso que ha disipado en un instante todo el peso del sueño.” (95) [“startled awake, I am stiff with cold, and I don't know where I am, even who I am. [...] What has woken me is a sense of danger, a reflection of alarm so powerful than in one second it dissipated the weight of sleep,” (61)] says the first person singular narrative voice. This is a palimpsestic moment, since after a long description of

being woken up in the middle of the night by the voices of the Russian guerilla from the neighboring room, we find out that the protagonist re-lives his sudden terror in a hotel room several decades ago, when he unexpectedly awoke in the middle of the night in a hotel room. The use of the present tense mirrors the confusion of the elderly narrator, who does not realize during the first moments that he is not in the stable of a small hut somewhere in the Soviet Union.

As the story unfolds it becomes clear that during the invasion of the Soviet Union, the protagonist, a member of the Blue Division stayed in the home of a Russian woman and his son. After witnessing their extreme poverty, he shared his delicious sausages, sent to him from Spain, with them. He also decided to leave the bed for the Russian woman and her son when he occupied their home, and chose to sleep in the small stable. This very act contributes to saving his life; thus the bed acquires a symbolic meaning in this story. One night he woke up and listened to the long conversation of the woman and the Russian guerillas. He was ready to die, but the woman persuaded the guerillas not to enter the stable, and saved his life. In contrast, the German officer who occupied the hut after him decided to sleep in the bed and he was killed by the Soviet guerilla. This time the woman, who saved her Spanish co-habitant did not intervene. The dissimilar behavior of Spanish and German soldier stands for a significantly different attitude toward the civilian population as they transmit a message of fundamental difference between the Spanish and German members of the Nazi troops, thus embellishing the role Blue Division members played. The actions of the Russian woman suggest that she understands the difference between Spaniards and Germans.

Similarly to the soldier, who generously shares his food with the Russian peasants, and lets his hosts sleep in the bed, in *Narva*, another life-story narrated by a member of the Blue Division, we share the experience of becoming aware of the fate of the Jewish people living in the German-occupied parts of the Soviet Union. This difference is further reiterated in *Narva*, where a beautiful Jewish woman asks for help from the Blue Division soldier, whom she meets at a dance, organized by the occupying German forces:

–Tú no eres como ellos, aunque lleves su uniforme, tú tienes que irte de aquí y contar lo que nos están haciendo. Nos están matando a todos, uno por uno, cuando ellos llegaron a Narva éramos diez mil judíos, y ahora quedamos menos de dos mil, y al ritmo que van no duraremos más allá del invierno. No perdonan a nadie, ni a los niños, ni a los más viejos, ni a los recién nacidos. Se los llevan en tren no sabemos adónde y ya no vuelve nadie. (481-482)

[You aren't like them, even though you wear the same uniform. You must leave here and tell what they are doing to us. They are killing us all, one by one. When they came to Narva there were ten thousands of us Jews, and now there are fewer than two thousand, and the way they're going, we won't last through the winter. No one is spared, not the children, not the old, not the newborn. They take them away in trains, and no one ever comes back. (310-311)]

“You are not like them”, this phrase explicitly accentuates the difference. The phrase is uttered by a Jewish woman, which on the one hand makes it sound more objective, and on the other hand insinuates that Jewish people themselves regarded the Spanish soldiers differently. Xosé Manoel Núñez Seixas, a historian, explains that narratives of the Blue Division soldiers about their experience in the Soviet Union transformed dramatically after 1945. While in their letters and war diaries they share the experiences of witnessing Nazi anti-Semitism, after the end of World War II, the soldiers gradually distanced

themselves from the actions of the Nazis. The narrative underwent yet another transformation after 1975, and “broadly redefined the social perception of the Blue Division experience,” “infusing it with more benevolent tones.” (65-66)

Various literary critics, for example Adolfo Campoy-Cubillo and Juan Carlos Galván concur that Muñoz Molina uncritically reiterates contemporary Spanish discourses or even Francoists myths about the role of Spaniards in World War II. As Galván puts it: “es evidente que Muñoz Molina no llega nunca a pronunciar una opinión crítica sobre la División Azul, y menos la participación activa del régimen franquista en torno a su participación en los genocidios cometidos por el Tercer Reich.” (206) [It’s evident that Muñoz Molina never formulates a critical opinion about the Blue Division, nor does he criticize the active participation of the Franco regime in the genocides perpetrated by the Third Reich.] If we take a careful look at the role Spaniards play abroad and the spaces they occupy in relationship to the events throughout the novel, we find that they remain witnesses, no Spaniard takes part in the atrocities committed. Furthermore, the experiences of the Blue Division members are narrated together with the life-stories of the prominent and everyday victims of Nazi and Stalinist persecution, thus blurring the difference between victim, bystander and perpetrator.

Interweaving Memories in *Sepharad*

Sepharad is an “interwoven” in various ways: it brings together different experiences of persecution, interweaves the present and past, fiction and history, as well as connects the haunting legacies of Nazism, Stalinism and Francoism. Various scholars emphasize the interconnected nature of the “novel of novels”. For Santos Sanz

Villanueva “es el exilio el hilo conductor de *Sefarad*, pero está tejido con fibra de las variadas calamidades y oprobios (persecuciones, asesinatos...) encadenados en el horrible siglo pasado.” (quoted in Valdivia 51) [exile is the common thread of *Sepharad*, but the texture is woven from several calamities and shames (persecutions, assassinations...) linked to the horrible previous century. *The* main topic, exile, is seen as the unifying thread in a textile, woven with fibers of calamities and resulting in the picture of a horrible century of persecution. Another critic, Alexis Grohmann considers *Sepharad* an “arabesque that weaves together biographical, autobiographical, and travel writing, memoir and fiction, stories and fragments of lives and journeys into an ultimately interconnected tapestry.” (233) The expressions ‘weave together’ and ‘interconnected tapestry’ clearly signal the interwoven nature of *Sepharad*. Grohmann argues that this sense of interconnectedness results from the ‘errant’ or digressive nature of *Sepharad*, that defies the “tyranny of a main story-line.” In his excellent interpretation, the different forms of errancy all contribute to representing the interconnectedness of the world. For Grohmann, generic errancy results in a constant shifting between fiction and history, and their ultimate weaving together, as well as the interlinking of the present and the past, while stylistic errancy and the constant switches between the first, second and third person narrative voices. As for Grohmann’s interpretation of errancy, while the stories ‘err’ in the sense that they travel, I do not consider the narrative techniques revolutionary or digressive in the twenty-first century. They perform a function of interweaving and generalizing experiences of vulnerability all across the continent.

As for the interweaving of memories, scholars disagree on whether memories in *Sepharad* are multidirectional or transnational. While David K. Herzberger and Pablo Valdivia regard the intermingling of memories in *Sepharad* as an example of multidirectionality, Dagmar Vandebosch questions this position and classifies the novel as transnational. Vandebosch states that the transnationalisation of memory is conditioned by “the strong relation with the Spanish context of enunciation and the local debates on memory.” (“Transnational Memories” 615) Furthermore, Rothberg’s concept of multidirectionality requires “memories to be mutually unsettling”. While bringing the European memories to a Spanish audience in *Sepharad* certainly opens up a conversation within Spain, and has an unsettling effect, “the inverse question on how the narration of Spanish history can contribute to European memory is barely raised.” Vandebosch considers the title of the book as the only example of multidirectionality, since “it establishes a direct link between Spanish history and the Jewish memory of exile.” (615) She concludes that *Sepharad* represents transnational memory, with the purpose of “broadening and unsettling Spanish national memory.” I agree with Vandebosch’s observations regarding the Spanish context, nonetheless I consider that the stories of Nazi and Stalinist persecution do open up a conversation vis-à-vis the two totalitarian regimes. Portraying these two regimes together opens up conversations within Spain and contributes to an ongoing debate about the destructive legacies of Nazism and Stalinism in the wider European context. Alejandro Baer highlights that the scholarly debates about the Holocaust as a unique event have significant implications for Spanish conversations about the past. If the Holocaust is regarded as a unique event, then it is possible “to draw

a radical distinction between Nazism and Fascism (both in its Italian and in its Spanish form) and hence to dissociate Franco from the horror. It enables Spain to remember the Holocaust without questioning itself, without probing into its own past.” (106)

On the other hand, universalist interpretations of the Holocaust invite comparisons of Nazism and Communism in Europe. In addition to the scholarly comparisons that deal with the birth of these systems, for example Hannah Arendt’s *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, or with the legacies of these system, for example the edited collection *Stalinism and Nazism: History and memory compared* (Rousso), these debates may transform into a narrative of competitive victimhood, or may be appropriated to construct an exculpatory narrative, especially within Germany and Eastern Europe. The House of Terror in Budapest that dedicates the underground floor to the victims of the Holocaust, and the top four floors to the victims of communism is a good example to illustrate this process. *Sepharad* does not create a hierarchy of suffering, it interweaves and connects life-stories of persecution and exclusion by the Nazi, Stalinist and Francoist regimes.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter I have focused on the spatial manifestations of exclusion and persecution, such as the loss of a homeland, crossing borders, travelling on a train, saying farewell on a train station or staying in a hotel. I have also analyzed more abstract ways of exclusion, for example illness and poverty. These forms of exclusion evoke the Jewish experience of lost homelands, and relate to the Spanish connections with the Nazi past, such as the life-stories of the Blue Division soldiers in the Soviet Union, or the

description of a Nazi villa in the Spanish coast, or conjure other forms of exclusion contemporary readers may be familiar with, in order to create empathy with the excluded. Various stories relate experiences of persecution and oppression within the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe both during communism and Nazism, thus Antonio Muñoz Molina's *Sepharad* includes tragic life-stories of persecution and exclusion from all over the continent of Europe, suggesting that these experiences determine the life of Europeans during the twentieth century.

In the next chapter I will continue to focus on the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in the lives and narratives of Imre Kertész and Jorge Semprún. The same way as the first chapter, the second chapter connects Jewish and non-Jewish experiences of persecution and exclusion during both the Nazi regime and the subsequent dictatorships in Europe.

CHAPTER III: BUCHENWALD MEMOIRS, WHEN LIVING
MEMORY BECOMES HISTORY: JORGE SEMPRÚN AND IMRE
KERTÉSZ

*The End and the Beginning
After every war
Someone has to clean up.
Things won't
straighten themselves up, after all.*

*Someone has to push the rubble
to the side of the road
so the carts corpse-filled wagons
can pass.*

*Someone has to get mired
in scum and ashes,
sofa springs,
splintered glass,
and bloody rags.*

*Someone has to drag in a grinder
to prop up a wall,
someone has to glaze a window,
rehang a door.*

*Photogenic it's not,
and it takes years.
All the cameras have left
for another war.*

*We'll need the bridges back,
and new railroad stations.
Sleeves will go ragged
from rolling them up.*

*Someone, broom in hand,
still recalls the way it was.
Someone else listens,
and nods with unsevered head.
But already there are those nearby
starting to mill about
who will find it dull.*

*From out of the bushes
sometime someone still unearths
rusted-out arguments
and carries them to the garbage pile.*

*Those who knew
what was going on here
must make way for
those who know little.
And less than little.
And finally as little as nothing.*

*In the grass that has overgrown
causes and effects,
someone must be stretched out
blade of grass in his mouth
gazing at clouds.*

Wisława Szymborska

The Writer's Sepharad

In this chapter I examine Imre Kertész's and Jorge Semprún's first literary productions about the dreads, deaths and terrors of the Nazi camps together with their later reflexive works about their insights into the process of literary creation. More precisely, I analyze *The Long Voyage* (1963) and *Fatelessness* (1975), their first accounts of the Nazi concentration camps and the Holocaust, but I also draw on Semprún's *Life or Literature* (1994) and Kertész's *Dossier K.* (2006). The later reflective works of these authors, written thirty years later than their first books, help us to explain their literary choices and put their first literary narrative on the Holocaust in context and perspective. Since both reflective works date from a period posterior to the dictatorships in Spain and Hungary, the authors also comment on the reception of their narratives on the Holocaust both during and after the dictatorship period. By examining the interaction of the narratives on the Holocaust and on the national dictatorship in two specific countries, Spain and Hungary, I combine the approaches of general Holocaust Studies and national literary studies, and contribute to an emerging interdisciplinary dialogue. As Erin McGlothlin and Jennifer M. Kapczynski point out, the study of national literatures and Holocaust studies "are distinct fields that all too often neglect the cultivation of a common dialogue" because Holocaust scholars are concerned "with overarching questions on modes of witnessing, the limits of narrative representation, and the aesthetics figuration of trauma" and often "downplay national or linguistic origins." (4) My work intends to cover this gap by focusing on the limits of narrative representation,

and modes of witnessing in the works of Jewish and non-Jewish survivors of the Nazi concentration camps, while at the same time situating their works in their unique national context.

Imre Kertész (1929-2016) was deported first to Auschwitz and then to Buchenwald for being a Hungarian Jew, while Jorge Semprún (1923-2011) was deported to Buchenwald for fighting in the French communist resistance. Jewish and non-Jewish prisoners shared various experiences: the shock of witnessing the mass murder of Jews; the non-ceasing functioning of crematoria; the unimaginable cruelty and suffering; and the difficulty of talking about the horrors of the death camps with their fellow citizens who were not ready or willing to listen to them.

The idea of non-belonging and the subsequent transitions between center and periphery define both Semprún's and Kertész's life. Kertész grows up as a member of a middle-class family, and as an only child. He suffers the consequences of a hostile divorce and the inability of his parents to agree on his fate. In 1944, after the occupation of Hungary by the Nazi German forces, he becomes aware of his Jewishness. As Sarah Cohen remarks, identifying as Jewish remains problematic for highly assimilated urban Hungarian Jews. They are suddenly excluded from the Hungarian society, at the same time traditional, deeply religious and Yiddish speaking communities also view them with suspicion. Kertész, as most members of assimilated Jewry experiences an identity crisis. During a time, when everybody who was regarded as Jewish by the Nazi laws had to wear a yellow star, the previously overlapping Hungarian and Jewish identities become a binary choice.

Semprún and Kertész were considered “foreigners” or “not Spanish” and “not Hungarian” enough, since they lived in exile. Semprún even wrote most of his works in French. Kertész chose voluntary exile, when he moved to Germany following the fall of Communism in Hungary. The mixed reception of his Nobel Prize in 2002 in Hungary resembles the reception of Semprún as a Minister of Culture in Spain from 1988 to 1991. Both of them were regarded as foreigners in the countries they considered home. Kertész was living in Germany at the time, and Semprún was living in France. Semprún narrates this experience as follows: “Uno de los procedimientos más frecuentes de los que criticaban mi nombramiento era el de privarme de mi españolidad, haciendo de mí un extranjero. (*Frederico Sánchez* 148) [...] Me daban lástima sencillamente.” (150) [The most frequent resource of those criticizing my appointment was to deprive me of my Spanishness, and converting me into a foreigner. [...] I felt sorry for them.] The phrase to ‘deprive me of my Spanishness’ expresses a strong sense of national identity, and addresses the issue of exile and belonging once again.

Central and peripheral positions remain simultaneously present throughout Semprún’s and Kertész’s life and writings, and these categories shift and reverse frequently. I explore various interpretations of center/periphery, such as powerful/vulnerable, lawful/outcast, dominant/muted, mainstream/margin or victorious/defeated. Therefore, this chapter examines similar same questions of belonging, non-belonging and “uprootedness” that we have seen in the previous chapter about *Sepharad*.

The idea of uprootedness or “Sepharad” manifests in different ways in the life and work of these two authors. For Semprún, Sepharad means exile from the Iberian Peninsula and his native country of Spain. The same way as in *Sepharad*, identity is perceived in spatial terms, the location and concept of home, that is, a space of belonging remains crucial. Semprún reflects about the meaning of home in *Federico Sánchez se despide de Ustedes* [*Federico Sánchez Bids You Farewell*]: “Decir mi casa es una convención: para hablar pronto y que se entienda. Porque «mi casa» se entiende, o decir cualquier cosa. Porque en ningún sitio estoy en mi casa. O estoy en mi casa en cualquier sitio, lo que viene ser lo mismo. Póngase al alcance de un paseo algunos cafés, un río, librerías, un museo y todo está resuelto: estoy en casa.” (18) [To say my home is just a convention: to be brief and be understood easily. Because one understands the phrase “my home”, or just to say something. Because no place is my home. Or I am at home everywhere, which is the same thing. All I need is a café, a river, a few bookshops, and a museum in a walking distance, and everything is fine: I am at home.] A few coffee shops next to the boulevard, a river, bookstores and a museum are the essential elements to feel at home, or in other words they are the spatial expressions of the identity of an intellectual. We have seen the same elements in the tales of *Sepharad*, where we can most easily identify the intra-narrator with Muñoz Molina himself: he visits a museum in New York, he relaxes in a tea-house in Germany, and he participates in official events related to his books. The only –telling– difference is that Semprún mentions a river, which is largely missing from Muñoz Molina’s tales. The presence of the river is probably due to the experience of living in Paris, a city where the river is part of the

identity of the city. In contrast, it is the sea which defines the identity of a peninsula.⁷ The sea appears in various tales, exploring its influence and relationship with the people of the land. Despite this difference, which originates in the physical reality of the two countries, we experience the surroundings from the perspective of an intellectual and through his elitist gaze.

Both Semprún and Antonio Muñoz Molina frequently refer to books,—or in Semprún’s case to poems and philosophical essays,—most of the Spanish general public is not familiar with. Muñoz Molina recounts the memoirs which are mostly unavailable in Spanish, thus rendering memory a privileged place in the reconstruction of the past. Semprún mentions the artistic productions in association with a situation he encounters during the course of his life. The frequent references to high culture or literature unavailable in Spanish add to the reputation of these authors as elitists. As Gina Herrmann and Ofelia Ferrán point out in relation with Semprún’s oeuvre: “This is a body of work, too, that in its constant citation of philosophers, poets and writers of the Western tradition calls to a cultured reader who hopefully shares Semprún’s horizon of knowledge and aesthetic tastes. [...] The flaunting of erudition and the intense control that Semprún’s narrative voices maintain over their *récits* have led more than one critic to highlight a certain “coldness” and the “moral superiority of the Semprunian narrator.”

(3-4)

⁷ The inhabitants of the territories lying next to the Coast identify more strongly with the sea/ocean than the inhabitants of the central regions, such as Madrid. Yet, even madrileños usually have fond memories of holidays on the Coast.

The place of birth and childhood plays an equally important role in Semprún's works, as it does in the tales of *Sepharad*. Semprún leaves Spain in 1936 and returns more than half a century later, to live in the neighborhood of his youth: "Así, medio siglo después de haber abandonado el barrio de Retiro [...] después de dos guerras, el exilio, Buchenwald, el comunismo, algunas mujeres, unos cuantos libros, resulta que he regresado al punto de partida." (*Federico Sánchez* 17) [So, half a century after I had abandoned Retiro, [...] two wars, a long exile, Buchenwald, communism, various women, several books later, I ended up returning the same place.] Of course, return does not mean a new beginning, since he returns together with the haunting memories of the past; the Spanish Civil War and World War II, Buchenwald and communism all left an indelible mark, as he narrates in several novels.

In Kertész's case, uprootedness or "Sepharad" refers to the Jewish experience of sudden exclusion. Randolph L. Braham, one of the most important experts on the Holocaust in Hungary in the United States called Hungary "the most controversial chapter of the Holocaust." Braham poses the questions why was the Holocaust possible in Hungary, how could the deportation and mass murder of Hungarian Jewry happen as late as 1944? He explains it from the perception and ethics of the Jewish leaders, who grew up in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, during the Golden Era of Hungarian Jewry (1867-1918). Hungarian Jews were highly acculturated, they were in the forefront of modernization and lived in symbiosis with non-Jewish Hungarians, especially in Budapest and the urban areas. Many Jewish Hungarians were fully assimilated; some of them even changed their names or converted. Despite periodic manifestations of anti-

Semitism, such as the blood libel case in Tiszaeszlár (1882-83), Magyars of the Israelite Faith were convinced that “they were part and parcel of the Hungarian nation” and that certain things could not happen in civilized and chivalrous nation. By 1944 Hungarian Jews were already aware of deportations taking place in other regions, for example nearby Slovakia. Nonetheless, the mentality of “what could have happened in the East cannot happen in the West” prevailed, despite of the many eye-witness accounts available from Jewish people who managed to escape to Budapest from the newly reacquired territories of Slovakia. According to Brahm, Hungarian Jews clung to their beliefs of the Golden era, even while the Numerus Clausus Laws, the first anti-Jewish laws in Europe came to force. Thus, the Jewish community contemplated with shock as Hungarian authorities and many Hungarian civilians fully collaborated with the Nazi occupiers in the annihilation of Hungarian Jewry. The omnipresent feeling of sudden exclusion is equally present in the works Kertész and Muñoz Molina’s *Sepharad*.

Trapped/In A Cobweb

Many Holocaust memorials start with the moment of deportation or with the moment of arrival at the camp and tell little about the previous life of inmates. They often end with the moment of liberation or tell about the haunting memories. Primo Levi’s *Survival in Auschwitz* and Ellie Wiesel’s *Night* come to mind to illustrate this point. Levi’s *Survival in Auschwitz: If This Is A Man* opens with the following paragraph in the author’s preface:

It was my good fortune to be deported to Auschwitz only in 1944, that is, after the German Government had decided, owing to the growing scarcity of labour, to lengthen the average life-span of the prisoners destined for

elimination; it conceded noticeable improvements in the camp routine and temporarily suspended killings at the whim of individuals. (9)

The use of the expression good fortune in a sentence that relates to the deportation to Auschwitz, and “temporarily suspended mass-killings at the whim of individuals” makes reading this sentence shocking thus successfully conveying the impossibility of interpreting the reality of Nazi concentration camps according to everyday logic. The narration is immediately experienced as out-of-the ordinary and inconceivable. The book finishes with the narration of the “Story of Ten Days,” the struggles of a dozen inmates, all in life-threatening conditions, to survive the ten days between the German evacuation of the camp and the arrival of the Soviet troops. The last paragraph of *Survival in Auschwitz* gives a brief account of what happened to the companions of Levi after liberation:

Of the eleven of the *Infektionsabteilung* Sómogyi was the only one to die in the ten days. Sertelet, Cagnolati, Towarowski, Lakmaker and Dorget [...] died some weeks later in the temporary Russian hospital of Auschwitz. In April, at Katowice, I met Schenk and Alcalai in good health. Arthur has reached his family happily and Charles has taken up his teacher’s profession again; we have exchanged long letters and I hope to see him again one day. (173)

This short paragraph lists the names and the fates of the fellow inmates, it barely tells anything about the life of the survivors after returning. Levi’s first account of Auschwitz starts with the deportation, and ends with the liberation of the camp.

In a similar fashion, the first sentence of Ellie Wiesel’s *Night* is “THEY CALLED HIM Moishe the Beadle, as if his entire life he had never had a surname.” (3) The first chapter of perhaps the most well-known Holocaust memoir in the United States, narrates

how Moishe, and all foreign Jews are deported from Sighet. Moishe returns to Sighet a few months later and tells what happened to the deported:

They were forced to dig huge trenches. When they had finished their work the men from the Gestapo began theirs. Without passion or haste, they shot their prisoners, who were forced to approach the trench one by one and offer their necks. Infants were tossed into the air and used as targets for the machine guns. This took place in the Galician forest, near Kolomay. How had he, Moishe the Beadle, been able to escape? By a miracle, he was wounded in the leg and left for dead. (6)

Moishe the Beadle tries to warn the Jews of Sighet: “Day after day, night after night, he went from one Jewish house to the next, telling his story.” (7) The memoir starts *in medias res*, by narrating how nobody believes Moishe, and quickly jumps ahead to two years later, when the entire Jewish population of Sighet is deported. The memoir narrates the experience of the young Ellie Wiesel in the concentration camps, including the agonizing moments of his father’s death. Like many other memoirs, *Night* ends with the liberation of the Buchenwald concentration camp:

One day when I was able to get up, I decided to look at myself in the mirror on the opposite wall. I had not seen myself since the ghetto. From the depths of the mirror, a corpse was contemplating me. The look in his eyes as he gazed at me has never left me. (115)

The image of the corpse refers to death, indicating that the person contemplating his image in the mirror is nearer to death than life, and implicitly asks the same question as Levi: Is this a man? Can he still consider himself human? He shares that the haunting memories would never leave him, but he does not give details about his later life.

Most representations of the Holocaust capture the moment of death, without dedicating much attention to remembering Jewish life. While the horrors should be remembered, these images subconsciously make us associate Jewish culture exclusively

with death and suffering. My analysis of Kertész's *Fatelessness* and Semprún's *Long Voyage* centers on the moments of transition: arrival to and return from the Nazi concentration camps. By shifting the focus away from the actual death camp experience, I shift the focus away from portraying death. Showing everyday Jewish life before the war and the moments of happiness reflects best who these people really were.

At the same time, this approach results in a shift in emphasis from the individual to the collective, and helps us understand the break-down process of society's, and examine the responses of the community to the fate of its Jewish members. It reveals the underlying assumptions of lay people in most societies that even though the sovereign state has the power and authority to discipline and punish its citizens, it also faces limitations in carrying out punishment against its subjects. This belief shatters abruptly for the Jewish people with the arrival to the forced labor and extermination camps at the latest. Focusing on the first moments of confronting a new, unexpected and unimaginable reality, helps to convey the abruptness from an organized, law-governed existence to the total incomprehensibility of the death camps. Similarly, focusing on the return highlights and denounces the hypocrisy of a society which prefers to put a thick carpet of forgetting over the horrors of the Holocaust and avoids any discussion of responsibility.

Focusing on the moments of transition also sheds new light on the fundamental difference between how Jewish and non-Jewish people experienced the act of being taken prisoner. For a resistance fighter the act of being imprisoned was not necessarily a "logical consequence" of one's actions of fighting against the state, but at least explicable. In contrast, for the Jewish prisoners –as well as the Roma and other people

who were imprisoned simply due to their ethnic or religious identity— the act of being arrested and imprisoned was inexplicable, breaking the tacit agreement between the state and its citizens.

The frontier between normal everyday life and horror seems blurred when you look at it without any foresight into the future: the everyday transforms into horror gradually, people try to conceive the most unexpected turn of events in terms of everyday, as they are a continuation of their everyday life, even though there is always a moment when one cannot maintain self-deception any longer. Contemplated from hindsight the dividing line between normal everyday existence and inconceivable horrors appears as a clear dividing line. Yet, without any foresight into the future, it is impossible to realize when the border has been crossed. In general, people strive to maintain the illusion of normality as long as possible, the thorough preparation for the journey, the carefully packed suitcases illustrate that many expected to return home and could not believe the rumors about the mass killings, even if they heard them. The functioning of Nazi extermination camps deceived people based on this universal human characteristic, that is why they carefully imitated everyday life.

Kertész's *Fatelessness* narrates the story of a 14-year-old Jewish boy, George “Gyuri” Köves, deported to Nazi concentration/extermination camps. Similarly to most accounts of Holocaust survivors, the novel starts shortly before the deportation of the protagonist and ends soon after he is returning home. Focusing on the deportation, the train journey and the first moments of arrival to a Nazi death camp in *Fatelessness* draws our attention to Kertész's unique interpretation of the Holocaust, namely that “the ability

to accept and adapt to changing circumstances” made the Holocaust possible. (Cooper 19) The narrator, his family members and neighbours “adapt gradually but continuously to the world around them,” and “make the adjustment necessary to uphold the appearances of normalcy” through “adherence to familiar routines.” (23) Thus, in *Fatelessness* the grand moments of life are translated into a series of boring everyday activities.

It is precisely this mechanism of delusion and the ability to ‘become a well-adjusted and obedient cog’ that make possible the deportation of young Kőves to a Nazi concentration camp. Self-deception and adjustment are most visible during the moments of transition, before and upon arrival at the camp. Kertész represents perfectly the gradual nature of the process, at the same time he does not consider the possibility of active resistance. Semprún, a resistance fighter himself, in contrast focuses on portraying the moral satisfaction resulting from his stance of armed resistance. He portrays how others became “well-adjusted and obedient cogs” in the system. He criticizes administrators, the guards in the concentration camp, and the general population who witnessed and tolerated the existence of death camps.

Semprún’s *The Long Voyage* lends itself extremely well to an analysis focusing on the preceding life, since the the memoir narrates the circumstances of arrest, the journey to the death camp and the initial moments of arriving at the camp. *The Long Voyage* recounts the journey to the death camp, literally speaking, it focuses on the days of the train journey to Buchenwald, though, with the help of the free associations of the protagonist, we also find out about the times before the deportation, and the moments

following the liberation of the Buchenwald camp and the pitfalls of trying to reintegrate into normality again. The book ends with the arrival of the inmates to the Buchenwald concentration camp. Although we encounter occasional flash-forwards which tell about dreadful episodes which happened in the concentration camp, the majority of the memories center on Semprún's involvement in the resistance, the journey itself and the impossibility of giving a true account of the horrors and having a conversation with the rest of the society. The memoir, written sixteen years after liberation, remains a partial account, circling around the Jewish experience without daring to give a full account of the horrors.

During the journey the narrator talks in the first person singular, but at the moment when the boxcar arrives at the concentration camp and the narrator jumps off the wagon, the narration turns into the third person, to indicate a distance from the events, the narrator refuses to identify himself with the experience in the camp: "I don't remember whether he had said: 'Don't leave me alone pal,' or whether he had called me by my name, that is, by the name he knew me by. Maybe he had said: 'Don't leave me alone, Gérard,' and Gérard jumps down onto the station platform, into the blinding light. (217) When he arrives at the camp, the narrator loses his identity and the connection to his former self. In Ursula Tidd's interpretation "Semprún experiences a fracturing of self and experiences himself and his experience as 'other.'" (117) Tidd attributes the frequent identitarian doubling, an omnipresent characteristic of the Semprunian narrative, to the experience of trauma. While trauma and frequent identity changes and aliases due to Semprún's life in clandestinity certainly play a key role, I consider that the shift from the

first person to the third may not only mean that the narrator is not ready to share his experience, but also that he does not believe in finding attentive listeners whom he can address.

Initially, Semprún avoids using precise terms, like Holocaust or the extermination of Jews, which do not appear throughout the book. In fact, in relation to a brief meeting with a Jewish woman who asks for direction in Paris, the protagonist speculates: “I wonder whether, finally, she took this voyage that we’re taking. In any case, I don’t know that, if indeed she has taken this voyage, she hasn’t taken it the same way we are. Because there is another way of traveling for the Jews, I was to see that later. I have only a vague picture of this voyage.” (93) The narrator refers to the ‘voyage the woman may have taken,’ meaning whether she was deported to a Nazi death camp. There is no mention of her fate there, or the fate of Jews like her. The journey was different, and we do find out later that it was more inhumane, but throughout the book there is no clear reference to the annihilation of European Jewry in the Nazi extermination camps.

Semprún’s *Literature or Life* (1994), written three decades after *The Long Voyage*, centers on the role of literature and art in capturing the ‘essence of evil’ and argues throughout the whole memoir that instead of a true account, which nobody can understand, survivors and witnesses should give a truthful account and deliver their message using literary artifice. The memoir places death in the center, since the only ethically and morally possible option for all witnesses remains to write about the horrors of the camp, in order to preserve the memories of those who perished. In this latter work the focus shifts from the experience of the resistance fighters to witnessing the Shoah and

narrating the genocide of European Jews. Whereas in the *Long Voyage* references to the Jewish experience are scarce, in *Literature or Life* the second chapter, titled “Kaddish,” – a Jewish prayer recited for the dead– tells us about Jewish death and mourning, about a dying Hungarian Jew and the death of Maurice Halbwachs.

As for the Hungarian Jew, we don’t know anything about his previous life, we see only him in the moment of dying:

Kneeling next to the dying Jew, I have no idea how to keep him alive, my Christ of the Kaddish. I speak softly to him. [...] But I did not want to experience the death of that Hungarian Jew I held in my arms. [...] I could easily imagine his itinerary, these last few years. His deportation, his arrival to Auschwitz, the chance selection that sent him to the side of survival, the equally perilous life that followed, the evacuation of the camp before the advance of the Red Army. (43-44)

We do not know anything about the previous lives of the other inmates of the camp either, most of them do not have a name, identity, story, and all of them are part of a faceless, dying crowd. Yet, not only do the dying take their life-story to the grave, the living do not have names and individual identities either. In the next quote the narrator talks about the encounter with a member of the *Sonderkommando*, a special unit that “dragged the victims out of the gas chambers and delivered their corpses to the adjoining crematory to be burned.” (49)

I no longer remember the name of that Polish Jew. I don’t even remember if he had a name. By this I mean that I cannot recall if Jürgen Kaminski mentioned his name to us. [...] (49)

The survivor of the *Sonderkommando* at Auschwitz, this Polish Jew who had no name because he could have been any Polish Jew, even any Jew from anywhere at all, really– the survivor of Auschwitz remained motionless, his hands spread out flat on his knees: a pillar of salt and despairing memory. (51)

Neither the death or the life of ordinary European Jews is individualized, it is presented as a collective, interchangeable experience. Yet, individual fates and identities should be remembered to counteract the Nazi methods of obliterating their memories. Only outstanding intellectuals and their contribution to “high-culture” are given importance and proper consideration. The detailed account of the death of Maurice Halbwachs is just one example.

Semprún turned to literature to preserve the memory of those who perished and give testimony to the everyday resistance of survivors like him. Kertész, in contrast, declared himself a chronicler, whose task is limited to narrating events without any higher purpose in mind. Semprún maintains a strong narrative presence in his works, whereas the figure of the writer is invisible in *Fatelessness*.

Kertész as author comes to the forefront in *Dossier K.* (2006), the only book he himself calls a memoir. The book reads as an interview between the author and a knowledgeable interlocutor, nonetheless the interview process is imaginary, as Kertész himself formulates both the questions and the answers. In this work, Kertész reflects on the relationship of truth and fiction, literature and life, the same way as Semprún does in *Literature or Life*. These works help us understand the process of literary creation and reveal the strikingly different attitudes of these two writers in relation to the role and means of artistic creation.

In *Literature or Life* Semprún uses a retrospective circular structure to give us a glimpse into both the process of writing and that of remembering; he speaks as a witness, an exceptional figure, stressing the differences in his circumstances as a political prisoner

and as a non-Jew. In contrast, in *Fatelessness* Kertész uses a linear structure in which we confront events through the eyes of the narrator, a 14-year-old Jewish boy, who experiences events as they unfold and does not display knowledge of the future in any moment of time.

In fact, Kertész read *The Long Voyage*, and “regarded it as the exact opposite of what he sought to write.” (Cooper 17) In contrast with *The Long Voyage*, *Fatelessness* “shies away from grandiose metaphor and metaphysical rumination and dwells instead on the everyday life in the camps.” (Cooper 7) Whereas the Semprunian protagonist always looks for deeper philosophical meaning, and readily shares his conclusions with his interlocutors, the Kertészian one does not feel the need to look for an explanation, he accepts all events as “natural”. According to the recollection of Spiró, a prominent Hungarian dramatist, and one of the few friends of Kertész, their small circle of Hungarian writers unanimously rejected Semprún’s *The Long Voyage* as “sentimental, ideologically tainted rubbish.” (“In Art Only the Radical Exists.” Web)

Semprún and Discourses on the Holocaust in France

Semprún completed *The Long Voyage*, his first novel, while he was living in France and continued to form part of the Communist Party of Spain in exile. Between 1953 and 1962 he participated in the organization of the officially banned Communist party in Madrid, which included frequent clandestine visits to Franco’s Spain as “Federico Sánchez,” risking his life. In 1963 he was expelled from the Party as he finished his book, thus finding himself on the periphery of the periphery. Or did giving up underground work and clandestine trips to Spain and dedicating himself to literature

bring him back to the center/mainstream of legality? In the course of the sixties and seventies Semprún wrote various successful screenplays, such as *The War is Over* directed by Alain Resnais as well as *Z* and *The Confession* by Costa Gavras, and turned into an increasingly successful author. In the words of Soledad Fox Maura, “Fame put the definitive nail in the coffin of Federico Sánchez and all his clandestine identities, and thrust Jorge Semprún into the spotlight.” (174)

The capture and trial of Adolf Eichmann by the Israeli state in 1961 re-directed the attention of the world to the industrialized mass murder of European Jews. During the trial, more than hundred survivors offered their testimony, and the trial got a huge media coverage. As Anette Wieviorka notes “It opens a new era, in which the memory of the genocide becomes central to the way many define Jewish identity, even as the Holocaust demands to be admitted to the public sphere.” (57) By the time Semprún’s *The Long Voyage* appeared, the discourse on the Holocaust had undergone a considerable shift in France and elsewhere, thus the book appeared in a political climate, when witness testimonies gained new importance. One more element to add to the success of Semprún’s testimony is that his narrative supports the early postwar French national discourse that laid emphasis on the role of French resistance to Nazism, and privileged the accounts of resistance fighters over the accounts of Jewish survivors.

During the 1970s the focus shifted to the individual life stories and voice of the man in the street became important, “feelings and problems began to be exhibited publicly, first through radio, then in television.” (Wieviorka 97) In the 1980s a few more events helped to bring the attention of the general public on the Holocaust. In 1984

Shoah, Claude Lanzmann's groundbreaking documentary appeared in France. A few years later, the Klaus Barbie trial (1987-1991) divided France, where in addition to prosecuting the "Butcher of Lyon," the French involvement in the implementation of the Final Solution was also on trial. The years of Occupation and the antiemitism of Vichy France, which the majority of French society covered with a thick carpet of forgetting, was suddenly out in the open.

During the three decades that separate the publication of the two books, Semprún had become an influential public intellectual and an acknowledged writer. Two years after the death of Franco, *Autobiografía de Federico Sánchez* [*Autobiography of Federico Sánchez*], Semprún's first book published in Spanish, won the Planeta prize in Spain, a literary prize from the Spanish publishing group. In the words of Semprún "El año 1977 fue el de las primeras elecciones democráticas, el año de la llegada a Madrid del *Guernica* del Pablo Picasso, el año del premio Nobel de Vicente Alexandre. [...] La *Autobiografía* se vendió en España por cientos de miles de ejemplares, experiencia para mí nueva y por otra parte única. El libro provocó una discusión profunda en el mundo político, los medios de comunicación y la sociedad general durante meses. Ejerció una influencia indiscutible en el curso de las cosas." (*Federico Sánchez* 146) By mentioning his book together with the first free elections in Spain, Vicente Alexandre's Nobel Prize for literature and Picasso's *Guernica*, Semprún situates it among the great events of the year. He adds that the book influenced the Spanish transition in a significant way. After the death of Franco Spanish society gradually became liberated and re-integrated in

Europe. Spain and Portugal “joined Europe”⁸ in 1986, thus the re-integration of Spain into Europe was complete. In the same year Spain renewed her diplomatic relations with Israel. In 1988 Semprún accepted the invitation of Felipe González and returned to Spain to serve as Minister of Culture (1988-1991) under the Socialist government. His reception and experience in Spain was mixed, as he himself narrates in *Federico Sanchez Bids You Farewell*. Nonetheless, he occupied a government position during the time when the Berlin Wall fell and Communist countries of the Eastern bloc began their transition to democracy. It was an exceptional moment of hope for many throughout the continent.

Kertész and Holocaust Discourse in Hungary

Kertész’s childhood experience of living an ordinary middle-class life suddenly turns upside down when he finds himself at the margins of society as a Hungarian Jew, excluded and singled out by a yellow star. His subsequent deportation and incarceration in Auschwitz and Buchenwald concentration camps places him to the realms of unconceivable and unimaginable. His return to a country, which quickly becomes a Communist Soviet satellite state, does not mean the end of his exclusion and marginalization. As a survivor of Auschwitz, he remains on the margins of a society, which sweeps the past under the rug as fast as possible and encourages survivors to keep silent. As opposed to Western Europe, where survivors faced an uncomprehending society, in Eastern Europe the Communist state treated survivors with suspicion, and in

⁸ European Economic Community back then

some places returning survivors encountered violence, or were not able to return their homes, occupied by new inhabitants. As someone living behind the Iron Curtain and cut-off from Europe, he shares the experience of exclusion and marginalization of most public intellectuals. Unlike Semprún, he becomes disillusioned with communism a few years after his return. In 1950 he finds himself on the margins again, when he is dismissed from his job as a journalist. For many years, he has difficulties sustaining himself, and works as a freelance translator.

During the Stalinist period, non-Communist or not ardently Communist intellectuals were barely tolerated or silenced by the regime. Some, like Tibor Déry and Árpád Göncz, were imprisoned; others like Magda Szabó were not allowed to publish. After 1956, György Aczél became Minister of Culture in Hungary, and for the next decades, nothing could appear in Hungary without his approval. Artistic productions fell in to one of three categories: Prohibited, Tolerated, or Supported. In the early years of communism both official and non-official conversation about the Holocaust was discouraged. After the end of the war a new coalition government that included the Communist Party established people's courts to punish crimes committed during the previous regime. Various war criminals were executed, but as the Communist regime was consolidating its power, the courts focused on convicting the "enemies of the people," a phrase used to identify those who opposed the Communist takeover. According to the official terminology of the era "Hungarian working people" were "the victims of the 'Horthy-fascist' regime. The brave red army liberated Hungary from fascist tyranny and had given Hungarians the chance to create a new and just workers' state." (Hanebrink

266) The creation of a communist state became ‘moment zero,’ a new beginning, when all the crimes of the past were conveniently forgotten, and transferred to ‘them’, the previous regime, with which the new Hungary had no connection.

Kertész’s marginalization in his native country continues, as he now lives in a different, but equally oppressive and totalitarian system. The following short conversation from *Fiasco* (1988), the second book of Kertész’s trilogy, illustrates the reluctance of society to engage in dialogue about the Holocaust. Köves, the adolescent protagonist of *Fatelessness* and the adult protagonist of *Fiasco* writes a novel about Auschwitz and he shares the news with his friends, who react with shock:

‘Of course,’ Van den Gruyn remarked with grudging commiseration, as if he was talking to a half-cured leper, “you were in Auschwitz.”

‘Yes,’ I said.

‘Have you taken leave of your senses?’ Sas had recovered from his initial astonishment. ‘A novel about Auschwitz! In this day and age! Who on earth is going to read that?’

‘Nobody,’ I said, “because it’s not going to be published. (102-103)

The reaction of Sas, who talks with “grudging commiseration”, reflects that the Holocaust is not considered an appropriate topic for discussion in Hungary. The expression a ‘half-cured leper’ evokes the association of Jewishness with sickness in Muñoz Molina’s *Sepharad*. During the Middle Ages a leper was considered contagious, and people affected by leprosy were hermetically excluded from society. This metaphor illustrates how violently the survivors of the Nazi concentration camps were excluded from Hungarian society.

The incident narrates a true story, as the publication of *Fatelessness* was indeed rejected. The publishing house explained that “while the subject itself is horrific and

shocking,” it “fails to become a shattering experience for the reader” due “to the main protagonist’s, to put it mildly, odd reactions.” (56) The letter finishes with: “We must also say something about the style. For the most part your sentences are clumsy, couched in torturous form, and sadly there are too many phrases like “on the whole,” “naturally enough,” and “besides which.” (57) The remarks of the publisher, written in 1975, already foreshadow a trend to expect a certain kind of representation. As Kertész himself puts it: “Works dealing with the Holocaust were expected to be full of passionate outrage” (29), and elicit a strong emotional reaction from the reader that clashed with Kertész’s intention to avoid sentimentality. The phrase “naturally enough,” frequently used by the 14-year-old narrator, symbolizes his attitude of seeing “the events around him as ordinary, or at least explicable.” (Cooper 11) In the following chapters we will examine how successful narratives, that can be qualified as “full of passionate outrage,” became in the twenty-first century, rewarding their authors with fame and glory.

Kertész, in contrast, resumes his experience as a writer in the communist era “as complete solitude and isolation.” (*Holocaust* 71) In an interview he argues that knowing that his work will not be published gave him a sense of artistic freedom: “Because I didn't write what the communist government wanted to see, I was cut off and alone with my work. I never thought my book would ever be published, and so I had the freedom to write as radically as I wanted, to go as deep inside as I wanted. In a democracy you have to find a market niche, make sure a novel is ‘interesting’ and ‘spectacular.’ That may be the toughest censorship of all.” The quote reflects an experience of absolute

marginalization, “I was cut off and alone with my work.” Even though his works eventually appear in print, he remains unknown for the general public.

Kertész is not the only one who comments on the silence of the Communist regime, since even David Cesarini, a scholar who spent most of his career fighting what he called the “myth of silence” about the Holocaust, acknowledges a certain silence and the challenges intellectuals faced when dedicating themselves to the topic of the Holocaust. As he notes in the introduction to his edited volume *Genocide and Rescue: The Holocaust in Hungary*, between 1945 and the 1980s historiographical research suffered under “Soviet mind control” and the Holocaust could not openly be discussed for fear of “validating Zionism.” The situation changed after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of Communism in 1989;

In post-Communist Hungary scholars are now free to delve into their country’s past. Between 1945 and the early 1980s, Hungarian historiography was warped by the domination of the Soviet Union. From 1989, however, with the disjunction of the Eastern Bloc, scholarship and politics were both freed from Soviet mind-control. (6)

The end of the eighties and the beginning of the nineties saw a dramatic change in the European political landscape, as the countries of the Eastern bloc transitioned to democracy. As Cesarini also points out, the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe influenced the Hungarian and European memoryscape.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, Kertész spends long periods of time in Berlin. In 1990 *Fatelessness* is translated into German, and he gradually gains popularity in his elected home. He dedicates himself to literature and he publishes one book after the

other. Kertész received numerous literary prizes in Germany, and most German newspapers covered the award of the Nobel Prize favorably and extensively.

Teaching the Holocaust in Hungary

All countries have their national myths and iconic literary figures. In communist Hungary my first encounter with the topic of the Holocaust happened in seventh grade of primary school (age thirteen) through the poetry of Miklós Radnóti in literature class. I was taught about the tragic fate of Radnóti, a Hungarian Jew, who was forced to serve in a Jewish labor battalion during World War II and died near the Western border of Hungary, when his battalion was force marched towards Germany. I learnt that he was shot by the Germans, buried in a mass grave, and later his notebook with all his beautiful poetry was found accidentally in the pocket of his coat when the mass grave was exhumed. I grew up admiring the poetry of Radnóti and wondering how the Nazis could kill him.

My image about the Radnóti of my childhood and the official narrative about his life shattered many decades later: I was astonished to learn an entirely different story in the United States about the death of Radnóti, who, as it turned out, was not murdered by German Nazis as I have always believed, but by Hungarians. It happened in 2013, during my PhD studies in the United States, as I opened *Holocaust: A History* by Debórah Dwork and Robert Jan Pelt. Their version of Radnóti's death reads as follows:

The guards forced those still on their feet to push for Germany. Radnóti and the other men in the carts remained in Győr. Their guards tried to get rid of them by dumping them at a local hospital. But the medical administration refused to accept them. Győr had been *Judenrein* ("cleansed" of Jews) since March, and they wanted no new ones. Why

don't you take them somewhere and kill them? someone – it's not clear who – suggested. The guards obliged. They were shot along the Rabca River. (xviii)

Radnóti and his companions were not only shot by Hungarians, but by the initiative of Hungarian anti-Semites.

Shortly after, I discovered from the Yivo Encyclopedia that “the” Hungarian Jewish poet did not even consider himself Jewish:

Considered one of the great Hungarian poets of the twentieth century, Miklós Radnóti was born Miklós Glatter, of Jewish parents, although he remained indifferent toward his Jewish roots all his life, converting formally to Catholicism in 1943. “I do not feel Jewish,” he wrote in a 1942 letter to Hungarian Jewish literary critic Aladár Komlós. “I was never taught to be religious, I do not feel a need for it, I don't practice it. Race, blood ties, unseverable roots, ancient pangs quivering in every fiber—I consider such things utter nonsense, and not the defining characteristic of either my intellectuality, my spirituality, or my poetry.” Yet he died as a persecuted Jew. (Yivo Encyclopedia)

Radnóti's case was by no means unique, many intellectuals and businessmen perceived themselves as Hungarians and not as Jews in Budapest during the first decades of the 20th century. It's the irony of fate that he did not only die as a ‘persecuted Jew’ but also became the symbol of Hungarian Jews for generations of Hungarians.

We had to memorize one of Radnóti's poems (rote learning played a major part in the communist school system.) In “How Others See,” one of my favourites, the poetic voice contrasts his own perspective of his beloved little country with that of the pilots of the warplanes bombing it:

I cannot know...

I cannot know what these parts could mean to someone else,
To me it's home, this tiny land in the embrace
of flames, since childhood cradling from far-off, my world.

It's out of her I grew, as does from a trunk its tender shoot,
and I hope that one day my body will sink into this soil.
I am at home. And when a bush kneels, once in a while,
at my feet, I know its name and can name its blossom;
I know where people are headed on the road, as I know them;
and know what, in the summer sunset, it could mean
when from tenement walls there trickles reddish pain.
Take a man in a plane: to him it's a map, this country (75)

The poetic voice expresses his organic connection to the “this tiny land in the embrace of flames” by portraying himself as part of this land: “It's out of her I grew, as does from a trunk its tender shoot,” “I am at home”, “I know” all refer to a deep identification with his homeland. One cannot help but think of the contrast between the strong sense of belonging, expressed here, and his murder by his fellow-citizens. The poetic voice personalizes the landscape and its inhabitants as living, full of purpose and beauty. At the same time, everyday life is indistinguishable from above, the pilot regards the landscape as a war “map” or target.

Semprún expresses a similar perspective on the vulnerability of the civil population, as he recalls his memories from the Spanish Civil War, the first time in human history when civilians were deliberately bombed from the air:

Perhaps because I saw the German and Italian fighter planes sweep in low over the roads and calmly machine-gun the crowds, on the roads of my own country. That little wagon with the woman in black and the baby crying is mine. That donkey, and the grandmother on the donkey, is mine. That fiancée all fire and snow walking down the burning road is yours.
(66-67)

Both Radnóti and Semprún identify with the victims of the air raids and give human faces to them.

My second encounter with Holocaust literature took place in high-school. One of the books on our reading list for my literature class was Jorge Semprún's *The Long Voyage*. The book opens with a dedication: for Jaime because he is sixteen years old. I was also sixteen when I first read the book. Back then, in communist Hungary there was a central curriculum, meaning that every sixteen-year-old in high school had to read it, which resulted in the *The Long Voyage* becoming both widely-known and popular in Hungary. Semprún attributes to this fact his strong emotional links with the country and its intellectuals: "...era uno de los países del mundo con el cual mis lazos eran más estrechos. Más íntimos, debería decir. [...] De Hungría me han llegado siempre las cartas más apasionantes y apasionadas de lectores. De Hungría llegaban los visitantes más exigentes. [...] En París no soy nadie, en Budapest sí que soy alguien." (*Federico Sánchez* 243-244) [it was one of the countries that I had close connections to. I should say more intimate. [...] Letters from the most fascinated and fascinating readers always arrived from Hungary. I had the most demanding visitors from Hungary. [...] In Paris, I am nobody, but in Budapest I am somebody.] Semprún mentions that various prominent Hungarians knocked on his door in Paris, such as István Szabó, an academy-award winner film director, whose films *Mephisto* (1982) *Colonel Redl* (1988) and *Sunshine* (1999) drew international acclaim, and perhaps as a result of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Eastern opening, he scatters names and meetings with Eastern European public intellectuals, such as György Konrád, or the later Czech president, Vaclav Havel.

Adding Semprún's *The Long Voyage* to the high school reading list certainly makes sense as part of a narrative, present in the Soviet Union and several Socialist

countries, which condemned the Holocaust as the genocide of Soviet / Polish etc. citizens, and not as the genocide of the Jewish population. In this respect, the memoir of a Semprún, a communist resistance fighter was a logical choice on behalf of the Party authorities. Despite presenting the Holocaust from a communist point of view, the ‘internationalization’ of the Holocaust was not the only way of framing the narrative, the Shoah was taught and seen as a predominantly Jewish tragedy.

Imre Kertész was not in our reading list neither in primary nor in high school. In fact, like many others, I first heard his name when he became a Nobel Laureate in 2002. The prestigious prize brings him to the center stage, unexpectedly for both him and most Hungarians. Magdalena Marsovszky captures well the general mood in Budapest during 2002: “On the day when news agencies announced that the 2002 Nobel Prize in Literature is awarded this year to a Hungarian writer called Imre Kertész, joy and pride were virtually palpable in Budapest. Yet, the first moments of euphoria were followed by the sobering question: “Who is Imre Kertész?” Kertész was virtually unknown both in his native country and the English-speaking world. (Marsovszky 148) Since the “Holocaust and matters Jewish represent an unresolved and uncomfortable problematic” (Vasvári and Tötösy 1) in Hungary, Kertész’s Nobel Prize gave rise to ideological battles between the political left and right, debating “whether Kertész as a Jewish-Hungarian is Hungarian and whether Hungarians – that is, the country’s nationalist and conservative sections of society – should or should not endorse the award. (1) Judy Young samples and translates

some of the typical responses of the far-right, which appeared in *Magyar Fórum*⁹ and similar venues. Zoltán Szócs remarks that “I too, congratulate Imre Kertész for this international recognition but have to admit... I am really curious as to who will be the first Hungarian writer to receive the Nobel Prize.” (274) In this quote, Szócs characterizes Kertész as non-Hungarian, demonstrating that antisemitic discourse and the exclusion of Hungarian Jews remain present in the twenty-first century.

Nazism and Communism

The liberation of Buchenwald in 1945 did not end Semprún’s and Kertész’s struggles against oppression. Upon returning to Hungary, Kertész found himself trapped in a left-wing dictatorship that kept silence through brute force and repressed crucial memories of the recent past. Unable to return to his native Spain, where Franco’s right-wing dictatorship was now firmly entrenched, Semprún settled in France. Paradoxically, his political exile from an internationally isolated and peripheral Spain resulted in his relocation to the “heart of Europe.” These two writers have more in common than their incarceration in Buchenwald concentration camp: Nazism and communism, the two totalitarian regimes which defined the history of Europe during the twentieth century altered theirs, too, albeit in different ways.

Marie Peguy, one of the few scholars to study Kertész and Semprún, notes the contrasting meaning of community for the two authors. Communism offers a sense of comradeship for Semprún, who easily identifies himself as belonging to a group during his

⁹ Hungarian Forum, a well-known right-wing newspaper, founded by István Csurka, an iconic figure of the Hungarian far-right

imprisonment in Buchenwald. Kertész, in turn cannot identify with any community: Hungarians exclude him from the society because he is Jewish, Jews exclude him because he is not Jewish enough. While Semprún needs to re-construct his shattered identity after liberation from Buchenwald, Kertész in turn needs to find an entirely new one. He offers a negative definition for Jewishness, no doubt based on his experience of living under two totalitarian regimes: “I think what two Jews have in common is their fears; that’s how they can be distinguished more accurately, at least in Central and Eastern Europe.” (*Dossier K.* 114)

Both Kertész and Semprún experience the arbitrary nature of communism. In contrast to Semprún, Kertész never had a chance to choose his way of living, in both cases it was political change in his home country and inescapable totalitarianism which excluded him. Semprún continued to work with the Spanish Communist Party at his own will and based on his own convictions. I attribute to this fact the different ways they lived through and narrated their experiences. For Semprún, his life was like a novel, full of adventure and danger, for Kertész it was a constant, monotonous oppression, where he was completely deprived of freedom. Kertész himself refers to the total lack of choice in *Dossier K.*: “Dictatorships make children out of people inasmuch as they do not permit existential choices and thereby deprive one of the wonderful burden of being responsible for oneself. (117) “I was concealed in my insignificance.” “I compared myself to a person which is cast this way by chance, like a light skiff by a swift current.” These metaphors express “total vulnerability to chance.” (117) In a dictatorship people are deprived of agency, and have no sovereignty over their fate. The feeling of vulnerability, omnipresent

in Holocaust literature as well, plays an important role in the works of Kertész, Muñoz Molina and Semprún.

Semprún has never lived under a Communist regime, and his initial support of communism expresses what many Eastern Europeans would call a “romantic belief” in communism and Stalinism. After being expelled from the Communist Party, Semprún became disillusioned, as well as many of his former comrades. A quarter of a century later he laconically summarizes the general tendency: “A veces, casi siempre, en un plazo más o menos largo ha seguido el mismo camino que yo: se ha apartado suavemente del comunismo, o el comunismo se ha apartado brutalmente de él.” (26) [Sometimes, almost always, in a shorter or longer period of time, people followed the same route as me; they gradually distanced themselves from communism, or communism distanced itself abruptly from them.] The process of distancing oneself could be gradual and gentle, or abrupt and brutal. The use of the adjective brutal in connection with the Communist Party entails his later critical position.

The link to communism means that Semprún, unlike many of his compatriots visits the countries of the Eastern bloc and even the Soviet Union on a regular basis during the fifties, and acquires first-hand knowledge of these places. His cultural activities and his post as a Minister of Culture take him to the countries of the Eastern bloc during the dismantling of communism. Thus, Semprún and Kertész share a firsthand experience of living under Nazism, a close connection with communism and the chaotic transition process from dictatorship to democracy. Both of them live long enough to experience and reflect critically on the incomplete process of political transition.

Imre Kertész considers that Nazism and Communism, the two totalitarian regimes of twentieth century Europe, share a common trait, namely demanding and achieving unconditional conformism from their subject. He states that “I am appalled at the ease with which totalitarian systems of command expropriate the autonomous personality, and how human beings become well-adjusted and obedient cogs in the powerful wheels of the state.” (“Europe’s Oppressive Legacy” x). The transformative power of the oppressive state on its subjects constitutes a strong link between the two systems, thus living in a Communist dictatorship constantly evokes the memory of Auschwitz, the past and present oppressive systems merge into a palimpsest. At the same time, this apparent ease leads him to regard Nazism and Communism as “not merely the distinctive and outlandish history of a generation or two, but a normal existence that is part of the fallability of mankind.” (x) According to Vasvari and Zepetnek, Kertész considers the “development of self-lying mechanism” and the “problem of conformism as the common root of becoming either a loyal servant of a mass-killing system or a victim.” (*Comparative Central European Holocaust Studies* xviii)

Before The Camp: The Jewish Experience

Fatelessness starts shortly before the deportation of Gyuri, the protagonist, and ends soon after he is returning home, as most works dedicated to narrate the horrors of the Holocaust. Yet, in this section, I will focus on the moments of transition; Gyuri’s arrival in Auschwitz, his return to Budapest, and subsequent efforts to narrate the untellable.

In the first scene of the novel Gyuri's father is being called upon labor service.

The last evening, he spends at home is described as follows:

I tried to be patient for a bit, striving to think of Father, and more specifically, the fact that I would not see him for a long time after that; but after a while [...] I began to get bored. Even having to sit around became a drag, so simply for the sake of change I stood up to take a drink from the tap. They said nothing. Later on, I also made my way to the back, between the blanks, to pee. On returning, I washed my hands at the rustic, tiled sink, then unpacked my morning snack from my school satchel, ate that, and finally took another drink from the tap. (8)

Contrary to our expectations, the scene lacks dramatism or pathos, instead we follow a succession of the most ordinary routine actions, which normally don't make it to artistic representation: drinking water, peeing, washing hands. Some of these actions, which have no narrative value to start with, are redundant, as they stress the obvious: water comes from the tap, and we wash hands in a sink. The abundance of everyday details also serves to demonstrate that ordinary life is interrupted in an imperceptible way.

Kertész justifies his choice of not trying to break up time in the novel, and "narrate only the most powerful scenes" by having to reflect the tedious, monotonous and boring way people have to live through every single day in an oppressive system.

Besides, Kertész's narrative strategy of using a linear structure helps to convey the feeling of absurdity and the abruptness of the transition from a fairly common everyday life to the reality of the extermination camps. Kertész builds on our notion of adolescence: the age of in between, no more a child and not yet an adult, desperately trying to make sense of the surrounding world and feeling permanently lost. That's why the readers so readily accept the authenticity of the experience. Upon his arrival to Auschwitz Gyuri continues to assume for several hours that he arrived in a normal labor

camp. Based on his previous knowledge, coming straight from secondary school and a middle-class family, he associates the football fields he sees with playing on them: “From what I saw of the area on this short walk, on the whole it too, won my approval. A football pitch, on a big clearing was particularly welcome. [...] A place for us to play football after work.” (89) We experience a strong tension between the innocence of the narrator and the omniscience of the readers, who have the historic knowledge and instantly become aware of the erroneous notion of the protagonist. The text operates on the assumption that readers are familiar with the atrocities of the Holocaust, thus they are able to complement the information which is entirely missing from the text. This lets us readers feel as the knowledgeable adults while at the same time actively involving us in the reading process, forcing us to interpret and reflect on what we read.

Gyuri arrives in the extermination camp bringing with him the values of a law-abiding citizen. When he had a chance to escape from the march, escorted by the Hungarian police in Budapest, he preferred to stay in his place:

...I don't know how, a streetcar managed to become wedged in our column, not far in front of me, as it happened. [...] I became alive to the sudden flash of a piece of yellow clothing, up ahead, in the cloud of dust, noise and exhaust fumes [...] A single long leap and he was off to the side, lost somewhere in the seething eddy of machines and humanity. [...] I saw one or two enterprising spirits then immediately make a break for it in his wake, right up ahead. I myself took a look around, though more for the fun of it, if I may put it that way, since I saw no other reason to bolt, though I believe there would have been time to do so; nevertheless, my sense of honor proved the stronger. (56-57)

Once again, the scene is narrated without any further comments. It is the task of the reader to evoke the stark contrast between our retrospective point of view and that of an ordinary person, living during the 1940s, who has no insight into the future and no reason

to suspect that what the Nazi propaganda calls a labor camp is actually a mass extermination facility, established with the explicit purpose of industrializing mass killing. The phrase ‘my sense of honor’ conjures up a citizen who was taught to follow the rules and obey authorities. It expresses a level of utmost trust in the state and its representatives. In contrast with the long, detailed explanation of the sudden escape of a prisoner, staying in the line does not require any explanations. In this scene both the self-deception and the willingness to carry out orders are present.

Semprún and Kertész represent the commonly accepted notion that the state has the authority to punish criminals, coupled with a firm belief that those punished are indeed criminals. Kertész’s depiction of Gyuri’s arrival to the Auschwitz, when he identifies the inmates as criminals illustrates perfectly that this belief is only shattered when he himself falls victim to the unreasonable actions of an omnipotent, oppressive state regime.

Gyuri automatically assumes that the inmates are prisoners, since the very idea that non-criminals may be held captive behind barbed wire remains inconceivable:

Then they got closer to me in the hurly-burly, and I finally got my first glimpse of the people here. It was quite a shock, for after all, this was the first time in my life that I had seen, up close at any rate, real convicts, in the striped duds of criminals, and with shaven skulls in round caps. Naturally enough, I immediately recoiled from them a bit. [...] Their faces didn’t exactly inspire confidence, either: jug ears, prominent noses, sunken, beady eyes with a crafty gleam. Quite like Jews in every respect. I found them suspect and foreign looking. (77-78)

Once again, we encounter a strong notion of law-abiding citizen, who finds it a shock to see “real convicts for the first time” and approves the separation of ordinary citizens and criminals. He even shares some of the widely-held prejudices towards Jews, such as “jug

ears, prominent noses.” Like many members of the urban middle-class, he finds the prisoners ‘suspect’ and does his best to distance himself from them. These are exactly the characteristics that make him an “obedient cog in the system.” Gyuri becomes a victim because he is a meticulously law-abiding citizen, and the same values make others to collaborate with the system and follow directions without questioning them.

In contrast to the scary looking “Jewish convicts”, the neatly dressed Nazi soldiers make a good impression on him:

...I noticed that out there were now German soldiers, in green forage caps and with green collars on their tunics, who were keeping an eye on everything and making eloquent hand gestures to indicate directions; I was even a bit relieved to see them, since they struck me as smart and trim, the sole anchors of solidity and calm in the whole tumult. (80)

As ironic as we may find these observations in hindsight, they reflect generally held prejudices, widespread in the public opinion. Most Hungarian Jews were highly assimilated and played an important role in the intellectual and business life of the cities. In the following account, Susan Faludi, the US born daughter of a Hungarian Jew, recalls the experience of her elderly parent about the high level of pre-war integration:

Her history wasn't so Pollyanna. From the 1867 passage of Jewish Emancipation Act, granting Jews Civic and political equality, until the 1920 signing of the Treaty of Trianon, an extraordinary set of circumstances led to the ‘Golden Age’ of Hungarian Jewry. The era yielded spectacular opportunity for the bourgeois Jewish population. And unprecedented acceptance. For a significant subset of the country’s Jews in that period, it seemed possible to be ‘100 percent Hungarian.’ Our family was among them. A century before my father changed gender, her forebears had crossed another seemingly unbreachable border. (87)

During the Golden Age of Hungarian Jewry, bourgeois Jewish families were able to integrate fully into the texture of city life, ‘it seemed possible to be 100 percent

Hungarian.’ Some of these families, like Faludi’s were wealthy, others like Kertész’s were less so. Yet, independent of their financial status, many bourgeois families enjoyed the “unprecedented acceptance” and prioritized their Hungarian identity over their Jewish one.

In this social context it is understandable that the first time the young protagonist of *Fatelessness* and his mates ever hear Yiddish is when they meet the inmates of Auschwitz. As a matter of fact, Kertész later affirms in his memoir, *Dossier K*, that the Holocaust made him Jewish:

What made me Jewish was the Holocaust, and that is a new phenomenon in Europe. [...] I would have had a hard job discussing Jewish metaphysics, Jewish culture, or Jewish literature with you because I am not acquainted with these things. In that sense I am not Jewish at all. Yet that is of no interest to anyone the moment I am taken off to Auschwitz. (116)

“What made me Jewish was the Holocaust” summarizes the experience of highly integrated urban Jewry in Hungary, who considered themselves to be part of Hungarian culture and did not take part in Jewish life. His experience is no way unique among Hungarian and Eastern European urban Jews. In *Sepharad*, we find a similar recollection of feeling Jewish for the first time during the Holocaust. This time a Sephardic Jew narrates his life-story as follows:

A mí me hizo judío el antisemitismo. Durante un tiempo aún podía ser como una enfermedad secreta, que no lo excluye uno de la comunidad con los demás porque no se revela en signos exteriores, en manchas o pústulas que pueden condenarlo como a un leproso en la Edad Media. Pero un día, en 1941, tuve que coserme una estrella de David amarilla en la pechera de mi abrigo, y desde entonces la enfermedad ya no podía ser escondida. (549)

[No, it was anti-Semitism that made me a Jew. For a time my Jewishness was like a secret illness that doesn't exclude a person from contact with others because it isn't revealed in external signs, not like the lesions or pustules that condemned you as a leper in the Middle Ages. But one day in 1941 I had to sew a yellow Star of David on the upper chest of my upper coat, and from then on, the illness could not be hidden. (353)]

'No, it was anti-Semitism that made me a Jew' replicates Kertész's and his protagonist's experience; one has no power to decide or any agency in the matter: it is the Nazi Laws that identify one as Jewish.

It is no wonder that it takes time for Gyuri, an assimilated middle-class Jew to understand the inconceivable reality: "At the very beginning, I still considered myself to be what I might call a sort of guest in captivity—very pardonably and, when it comes down to it, in full accordance with the propensity to delusion that we all share and which is thus, I suppose, ultimately part of human nature." (102) It takes a full day for him to comprehend where he is. He gradually becomes aware of both his prisoner status and the fate of his fellow citizens: "I would be prepared to swear that I didn't exchange a word with any stranger on the walk, yet it was to this that I can truly ascribe my more precise understanding of the facts. There across the way, at that very moment fellow passengers were burning." (108) The revelation is presented in a dry, unsentimental style, and without any comments.

Before The Camp: The Non-Jewish Experience

In contrast to the dilemma of Hungarian Jews, who are suddenly singled out, the narrator of *The Long Voyage* merely questions the term used by the French to refer to him, and not the essence of his identity. The narrator muses about the meaning of

nationalism recalling the first time he was called a Spanish Red after passing the border and arriving in France:

It was at Bayonne, on the docks next to the main square of Bayonne, that I learned I was a Spanish Red. The next day I got my second surprise, when we read in the newspaper that there were Reds and Nationalists. Why were they Nationalists when they fought the war using Moroccan troops, the Foreign Legion, German planes and the Littoro divisions, was more than I could fathom. That was one of the initial mysteries of the French language I had to decipher. (104)

The narrator expresses surprise and gives his own views on the matter. His comments stand in stark contrast with the apathy of Gyuri, the protagonist of *Fatelessness*. Nevertheless, those terms were to stay, today, 80 years after Franco's coup and the start of the Spanish Civil War, Franco's side is still referred to as the Nationalists. The narrator merely questions the use of a term that he considers equivocal and consequently characterizes as the "mystery of the French language". There is no hint of self-doubt in his statement; the term is a result of misunderstanding by foreigners.

Initially, *The Long Voyage* focuses on the resistance fighters, who had been arrested as a consequence of their free decision to join the maquis and fight the Nazis in France:

Because the historical essence common to all of us who are being arrested in this year 1943 is freedom. We, who can be so dissimilar, resemble each other, we become identified with one another, to the extent we partake of this freedom. And it is to the extent that we partake of this freedom that we get ourselves arrested. [...] I am in prison because I'm a free man, because I found it necessary to exercise my freedom, because I accepted this necessity. (44-45)

The option of choosing offers a fundamental difference between the Jews arrested and the resistance fighters arrested. Resistance fighters deliberately decided to go clandestine and

by fighting the Nazis, they were aware of the possibility of arrest and death, hence the appearance of freedom. The Jewish population, in contrast, tried to continue their everyday lives, they did not have the sovereignty to choose, their circumstances suddenly changed, they found themselves outside the legal protection of the state without a single action, by the mere fact of their origin, often unimportant or even unknown to them.

Semprún's writing presents the Jewish perspective gradually. He confirms that he had no information about the fate of European Jews in the winter of 1943, and by delaying this information, he mirrors the process of this knowledge reaching him. He depicts the different conditions of Jewish and non-Jewish prisoners, such as he himself:

Later in a few months, I'll know what kind of voyages they made the Jews take. [...] I saw the trainloads of Jews arrive, the transports of Jews evacuated from the Polish camps. [...] When they arrived, when they pulled back the sliding doors, nobody moved. They had to pry loose the frozen mass of corpses, the Polish Jews dead standing up—they fell like tenpins onto the station platform of the camp—in order to find the few survivors. (97)

The narrator avoids using precise terms at the beginning, he merely refers to the “voyages they make the Jews take,” perhaps to resemble the perception of many Jews, who embarked on the journey without knowing where the trains would take them. The horrors of arrival are vividly described, “the frozen mass corpses” demonstrate the fate of the deported.

Why does Semprún give abundant details about his life before his deportation and why are those details largely missing from the testimonies of Holocaust survivors? The answer lies in the different social context of the deportations: Semprún is proud of his past as a resistance fighter, and chose to break the rules of a totalitarian regime to fight

against it. He and his fellow fighters were aware of the possibility of state repression. At the same time, those who were deported merely because of their Jewishness could not foresee the repression, since it broke social conventions. Their punishment was not related to their actions, but to the very fact of their existence. As most of us have the tendency to narrate and memorialize the unusual, the details of everyday life did not make it to the accounts of survivors.

The Long Voyage and *Fatelessness* offer a similar perception of the inmates of the camp by the outside world: they are seen as criminals. Most Nazi extermination camps did not function in isolation; they were built in the outskirts of villages and towns, and were plainly visible to the inhabitants. Buchenwald was built near Weimar, Auschwitz in the outskirts of Oświęcim and Majdanek in the outskirts of Lublin. Inmates and townspeople were mutually able to look through the barbed wire fences and glimpse life on the other side. The following quote reflects on the relationship between people inside and outside the barbed wire fence:

But how did they perceive us? There must have been some very good reason why we were locked in a camp, why, winter and summer, they made us work from sunrise, or even before. We were criminals whose crimes must be particularly heinous. That's how these peasants must have seen us, if indeed they even did see us, if they were actually aware of our existence. (121)

The phrase “We were criminals, whose crimes must be particularly heinous” expresses the same idea we have seen in Gyuri’s first encounter with the inmates: the notion that innocent people may be imprisoned and murdered behind barbed-wire remains inconceivable for large parts of the society.

Another common element in the narratives is that both Semprún and Kertész refer back to their school memories in great detail. These memories evoke normality, an innocent time, not so long ago, when life centered around learning lessons and infuriating teachers.

In school, at the Henry IV Lycée, we used to give the geography professor a rough time, my memory of the Moselle valley certainly can't come from there. I don't believe I learned a single geography lesson that whole year. Bouchez was furious with me. How is it possible for the head of the class in philosophy not to have any interest in geography? (11)

The evocation of these everyday memories signals continuity, it indicates that the everyday life of an ordinary student may transform so profoundly that he finds himself in a crowded boxcar, in route to a German death camp, without food and drink, crammed together with 120 other people. The Moselle Valley, a geographic location provides anchor in a world, where the rules of normal life do not apply any more. It reminds us that the world used to be a well-regulated place, where maps and school lessons clearly indicated the rules and conventions governing everyday existence. The quote also contains a reference to perceived intellectual superiority, "head of philosophy," a trait underlined in many subsequent conversations.

The 20 year old protagonist in *The Long Voyage* and Kertész's 14 year old Gyuri Köves share a certain youthful innocence, they are always the last to discover what is going on around them. The following dialogue takes place in the train between Semprún and the guy from Semur: 'But no one knows where we're going.' 'Of course we know. How did you spend your goddamn time at Compiègne? We know we are going to Weimar.' In Compiègne I spent my goddamn time sleeping. (18) Though, at the same

time in *The Long Voyage* the narrator displays a deeper understanding of the “bigger picture” than his interlocutor. The following dialogue demonstrates that he is ready to challenge the national myths and reveal the truth:

He looks at me taken aback.

‘French camps in France?’

‘Of course,’ I repeat, not Japanese camps. French camps, in France. [...]

This revelation upsets him. But he quickly recovers.

‘Have to explain to me, pal,’ he says. [...]He doesn’t question my statement, but it doesn’t fit in with his idea of things. His is a strictly elementary notion, with all good on one side and all the evil on the other.

(19-20)

The man is taken aback to discover the truth the narrator discloses and ‘explains’ to him. He has a ‘strictly elementary notion’ of the world, unlike the narrator who, in contrast, perceives the complexities and does not share the simplistic view of ‘us’ the good ones, versus ‘them’ the bad ones. The man from Semur is better prepared for the train journey, he knows that they are heading towards Germany and brought toothpaste with him to mitigate thirst, he generously shares his apples, yet the twenty-year-old narrator understands better the bigger picture and the ultimate reasons behind everybody’s actions, and he is always ready to explain and open the eyes of his interlocutors. As the guy from Semur puts it: ‘You,’ he says, ‘always have a ready-made answer for everything.’ These examples demonstrate that despite his young age, the narrative voice presents a certain “superior” understanding of the events. This narrative perspective contrasts starkly with Gyuri’s struggles to understand what’s going on around him. Gyuri limits himself to acknowledging his new surroundings with an adolescent shrug, and without the slightest intention to understand or explain the bigger picture.

After Liberation, Jews and Non-Jews, Similar Forms of Exclusion

The stark difference between the Jewish and non-Jewish experience before the concentration camp diminishes after returning to an unwelcoming and uncomprehending society. In *Fiasco* (1988), the second book of Kertész's Holocaust trilogy, the author summarizes living the terror of a Nazi concentration camp and its consequences:

Köves's life [...] there was no denying it, hit rock-bottom. [...] It may have begun at birth—or no, rather with his death, or to be more accurate, his rebirth. For Köves had survived his own death; at a certain moment in time when he ought to have died, he did not die, although everything had been made ready for that, it was an organized, socially approved, done deal." (125-126)

The half sentence 'It was an organized, socially approved, done deal' perfectly sums up the responsibility of the society in making the annihilation of the Jewish population possible.

The "painful sense of provisionality" refers to the struggles of the individual to carry on with his life.

Semprún illustrates the normalization of the abnormal, the familiarization of the unnatural in a similar fashion. Murder, crematoria, torture become part of everyday life, and the only reality available for those who had been abruptly torn out normality, as we understand it today: "The unreal, the absurd became familiar. In order to survive, the organism has to adhere closely to the reality, and the reality was actually this totally *unnatural* world of the prison and death. But the real shock occurred when I returned from this voyage." (69)

The process of return is complicated; the survivors feel "like fish out of water." Their stories sound "ridiculous" around a lavishly laid dinner table:

I still don't know the Moselle wine. It was only later, in Eisenach, that I tasted it. On my way back from this journey. At a hotel in Eisenach where they had set up the repatriation center. A strange evening, that first evening of repatriation. Enough to make you sick. The fact is we were like fish out of water. That readaptation period was necessary, no question about it, to reacquaint us with the ways of the old world. (16)

The wine represents the continuity of everyday life and order, "the old world" from which the narrator was abruptly detached, and to which he needs to return. The journey serves as the point of reference, the phrase "I still don't know the Moselle wine," recreates the circumstances and the mental state of the 'before the death camp' and contrasts it with the 'after.' It leaves us with the impression that it is indeed possible to recreate the exact feelings and memories of the journey to the death camp, sixteen years after the liberation of the death camp. The following quote demonstrates the lack of interest survivors face when they try to communicate the horrors of the Nazi death camps:

Everyone doing his job. The German headwaiters doing their job as German headwaiters. The girls from various countries doing their jobs as girls from various countries. And we doing our job as survivors of the death camp. A little like fish out of water, admittedly, but quite dignified, our skulls shaved, our striped burlap trousers shoved down into the boots we retrieved from the S.S. warehouses. Out of place, but impeccably correct, telling our stories to these French officers who were pawing at girls. Our ridiculous recollections of crematoriums and interminable row calls in the snow. Then we sat down around a table to have dinner. (16-17)

The Moselle wine also represents new knowledge, gained after liberation from Buchenwald. The Moselle wine, and wine drinking stands in sharp contrast with our shaved skulls, our striped burlap trousers, and our ridiculous recollections of crematoriums. The constant repetition of the personal pronoun *our* highlights the difference between "our" experience as death camp survivors, and the world symbolized

by the wine, the hotel, and dinner on the table. The participants of the “old world” show no interest in listening to the testimony of the survivors, who in turn feel alienated and out of place. Thomas Trezise, a literary scholar, argues that survivors essentially needed an attentive audience to recover their voice in the first person singular, a voice that had been denied to them during the Nazi regime. Trezise states that “To begin with, recovering the voice meant finding the attentive listener or listeners to whose scarcity or absence victims might well have become so accustomed as to doubt the very possibility of ever being heard again.” (78) The phrase “everyone doing his job” resembles the stoic acceptance and style of Gyuri, the protagonist of *Fatelessness*: survivors accept as natural that no one is interested in their story. While the ordinary members of the society and the soldiers are able to continue with their everyday life following the war, the recently liberated inmates of Buchenwald are not. This small conversation fragment reveals how the story of survivors remains inaudible for the soldiers, the official representatives of the victorious powers.

Return to life in no way resembles a fairy tale, when the suffering ends and life becomes perfect. On the contrary, survivors have to deal with several challenges, such as bureaucracy, which often takes unexpected and humiliating turns. Even though Semprún had fought in the French resistance and was imprisoned in Buchenwald as a result, as a Spanish refugee he was not entitled for repatriation help. He takes the position of an observer and chronicler, in contrast, his companion enters into a discussion with the administrator:

Haroux bursts into a violent laugh.
'Administration my balls,' he says. 'And you think that's just dandy?'
'But it's not my job to think, monsieur,' she says.
'You have no personal opinion on the matter?' Harioux asks spitefully.
'If I had to have personal opinions, monsieur, there would be no end to it,'
she says, sincerely shocked. 'I confine myself to carrying out the
Administration's orders,' she adds. (110)

This conversation strikingly resembles the justifications Nazi soldiers and the members of the state administrations, who readily collaborated with the Nazi occupiers, gave after the war: we were following orders. The ex-prisoners, who were powerless against the Nazi administration, remain powerless against the French administration, whose members consider adhering to the rules their first priority. In the subsequent discussion the narrator's friend and the administrator react in different ways: Haroux expresses himself "in strong words and with a few pointed reflections concerning the state of France" while the "blond woman" talks "in a noncommittal tone. It's a matter which concerns her administratively; she doesn't have to take sides." (112)

The contrast between the strong words and the noncommittal, administrative tone expresses the inhumanity and soullessness of bureaucracy and state functionaries. The following quote suggests that there is no major difference between the occupying Nazis and French collaborators "between these characters from the Gestapo and the Vichy cops": "There's no difference. They are both equally kraut, that is, one is no more kraut than the other. There may be some slight differences of degree, method, or technique; there is no difference in kind." (38) Here the narrative voice equates the actions of the Vichy regime with those of the Nazi regime, stating that "There is no difference. They are both equally kraut." Kraut, a derogatory term to refer to Germans, expresses that the

members of the French police share the cruelty and oppression that characterizes the Nazi soldiers. These similarities in the attitudes of German and French authorities both before and after the end of World War II illustrate that some struggles continue after the liberation of the concentration camp, there is no new beginning.

A similar idea about the lack of a new beginning is present in *Fatelessness*. Right after his return to Budapest from Buchenwald, the 15-year-old Gyuri Köves expresses his doubts about the possibility of a new beginning and reintegration into society when he is talking to former neighbors:

‘Before all else,’ he declared, ‘you must put the horrors behind you.’ Increasingly amazed, I asked, ‘Why should I?’ ‘In order,’ he replied, ‘to be able to live,’ at which Uncle Fleischmann nodded and added, ‘Live freely,’ at which the other boy nodded and added, ‘One cannot start a new life under such a burden,’ and I had to admit he did have a point. Except I didn’t quite understand how I could wish for something that was impossible, and indeed I made the comment that what had happened had happened, and anyway, when it came down to it, I could not give orders to my memory. I would only be able to start a new life, I ventured, if I were to reborn or if some affliction, disease or something of the sort were to affect my mind, which they surely didn’t wish on me, I hoped. (256)

Gyuri’s words reveal the stupidity and the impossibility of the notion to start a new life. Life, –like history– does not consist of separate, neatly dividable periods; it is continuous and builds up on all our previous experiences. This is the first time the young narrator expresses amazement, and offers an opinion. The adolescent, who has accepted everything with a shrug, finally grew up. New beginning is deceptive on both the individual and collective levels, since it helps covering past crimes and assures impunity.

Gyuri’s reaction is a good example of *Fatelessness* breaking with the false idea of new beginning, and interweaving the past and present into a continuum. György Spiró

explains this concept as follows: “the peacetime and wartime world are structurally identical, and [...] Auschwitz, far from being a tragic twentieth-century slip-up on the part of “normal” society, was its logical consequence. [...] Kertész was able to delineate his hero’s trajectory from a false peacetime into the camp, and back again from there to an equally false peacetime, within the large-scale form of a novel.” (Web)

In contrast with the constant questions and incomprehension of Gyuri, in *The Long Voyage* we hear the voice of the omniscient narrator, his statements don’t leave room for doubt, they are imparted as the ultimate truth and wisdom:

The village is expelling us, it’s casting out the sound of our boots, our presence which offends its tranquility, its ignorant, good conscience, its casting out our striped clothing, our shaved skulls, our Sunday look which used to gaze at the life outside, in this village. And then, in a trice, it wasn’t the life outside, it was only another way of being inside the same world of systematic oppression, consistent to the very end, of which the camp was the expression. (121-122)

A few days later, it will be impossible for the villagers to maintain their distance through closed curtains, since the American troops decide to take the inhabitants of Weimar to the Buchenwald camp:

Because they did see the camp, for Christ’s sake, they actually did see it, they had to see what was going on, even if they didn’t want to know. In three or four days the Americans are going to take several contingents of Weimar residents to the camp. They are going to show them the quarantine camp, filled with the stench of the ill and infirm, who are still dying. They are going to show them the crematorium, [...] Then the women from Weimar, in their new spring finery, and the men from Weimar, with their professor- and grocer-like glasses, will start to cry, start to scream that they didn’t know, that they aren’t responsible. (140)

The temporal shift of referring back to a certain point of time in the past as a point of reference and re-creating the atmosphere of that day by contrasting it with events in the

future, –which is of course equally past from the moment of writing,– captures the sudden turn of fates and power. In theory, the moment of accountability finally came. The ‘women in new spring finery’ and ‘professor- and grocer-like glasses’ represent ordinary life that continued outside the concentration camp and show how ordinary people react to direct exposure to the horrors of the concentration camp.

Memories: Bridges and Barriers

Both Kertész and Semprún wrote their first accounts of the death camps several decades later. The trauma of witnessing the Holocaust may explain this delay. According to Cathy Caruth, a literary scholar and expert on trauma, a traumatic event is “not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated *possession* of the one who experience it. (4) She explains in Freudian terms that the event returns “insistently and against their will” (5) Thus, according to Caruth it is impossible to fully witness an event in the moment of trauma; it is only possible to narrate it in retrospect, after a period of “inherent latency”. (8)

In 1994 Semprún finally decided to narrate his struggles with the memories of Buchenwald concentration camp. He summarizes his struggles as follows: “La escritura me encerraba en la cláusula de la muerte, me asfixiaba en ella, implacablemente. Había que escoger entre la escritura y la vida, y escogí esta última.” (*Federico Sánchez* 29) [Writing incarcerated me in with death, I was suffocating, and could not escape. I had to choose between death and life, and I chose the latter.] He refers to the suicide of Primo Levi in 1987 to emphasize the intensity and dangers of remembering: “... un domingo, la primera noticia que oí por la radio fue la del suicidio de Primo Levi, en Turín. La muerte

antigua le había alcanzado a él. Sabía pues, a qué atenerme. Sabía que estaba en juego en el libro por venir.” (28) [...one Sunday, the first thing I heard on the radio was the suicide of Primo Levi in Turin. Death finally reached him. So, I knew what to expect. I knew what was at stake in writing the book to be.] Writing requires remembering, and continuing with life requires forgetting. These struggles are in the center of *Literature or Life*, Semprún’s later book, to which he originally gave the title *Literature or Death*.

Dori Laub, a psychoanalyst interviewing Holocaust survivors and another prominent scholar of trauma studies, claims that survivors need “to tell their story in order to survive. There is in each survivor an imperative need to *tell* and thus to come to *know* one’s story, unimpeded by ghosts from the past against which one has to protect oneself. One has to know one’s buried truth in order to live one’s life. This imperative to tell and be heard can become itself an all-consuming life-task.” (63) Semprún’s fight against the ghost of the traumatic past manifests itself in the phrase ‘I was suffocating, and I could not escape.’

Kertész and Semprún share the agony of remembering and the impossibility of leaving these memories behind. Kertész resumes the agony of constant remembering as follows:

A strange ecstasy took hold of me; I lived a double life: my present—albeit half-heartedly, reluctantly, and my concentration-camp past—with the acute reality of the present. [...] Auschwitz was present here, inside me, sitting in my stomach like an undigested dumpling, its spices belching up at the most unexpected moments. It was sufficient for me to glimpse a desolate locality, a barren industrial area, a sun-baked street, the concrete pilings of a newly started building to breathe in the raw smell of pitch and timber, for ever-newer details, input and moods to well-up with the force of actuality. For a time, I awoke each morning on the barrack forecourt at Auschwitz.” (73-74)

Comparing Auschwitz to an undigested dumpling, the memories coming up to belching up, none of these images correspond to the highly elevated tone most use to remember Auschwitz. Remembering is not chronological, and the memories do not fade with the passing of the time. This is a perfect example of palimpsestic memory at work, various phrases refer to the simultaneous presence of past and present, and express a never-ending trauma: “concentration camp past” is the “acute reality” of the present, “the slightest impression was enough to hurtle me back to the past,” “I awoke every morning on the barrack forefront at Auschwitz.” Whereas Semprún opts for a circular narrative technique which reflects the nature of traumatic memory, Kertész only comments on the process, and refuses to represent the past from the perspective of the present moment.

Before examining the challenges of narrating the horrors of the Holocaust, we should look into the possibility of narration. We have already discussed that trauma studies scholars believe that traumatic experiences may only be shared belatedly, but some, like the philosopher Giorgio Agamben, considered that it was impossible to give a true account of what happened, since the true witnesses, the Muselmanns, who were deprived of their humanity, could no longer speak. The survivors, who could speak could not be considered true witnesses according to Agamben, because they have not experienced the absolute bottom. His famous statement notwithstanding, Agamben has advocated in favor of narrating the experience and against unsayability: “Why confer on extermination the prestige of the mystical?” he asked, and explained that “those who assert the unsayability of Auschwitz today should be more cautious in their statements. If they mean to say that Auschwitz was a unique event in the face of which the witness

must in some way submit his every word to the test of an impossibility of speaking, they are right.” (32)

Another famous statement regarding the representation of the Holocaust is Adorno’s “To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric.” In answering his own question, “*What is your opinion about Adorno’s renowned dictum ‘To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric?’*” Kertész argues in *Dossier K.* that “I can’t imagine how as keen an intellect as Adorno could suppose that art would renounce portraying the greatest trauma of the twentieth century. It’s true, though that the industrialized murdering of millions cannot serve as a basis for aesthetic pleasure, as it were, but surely that doesn’t mean one ought to regard the poetry of, say, Paul Celan or Miklos Radnóti as barbaric?” (106) Thus, Kertész clearly refuses the notion that art has no function after Auschwitz, and agrees with those who offer a more nuanced interpretation of Adorno’s statement.

Both Semprún and Kertész narrate their struggles to share the experience of the concentration camps and the near impossibility of writing about the horrors. Kertész puts it as follows:

Yet, slowly something nevertheless was taking shape inside me. If I distinguish it from the mild dizziness caused by walking and from other contingent impressions, I discover a definable feeling. I suppose my state of affairs was materialising in it. It would be hard to put it into words—and that’s exactly the point: it settles itself in spaces that lie outside of words. It cannot be couched in an assertion, nor in a bald negation either. I cannot say that I don’t exist, as that is not true. The only word with which I could express my state, not to speak my activity, does not exist. I might approximate it by saying something like “I amn’t.” Yes, that’s the right verb, one that would convey my existence—if, as I say, there were such a verb. But there isn’t. I could say, a bit ruefully, that I have lost my verb. (77)

“It would be hard to put it into words” comments Kertész, and concludes that the only verb to express what he means is actually a non-existing one, I amn’t. By creating a new verb, he assumes that new forms of language are necessary to narrate a previously unknown human experience.

In contrast, Semprún explicitly states that we do have the words to express every possible experience, including the most inhumane ones. He poses the same questions: “Mais peut-on raconter? Le pourrait-on? Le doute me vient dès ce premier instant.” (*Literature or Life* 25), [“But can the story be told? Can anyone tell it? From that first moment, I’m filled with misgivings.” (13)], and gives a different answer:

Pourtant, un dout me vient sur la possibilité de raconter. Non pas que l'expérience vécue soit indicible. Elle a été invivable, ce qui est tout autre chose, on le comprendra aisément. Autre chose qui ne concerne pas la forme d'un récit possible, mais sa substance. Non pas son articulation, mais sa densité. Ne parviendront à cette substance, à cette densité transparente que ceux qui sauront faire de leur témoignage un objet artistique, un espace de création. Ou de récréation. Seul l'artifice d'un récit maîtrisé parviendra à transmettre partiellement la vérité du témoignage. (25)

[Yet, I start to doubt the possibility of telling the story. Not that what we lived through is indescribable. It was unbearable, which is something else entirely (that won’t be hard to understand), something that doesn’t concern the form of a possible account, but its substance. Not its articulation, but its density. The only ones who will manage to reach this substance, this transparent density, will be those able to shape their evidence into an artistic object, a space of creation. Or of re-creation. Only the artifice of a masterly narrative will prove capable of conveying some of the truth of such testimony. (13)]

The aim is not to create a new reality, but to re-create an experience, in order to make it understandable, to better reflect its true nature. The artifice, that is to say artistic re-creation is necessary to preserve the very essence of the experience, and to make it

accessible for the living, making art the primary means of transmission. In Semprun's opinion, adhering to the factual truth does not give back the true nature of the experience that is why history is not the adequate means to talk about the Holocaust. These ideas also appear in the novels themselves, for example in a conversation among survivors in *Literature or Life*: "Later historians will collect, classify, analyze this material, [...] Everything will be said, put on record [...] Everything will be true [...] except that they won't contain the essential truth, which no historical reconstruction will be ever able to grasp. [...] The essential truth of the experience, cannot be imparted [...] it can be imparted only through literary writing." (124-125) The authenticity of the testimony does not depend on the accuracy of all the details, rather the veracity of the experience as a whole. According to Semprún only literature and art can express the essence, the most evil and incomprehensible part of the Holocaust, thus re-creating reality may make communication between "the living and the returning" possible.

Both Semprún and Kertész choose to deliver their experience and message in a carefully constructed way, using both autobiographical elements and fiction, yet Semprún always regarded his works containing a mix of true and fictional events as memoirs, while Kertész insisted that *Fatelessness* was a novel and not an autobiography, despite the coincidences between his own life and that of the protagonist.

Marie Peguy remarks that while action and struggle occupy a central place in Semprún's autobiographical fiction, the protagonists and narrators of Kertész remain passive and inactive. They limit themselves to observing and experiencing the world, without offering comments, thus rendering a feeling of objectivity to the narrations. The

narrative voices of Semprún, in contrast, always try to find and interpret the ultimate meaning behind the tragic events. This search results in reflecting the subjectivity and the “soul” of the experience. While Kertész expects the reader to make connections and use their historic knowledge, Semprún carries out this task for them, offering his solutions.

The Long Voyage may be read both as a novel and a memoir. Most maintain that it is a fictionalized account of the journey to Buchenwald. I read the book as memoir, since I share Semprún’s often reiterated belief that using fiction may be a more appropriate and powerful way to express the truth. In 1960, in one of his clandestine journeys to Spain, Semprún visited a member of the underground communist movement, and a survivor of Mauthausen “which was a very harsh Austrian camp.” Semprún describes his experience of listening to the experience of a survivor of Mauthausen concentration camp and explains the reasons for writing *The Long Voyage* in an interview: “In the evenings, he told me about his experience at Mauthausen. But I did not think that he was able to convey the experience as I had understood it at Buchenwald, a similar sort of camp. [...] This frustration gave me the impulse to look back on the past. I began writing my first book, *The Long Voyage*, in that apartment.” (“The Art of Fiction.” Web)

Semprún elaborates his *ars poetica* as well:

I will always defend the legitimacy of literary fiction in expounding historical truth. In the case of deportation, both Jewish and non-Jewish, it is simply not possible to tell, or write, the truth. The truth we experienced is not credible, and this is a fact the Nazis relied upon in terms of their own legacy, for future generations. If we tell the raw, naked truth, no one will believe us. This is why I mentioned Manolo in that Madrid apartment. He was telling the raw truth, which was incomprehensible because it was

bereft of verisimilitude. It needed to acquire a human shape, an actual form. (“The Art of Fiction.” Web)

In Semprún’s view fiction serves to look for a different kind of truth than history, thus we should not mistake ‘diction’ (artistic means of creation) for ‘fiction’ (imagination), to use Gérard Genette’s terms.

Soledad Fox Maura states that “Semprún has been misclassified as a testimonial author, when what he in fact writes is a sophisticated autobiographical fiction, most akin to the picaresque.” (67) Fox Maura expresses concern that many readers conflate the hero protagonist of the Semprunian narrative with the real-life author, and “excerpts from his books are frequently cited and regarded as historical fact.” (69) Semprún’s Buchenwald accounts incorporate realities of Auschwitz: for example, Buchenwald did not have “Arbeit macht frei” inscribed over the gate, and unlike Auschwitz-Birkenau, it was not a Nazi extermination camp. Other accounts, for example about the infamous Ilse Koch, the camp commandant’s wife, are true, but Semprún could not have witnessed them since their time in Buchenwald did not coincide or overlap. According to Fox Maura Semprún continues the Spanish tradition of gifted story-tellers, the pícaros, to “acquire the social status that has always eluded him” through “clever self-fashioning” and recounting his life “selectively and artfully.” (67) Semprún portrays his experience and himself as unique and heroic. He appropriates widely-known realities “for the sake of narrative punch” (93), and avoids portraying himself as a victim. *The Long Voyage*, in all its Hemingway-esque coolness, is a brilliant play at a reluctant hero, a man of action and words he had always wanted to be, and about whom Malraux had written so beautifully.” (74) I experienced how successful Semprún’s self-constructed image was when I

repeatedly had to explain to an academic audience my choice of including Semprún's literary *oeuvre* in a work that discusses how ordinary people lived through the oppression of dictatorial regimes.

Interestingly, Kertész shares Semprún's ideas regarding truth-telling, and argues along the same lines. In *Dossier K*, Kertész explains his views as follows: "I don't know what the truth is, in any case. Truth-telling artists generally prove to be bad artists." (*Dossier K*, 161) Kertész criticized Semprún's book not for its use of fiction, but because he considered that Semprún 'did not convey the experience he had understood in Buchenwald.'¹⁰

Ruth Klüger, a survivor and Holocaust studies scholar, also weighs in on the relationship of truth and literature. She considers veracity and the "search for truth" the most important feature of Holocaust literature:

When fictional and historical categories become inextricably entangled, does it matter which is which? Of course it does. It is at the crux of Holocaust literature, which is more historical than any literature has ever been required to be and it's also what makes it as a genre so interesting. Fiction is not the best way to learn what happened; history does it better. But fiction searches for the truth; it employs invention, symbols, exemplary events, but not lies. Where there are lies, there is kitsch. [...] And since Holocaust literature is so close to what I call the outer edges of narrative possibility, we are quite unforgiving when we recognize the lie. (401)

Here Klüger elaborates on the same notion of truthfulness, as Semprún, using literary 'artifice.' Klüger's perception of history and fiction as "inextricably entangled" reflects a notion that though the two categories are interwoven, a clear line of separation must exist

¹⁰ I am intentionally paraphrasing the words Semprún used to explain how he wrote *The Long Voyage* as a response to Manolo's story.

between the two. History and fiction are not opposites, but complementary. Both history (historical accuracy) and fiction (invention, symbols, and exemplary events) are necessary elements of portraying the truth. Invention has a limited scope and purpose: it may only serve to better illustrate the reality of the concentration camps. Both Semprún and Klüger are looking for the affective truth of the experience, they regard art as an alternative means to express the truth. Klüger also touches on lies and kitsch, concepts that we will examine in the next chapter in connection with Javier Cercas' *The Impostor*. Cercas's biographical fiction centers on these concepts and examines the relationship of fiction and truth, giving an even more ambiguous answer than Semprún does.

Conclusion

Kertész and Semprún represent the Holocaust through different narrative techniques, yet both give readers important ways to relate to the individual traumas they have faced as well as the historic, collective, dimensions of these traumas. Their experiences of dictatorship are ideologically different, –some would claim opposite–, and Semprún writes as a witness to the Holocaust whereas Kertész writes as a survivor; yet both texts help us to understand how, in both France and Spain as in Hungary, survivors confront a spooked society in which people act and then perhaps almost become incapable of recognizing or acknowledging the traumas they carry with them.

The recent deaths of the two Buchenwald concentration camp survivors, Semprún's in 2011 and Kertész's in 2016 exemplify the process of living memory becoming history. Ruth Klüger resumes the main preoccupation of our days about preserving the memory of the Shoah after the death of the last survivors:

Who will tell us stories of what it was like? I want to answer: Relax, the living witnesses of every event in history have died and their memory has persisted thanks to writing and other recording devices. My answer is, what remains will be, as it always has been, the written word, whether history or invented stories, interpreted and absorbed by readers and listeners. [...] Living witnesses may provide a certain frisson, sometimes even a voyeuristic pleasure, but they are not needed to preserve memory. (“The Future of Holocaust Literature” 392)

Semprún and Kertész are no longer with us to tell their tragic life-story and in person, yet, their literary accounts remain with us. Ruth Klüger emphasizes that “At present, memory still haunts us because the fabric of society has been torn in our own time (or in the time of our parents and grandparents) [...]. The problem and perhaps its solution lies in the juncture where history and literature cross.” (392) The idea of the “torn fabric of society” or “broken textile” remains prevalent, reminding us that simply remembering may not be sufficient, the way of constructing our narratives of the past matters, too.

In the next chapter I will precisely look at “living witnesses.” Alice Zeniter’s *Gloomy Sunday* portrays the death of a living witness of the Holocaust, but in contrast with the optimistic scenario projected by Klüger, the grandfather’s written testimony is lost forever because his grandson does not know how to handle it. Javier Cercas’s *The Impostor* narrates the rise and fall of Enric Marco, a fake Holocaust survivor. His unprecedented popularity in Spain raises important issues of Holocaust commemoration and their interaction with the subsequent generations. Both *Gloomy Sunday* and *The Impostor* center on the responses of the next generations to the narratives of the Holocaust, and continues to look at the interaction of Holocaust and dictatorship memories in Spain and Hungary at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The

narratives of the dictatorship experience and the Holocaust share a constant presence of the ghosts of the past.

Jo Labanyi summarizes the three possible ways to deal with the ghosts of the past: to refuse to see them or shut them out, (what the official state discourse does in a dictatorship), to cling to them obsessively, “allowing the past to take over the present,” or to acknowledge their presence, and live with the traces of the past. (“History and Hauntology” 65-66)

Joan Ramon Resina adds that: “the dead who are not granted passage into the cultural beyond remain politically active. Unable to go on living themselves, the survivors become permanent reminders of a past no one wants to heed. Their broken lives are evidence that a state that does not bury the dead decomposes alongside corpses.” (*Disremembering the Dictatorship* 232) Though Resina refers specifically to the victims of Francoist terror, buried in mass graves, he talks about a much wider phenomenon. Evoking the example of Antigone, Resina describes a human anxiety, narrated since ancient times: the dead must be properly buried. This is impossible to do in the case of the Holocaust, hence an unfulfilled moral obligation to the dead remains, especially on the part of those who witnessed their death.

CHAPTER IV: GIANT POSTERS AND EMPTY PHOTO FRAMES: NEW MANIFESTATIONS OF MEMORY REPRESSION AND MEMORY RECOVERY IN POST-FRANCO SPAIN AND POST-COMMUNIST HUNGARY

Winds of Change, Shifting Narratives During the Transition to Democracy

Javier Cercas' *The Impostor* (2014) and Alice Zeniter's *Gloomy Sunday* (2013), the two novels I analyze in this chapter, both portray how the generations, that lived through the Franco dictatorship in Spain and the Soviet-style communist dictatorship in Hungary, either reinvent their past or keep silent about it following the dismantling of those dictatorships, obstinately refusing to answer the questions of the subsequent generations, be it family members, or strangers. Both novels reveal how the process of political transition to democracy failed to come to terms with the traumatic legacies of the past, and demonstrate how the publishing industry and publicity of capitalism insulates the population from facing the ghosts of the past.

Javier Cercas (1962-) gained international recognition with *Soldiers of Salamis* (2001), his first "relato real", or novel without fiction, scrutinizing the legacy of the Spanish Civil War. Ana Luengo, a literary scholar, attributes the huge success of *Soldiers of Salamis* to its aesthetic approach and commitment to the legacies of the Spanish Civil War. (255) Luengo emphasizes in her critical reflection that the novel contained all the necessary ingredients to become a best-seller at a time period, when interest in the recuperation of historical memory rises starkly.

Cercas himself explains that he discovered the influence of the past on the present writing *Soldiers of Salamis*: “Porque escribiendo *Soldados de Salamina* descubro que el pasado es una dimensión del presente. O sea el pasado forma parte del presente. Y sin el pasado el presente no se entiende.” (Cercas and Samson 158) This perception of the past and present as entering in a constant interaction reflects a palimpsestic notion of memory, where the past constantly interacts with the present. Interpreting the past as a means of understanding the present underscores the importance of collective memory and portrays a dynamic relationship between the past and present.

Alice Zeniter (1986-), a young academic and novelist, wrote *Gloomy Sunday*¹¹ (2013), her second novel while teaching French in Budapest. The novel interweaves various family stories told to her by Hungarian friends, and narrates a family saga from the Second World War to the present. The protagonist and narrator of Zeniter’s novel is Imre Mándy, a slightly awkward and ordinary character who comes of age during the transition period of the 1990s in Hungary. Zeniter’s novel depicts his quest to learn about the past of his family. Imre’s grandparents lived through the Second World War and his parents, Pál and Ildikó, were born shortly after the war. Imre lives through the transitional period of moving to a democracy, thus we get a glimpse into the life experiences of three different generations. In a sense it is four generations, as Imre eventually gets married,

¹¹ *Gloomy Sunday* (2013), the title of the book is a fragment from a famous/infamous song of Rezső Seress, which was widely translated into English as “Gloomy Sunday.” Billie Holiday sang the most famous version of this song in English. *Gloomy Sunday* was also the English title of *Ein Lied von Liebe und Tod* (1999, Rolf Schübel), where *Gloomy Sunday* is indeed a Song of Love and Death. Even though Zeniter’s book is not yet translated into English, I opted for the most frequently used translation of Seress’s “suicide song.”

and following the political transition period he has a daughter, Gréta. The history of the family unveils itself slowly, because Imre's grandfather, parents, and aunts are reluctant to answer his questions, even though the lack of communication within the family led to tragedies in the past.

It is clear from the beginning of the work that the family has dark secrets. Imre's grandmother, Sára, died in 1955, more than a decade before Imre's birth. The circumstances of her death remain hidden from Imre up until the transition period from dictatorship to democracy, when some of the well-kept family secrets resurface. The young Imre witnesses his grandfather getting drunk every year on May 2nd, singing "Gloomy Sunday", Rezső Seress' melancholic suicide song, which the grandfather himself qualifies as "filth", and its author as a "common criminal." The child Imre never receives an answer to his questions about his grandmother, so he treasures every memento that he finds about the past, like the photo of his grandparents on their wedding day, where his grandfather wears a gendarme uniform, or the child drawing with the word "Russian" figuring above the head of his father, Pál.

Eventually, Imre succeeds in penetrating deeper and deeper in his grandfather's past. The earliest, most deeply hidden, traumatic memory comes from the Second World War, when the grandfather participated in the deportation of Hungarian Jews. Then, at the end of the war soldiers of the Soviet Army violated his wife, Sára, and she became pregnant with Pál. Ten years later Sára committed suicide on a Sunday afternoon. The grandfather spent the next decades of his life mourning his wife, and living under a

Soviet-imposed dictatorship. These memories form a tragic palimpsest that gradually comes to the surface during the transition period to democracy.

While *Gloomy Sunday* focuses on the shifting narratives of the transition process in Hungary, *The Impostor* examines the narratives and myth-making of the transition process in Spain. Enric Marco, the protagonist of Cercas' novel, invented a glorious past for himself; he claimed to have fought with the Spanish Republicans during and after the Spanish Civil War, and to have been deported to the Nazi concentration camp of Flossenbürg. In fact, Marco was neither an anti-Francoist hero nor a survivor. He was a guest worker in Nazi Germany, who travelled there from his own free will in the framework of an official program of Francoist Spain to support the Third Reich. In contrast with his claims, he was not imprisoned for his political resistance during the Franco regime, but for committing robbery. In short, he is a liar, an impostor, and a fraud. The exposure of Marco's lies reveals the uneasy relationship of Spaniards with the memories of the Franco dictatorship, as well as the Holocaust. The same way as the Mándy grandfather in *Gloomy Sunday*, Marco embodies the intermingling of Holocaust and dictatorship memories.

Marco's rise to popularity and his downfall in 2005 are public events, widely covered in the media. Marco's story belongs to the public realm because it is not the members of his family, who search for his true past, but the members of the general public. *The Impostor* is based on numerous interviews with Enric Marco himself, his family and friends, as well as interviews with experts and colleagues, together with archival work in Spain and Germany. The 'novel without fiction' presents an epic battle

between truths and lies, that is to say between good and evil, where the writer –and the readers– represent the quest for the truth.

Joan Ramón Resina points out that the fall of the Berlin Wall not only called into question the previous discourses about the past, but also changed the economic landscape of Europe: “on both sides of the Iron Curtain, social thinkers and literary authors busied themselves with the present’s relation to the past—a past that was then beginning to look problematic after the sea of change of the Cold War and the full blast of consumerist capitalism.” (1) The economic aspect not only played a key role during the transition process in Eastern Europe, but also in Spain. Both *Gloomy Sunday* and *The Impostor* explore the connection between the “full blast of consumerist capitalism” and memory work during and following the political transition.

The logic of capitalism determines the fate of the Mándy family, as well as of Enric Marco. The mechanisms of the neoliberal economy play a pivotal role in both *Gloomy Sunday* and *The Impostor*. Benedict Anderson linked the birth of capitalism to the invention of printing and the resulting mass production of print media. In *The Impostor* this process is replicated, since it is because of the media and its pursuit of entertainment that Marco grows into a “veritable rock star of memory.” Capitalism is also at work in *Gloomy Sunday*, when the three-year-old daughter of Imre poses for a giant poster that publicizes the opening of one of the first shopping centers in Hungary. Both novels offer a critical perspective of neoliberalism by demonstrating the stark contrast between the ordinary life of the protagonists and the glorious image projected about them by the media. Analyzing these two novels together reveals similar struggles against

the consumerism of the neoliberal societies that convert the grim reality of the transition process into a simulacrum of shiny success, the battered old face of the grandfather is erased by the shining smile of her beautiful three-year-old great-granddaughter, and the cowardice of many everyday Spaniards is substituted by an appealing tale of heroism.

The Pact of Silence and Myth-Making in Spain After Franco

A political shift in the present almost always includes silencing or reconfiguring the past, and giving birth to new interpretations of previous historic periods. Though the upper echelons of the governing elite may face lustration or other forms of removal from the political sphere after a political shift, and the most compromised leaders disappear from power, most middle cadres simply adapt to the changes and stay in power. Political leaders and functionaries strive to maintain their power and relevance in the new regime. However, these functionaries operate in part by forgetting the past, and their role in supporting the old regime as quickly as possible.

The sharp division between victors and vanquished during Francoism is perhaps best illustrated by the opposing behaviors of the authorities towards the dead. While “the churches have been filled with plaques commemorating those ‘who had fallen in the service of God and the Fatherland,’” that is to say the Nationalist victims of the Spanish Civil War, their Republican counterparts, “never even had an insignificant tombstone to remember them by.” (Casanova 154) Paul Preston confirms as well that “during the years of dictatorship, the defeated in Spain had no public right to historical memory, living as they did in a kind of internal exile. Only after the death of Franco and the slow reconstruction of democracy did it become possible for there to be a process of recovery

of their historical memory.” (*Spanish Holocaust* 520) Yet, the process of recovering the memory of the vanquished in the political realm took several decades after the death of Franco, mostly because a ‘Pact of Silence’¹² was self-imposed. The new forms of memory repression during the transition process to democracy left lasting cultural legacies on the new democracy.

Paloma Aguilar defines the Pact of Silence as a tacit agreement between the political elites to avoid weaponizing the past, and states that “se produjo un esfuerzo deliberado, tan incuestionable y amplio que ni siquiera hubo de hacerse explícito, por sustraer del debate parlamentario los aspectos más espinosos del pasado,” (282) [a consistent, unquestionable and wide-reaching effort to exclude the thorniest issues of the past from the parliamentary debates was so strong, that there was no need to make it explicit.] While silence regarding the Spanish Civil War benefited all parties in the conflict, the silence about the crimes of the Franco dictatorship unequivocally favored the members and beneficiaries of the Franco dictatorship. (281) Julian Casanova, a historian, confirms that while Francoist propaganda blamed the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War on the Republicans, at the beginning of the transition process to democracy “a kind of moral equivalence in sharing out the blames for the causes of the war and violence unleashed.” (148) Casanova notes that the transition to democracy did not rectify the

¹² The term “Pact of Forgetting” appears in English texts as well. I opted for “Pact of Silence”, since it reflects the process more accurately. Spanish society did not forget, people remember past events. The thousands of books that appeared a quarter of a century later and the flaring up of debates about the past in the new millennium provide ample example of the persistence of memories. The political forces negotiating the transition agreed not to question the past and ensure impunity for the governing elite of Francoism.

exclusively negative Francoist narrative of the Republic, and failed to recover its more positive sides, “lumping together the Republic, the war, and the dictatorship, a tragic past it was better to forget. (148) It is precisely this blending together of separate pasts that gave way several decades later to the so-called memory boom. The political transition process failed to provide Spanish Republicans and their descendants with an opportunity to share their stories and perspectives.

These memories continued to be buried both figuratively and literally for several decades, and it was only during the so-called memory-boom when these memories finally surfaced, and the process of excavating the mass graves of the Republican victims started. The generation of grandchildren initiated a process of paying the moral debt towards the Republic. At the beginning of the new millennium, when the Asociación para la Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica (ARMH) [Association for the Memory of Historic Recovery] started unearthing mass graves, the ghosts of the past reappeared, and the Civil War became a hot issue again. Giles Tremlett, a British journalist living in Spain, describes the atmosphere as follows: “History, it suddenly became clear, was a Spanish battlefield. There was no generally accepted narrative for what had happened in the 30s. Nor, I would discover, was there agreement on whole other areas of the past. [...] Ideas of ‘them’ and ‘us’, of ‘if you are not my friend, you are my enemy’ were becoming increasingly powerful.” (xix) Spanish society remained profoundly divided, and the different interpretations of the past gave way to fiery debates.

By the time the excavation of the mass graves of the Spanish Civil War began in Spain in the twenty-first century, and remembering the Spanish Civil War became

omnipresent in artistic productions and the media, and the moment of “legislating history” arrived, Europeans have already had in place a cognitive framework to remember the Holocaust, the murder of millions of European Jews, and this framework influenced the way conversations about the Spanish Civil War emerged. To give an example the title of Paul Preston’s historical account about the Spanish Civil War, *The Spanish Holocaust, Inquisition and Extermination in Twentieth-Century Spain*, exemplifies this process. Preston shares his doubts and motivations to use the word ‘holocaust’. He settles on using the term because “those who justified the slaughter of innocent Spaniards used an anti-Semitic rhetoric and frequently claimed that they had to be exterminated because they were the instruments of a ‘Jewish-Bolshevik-Masonic’ conspiracy.” (xi) Preston demonstrates that similarly to the Holocaust, the mass killing of Spanish Republicans was also a “carefully planned operation to eliminate”, (xiii) systematically carried out by the victorious Franco regime that closely co-operated with Nazi Germany.

Paul Preston terms the objections of the opponents of exhumations as “near-hysterical rejection” (520) and points out that “those who have benefited from the dictatorship or merely been educated to accept its monolithic version of national historical memory”, go back to “the process of brainwashing, what in Spain is called sociological Francoism, and it lives on in the democratic Spain of today just as sociological communism exists in the countries of the old Soviet bloc.” (521) Here Preston draws a parallel between the aftermath of the Franco dictatorship and communism by claiming that Francoist –and Communist– values and ideologies,

imposed on the population by a fully controlled education system and public media, survive long after the dictatorship itself have collapsed.

One of the reasons why it took so long to question the narratives of the Franco period lies in the negotiated nature of the Spanish transition. Franco took every possible step to ensure the permanence of his system. Once Carrero Blanco, his originally designed successor was killed by the Basque terrorist organization ETA in 1973, Franco decided to restore the monarchy and named Juan Carlos de Borbón as his successor. At the same time, he took precautions to limit the political power and the possibility for maneuvering of the new monarch. However, after his death in 1975, a negotiation of transition procedure was initiated. It was a gradual change, supported by the majority of the population and always remaining within the legality of the institutional framework. Jorge Semprún emphasizes the gradual nature of the transition and draws a parallel between the processes of transition to democracy in Spain and in the countries of Eastern Europe: “La transición democrática se ha caracterizado en España [...] por su carácter gradual y pacífico. Habrá sido una «transición de terciopelo», para retomar la expresión un tanto remilgada la cual alguien ha calificado la revolución antitotalitaria de Praga, en 1989.” (*Federico Sánchez* 107) [The democratic transition in Spain has been characterized as gradual and peaceful. It has been a “Velvet Revolution,” to use the somewhat finicky phrase someone invented to describe the anti-totalitarian revolution in Prague.] Semprún contributes to the myth-making of the Spanish transition by considering it peaceful, and ignoring the violence of ETA or the execution of Salvador Puig Antich in 1974, who was a Catalan anarchist. Semprún considers that the Spanish

process was similar to the Eastern European transitions. Indeed, this is a unique feature among the Southern authoritarian regimes in Europe, since in Portugal the dictatorship ended with the Carnation Revolution and in Greece the military junta fell as a result of a coup d'état. Interestingly, Semprún does not use the Spanish transition as a model for Eastern Europeans, but reverses the chronology. He applies the later term to the earlier phenomenon, grasping the common factors between them that have led to the collapse of the two different systems.

In the context of present academic and social debates about the commemoration of the Spanish Civil War, an almost unanimous consensus exists about condemning the “Pact of Silence” during the political transition process and considering the “memory-boom” and the related legislation as belated and incomplete. Ofelia Ferrán, a literary critic, describes the ‘Pact of Silence’ as follows: “With the implicit silencing of the past, with this erasing of Spain’s collective memory, or memories, what was also denied was a much-needed critique of the authoritarian practices that had characterized the Franco regime, many of which, in disguised form, were to persist throughout, and perhaps beyond, the transition.” (196) Ferrán criticizes the Pact because silence made possible the forgetting of Francoist crimes, and contributed to the survival of Francoist legacies and institutions. Joan Ramon Resina observes that “There is scarcely a story more mythologized” than the process of the Spanish transition to democracy, even “Francoist myths pale by comparison with this story’s success.” (5) This critical observation provides the key to understanding the transition process to democracy in Spain.

The “Pact of Silence” substantially delayed facing the traumatic past in Spain, and for a long time, the narration of the Spanish transition as a success story and the strength of Spanish democracy were not questioned. Javier Cercas and Antonio Muñoz Molina are among the most well-known contemporary authors. Both of them have published numerous best-sellers, received important literary prizes, and publish regularly in the newspapers. Montse Armengou¹³, an internationally renowned documentary filmmaker for the Catalanian public TV channel, summarizes best the common attitude of the two well-established intellectuals in an interview:

We have already talked about a disconnect and a glass ceiling. I think writers like Muñoz Molina and Javier Cercas have played a role in that as well. Evidently, we cannot call these people reactionary, or even right-wing or revisionist. Of course not; they operate on a progressive wavelength. But there are moments when they, too, say “until here and no further.” Incidentally, where do these people publish? In *El País*. (Faber 123)

El País, according to Armengou “is among those most responsible for the kind of glass ceiling we have had in Spain. Some things simply will never be touched—including the monarchy, the Transition, the kind of democracy we have, and so on.” (123) In other words, Armengou considers that the historical memory work does not go far enough. Even though some filmmakers or newspapers, especially in the digital media, do pose the most relevant and troublesome questions, most of the mainstream academics, writers and newspapers, who have a profound influence on the public discourse do not pass an

¹³ Armengou has co-directed the award-winning documentaries *Los niños perdidos del franquismo* (2002), *Las fosas del silencio* (2003), translated into English as *The Spanish Holocaust*, and *El Convoy de los 927* (2004).

invisible line, hence the existence of the glass ceiling and the disconnect between the more marginal and the mainstream intellectuals.

In today's world of memory-booms, very few advocate in favor of forgetting. But David Rieff does exactly that in his recent essay, *In Praise of Forgetting*. Rieff questions our moral obligation to remember and states that remembering actually harms societies as it keeps historical wounds open. He also advocates for a top down gradual transition process, where the governing elite cooperates in the process. He argues that elites would respond negatively to any profound and radical transformation, thus no transition could take place since the elites would stop the process right at the beginning.

Hungary After Communism

In *Postwar*, acclaimed cultural historian Tony Judt highlights the suppression of memories in the East and reflects on the unresolved fissures within Europe in December 1989, shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall:

The very violence with which the Jews of Vienna had been expelled from their homes, shipped east from the city and stamped out of memory helped account for the guilty calm of Vienna's present. Post-war Vienna – like post-war Western Europe – was an imposing edifice resting upon an unspeakable past. Much of the worst part of that past had taken place in the lands that fell under Soviet control, which was why it was so easily forgotten (in the West) or suppressed (in the East). With the return of Eastern Europe, the past would be no less unspeakable: but now it would, unavoidably have to be spoken. After 1989 nothing –not the future, not the present and above all not the past –would ever be the same. (3)

A quarter of a century after the fall of the Berlin Wall it is obvious that the opportunity to recognize how this ugly past had permeated all of Europe was missed. Second, he points out that political shifts also bring changes in the official narratives.

In spring 1990, when I was preparing for my final exams in high school, I did not have history classes at all. We were supposed to learn about Hungarian history following the end of World War II. Nevertheless, with the collapse of communism, the interpretation of the recent past changed so radically that the previously used history books were simply thrown out. For example, April 4th had previously been celebrated as national holiday to commemorate the liberation of Hungary by the Soviet troops at the end of World War II. By 1990, however the date had become the beginning of the Soviet occupation of Hungary and stopped being celebrated. Another example is the year 1956, the anti-Soviet uprising, which previously was called counterrevolution and mentioned only as a footnote in the history books, gained new significance and became labeled a heroic revolution. Ignác Romsics, a Hungarian historian, captures the popular mood well in his summary of the events: “As head of the committees dealing with unearthing the recent past [...] Pozsgay¹⁴ gave an interview to reporters of the radio program *168 óra* that was nothing short of sensational.” (150) Pozsgay announced that October 1956 was “not a counter-revolution, but rather ‘a popular uprising against an oligarchic form of rule that had humiliated the nation.’ This appraisal questioned the self-image of the regime and its past to its very foundations.” (150) This statement was indeed sensational in January 1989, because it openly challenged the narrative of the Communist Party. It was an important step forward in transforming the ‘one party, one voice’ political system.

The first free elections in 1990 brought the victory of nationalism in Hungary, the ex-communist–now Socialist–party hardly got any votes. The situation was similar in

¹⁴ Imre Pozsgay was “the champion of the reform progress” (196), and one of the most influential figures of “Reform Communism” during the political transition.

many ex-communist countries. For the first time in 50 years, the opposition came to power. Susan Suleiman, who escaped from Hungary in 1949 and returned for a longer visit in 1993, captures the popular mood in her autobiographical book, *Budapest Diary*. Suleiman is observing a confused society, where the rules suddenly disappeared. The rules were hated, resisted, or even broken; nevertheless, they provided a clear framework for the people. The fragments of the conversations reiterated help us understand the key elements of Hungarian society, they reflect upon the most important aspects of the transition.

The first shock came when Hungarians discovered that being united against a common enemy does not automatically mean common goals. People, who were fighting and resisting communism together, suddenly discovered that they had completely opposing value systems, they imagined the future of Hungary in completely different ways. Emblematic figures of resistance suddenly became enemies; old friends stopped talking to each other. Suleiman cites one of her friends: “You have to understand, that it was in the good old days when we were all together in opposing the regime. Our opposition was so strong that none of us realized our differences. Only afterward did we split into two hostile camps.” (73)

In the 1994 elections the Socialist (ex-Communist) party got an overwhelming majority, which indicates the deep disappointment of Hungarians during the initial years of the political transition. Suleiman speaks about the results with one of her friends, András, who says: “I told you there is no going back. What worries me is whether they manage to turn the economy around. Because if they fail we’ll see the nationalists

bouncing right back, and strong this time.” He points to the colossal Russian soldier: “You see, ideology is not what interests people, whether Communist or nationalist. What they care about is the quality of their lives. They voted for the Socialists in the hope they would make things better. If they fail, the anger will be tremendous—and you know who always gets to play scapegoat when people become really frustrated and angry. We have seen it before, we may well see it again.” (218)

Today, more than 25 years later I am astonished by the clairvoyance of András: his prediction came true. The economic situation did not get better, and my dream of freedom became a nightmare of hatred, where frustrated people are looking for scapegoats. Tremlett’s description of the Spanish situation held true for Hungary as well, since there was no commonly accepted narrative of the thirties, the forties or the subsequent decades. Hungarians remained divided and strongly disagreed on the past, the present and the way forward. Imre Kertész expresses his disillusionment with the process of transition in *Dossier K.*, his autobiography:

I am one of those childishly gullible beings who at the time democracy was restored to Hungary supposed that with the cessation of abnormal living conditions everything and everybody would suddenly be normal. As a result, I fainted from one consternation to the next: lies, hatred, racism and stupidity erupted around me like a carbuncle that had been swelling for forty years and was finally lanced by the surgeon’s scalpel. (198)

Kertész emphasizes hatred, and the sudden burst of long-suppressed prejudices, as well. Though, in contrast with a carbuncle, an infection that heals once the surgeon treats it and its repulsive content gets out, hatred, racism and stupidity gain new strength when they appear in the open. Restoring democracy does not equal the surgeon’s scalpel, and does not provide a magic cure for all previous ailments.

This disillusionment is in no way unique to Hungary. Christa Wolf, a leading East German intellectual documents a similar change of mood in the streets a few weeks after the fall of the Berlin Wall in *Parting from Phantoms*:

Many East Germans are disoriented and are sinking into depression. Others throw fits of hatred and revenge to evade their understandable feelings of rage and disappointment, fear, humiliation, and unacknowledged shame and self-contempt. And what will happen to that group which is very vocal now which hopes to see its situation improve rapidly once it lets itself be swiftly and unconditionally annexed by that other Germany, which is great, wealthy, powerful, and fully functional? What political direction will they take if they find their expectations disappointed again? (11)

Wolf predicts accurately what was going to happen. East-Germans welcomed re-unification as the solution of all their economic problems, a new way of living, the opening of new possibilities, and becoming part of a free, rich and more just world. When the two parts of Germany were re-united the Western German system –both economic and political– was thrust on Eastern Germany, without giving the chance for East Germans to participate in the decision-making process. Today, more than a quarter of century after the re-unification, economic and cultural differences between the old and new Länder still persist.

Nothing demonstrates better the shattering of hopes than the re-appearance of the slogan chanted by the East German masses looking for freedom from the oppression of Communism: “We are the people.” After the regime change, the slogan was not used for a quarter of a century. In recent years, however, the same slogan appears ever more frequently in the manifestations of German alt-right groups. The cry for freedom transformed into a slogan of exclusion.

Beyond the Silence of Dictatorship in Hungary: *Gloomy Sunday*

The Mándy family and the Railway Station, An Uneasy Relationship

The three generations of the Mándy family live together in a small house, circled and locked by the railway lines of Western Railway Station (Nyugati Pályaudvar) in Budapest. The same way as ordinary Hungarians during communism, they are held prisoners by their circumstances, and are unable to leave or change their situation. They constantly look at the trains, regularly passing by their fence, which they are not able to take. The contrast between their immobility and the journeys in the outside world is painfully apparent.

The members of the family live in symbiosis with the Railway Station, which affects every aspect of their existence. Various members of the family work for the state railway company: Imre's mother, Ildikó, works as a cashier in the domestic ticket booth, Imre's father, Pál, operates a small food kiosk in the railway station, and Imre's grandfather used to work at the railway station as well. Imre's childhood best friend is the son of a conductor, whom Ildikó met at the railway station. At the same time, the railway lines keep the inhabitants of the small house prisoners, thus the railways may represent the oppression of the state, especially during the communist period. The child Imre views his family members who are working for the railway company as slaves: "Pour Imre, les membres de sa famille étaient des serfs que le seigneur ferroviaire avait réduits aux travaux forcés." (24) [Imre viewed his family members as slaves, whom Railway Master condemned to forced labor.] The term forced labor expresses the total lack of freedom, and evokes both the Nazi and the Stalinist camps of forced labor.

The members of the Mándy family have bourgeois dreams, the same way as the great-great-grandfather of Imre, who wanted to establish roots for his family when he constructed the small house. Imre's mother would love to transfer from the domestic ticket booths to the international ones: "Quant à Ildiko, elle s'occupait du guichet des voyages internationaux mais sous le régime communiste il y avait trop peu de voyageurs autorisés à sortir du pays pour qu'on puisse envisager la création d'un nouveau poste. Ildiko rêvait parfois à la mort de la rousse qui tenait l'international." (23) [Ildiko was working as a cashier for the domestic section. She was dreaming about transferring to the international section, but during communism very few passengers had the authorization to travel abroad, thus no one could hope for the establishment of a new post. Ildiko often imagined that the redhead working in the international suddenly dies.] Since very few people are allowed to travel internationally during this time, such positions remained extremely rare, that is why Ildikó regards the death of her colleague as the only way to take her place. Imre himself would love to have a huge flat with several rooms: "Il ne voulait pas rester à vivre au bord des rails, dans la peur de trains, à glisser sur les bouteilles des autres. Il deviendrait suffisamment riche pour acheter un grand appartement dans un immeuble bourgeois avec une porte en bois vert tendre et des vitraux sombres aux motifs floraux." (24) [He did not want to live in the house by the railway lines any more, where the trains keep him constantly scared, and he trips over in leftover bottles of others. He would be rich enough to live in a tenement-house, in a big bourgeois flat, with smooth, green wooden doors and frosted glass windows with flowers.] These dreams reflect how limited the dreams of Hungarians were during communism. On a more

abstract level, both living in a flat not surrounded by railway lines and working at the international ticket booth embody the longing for freedom.

The Western Railway Station not only threatens to cut the roots of the family, it also forces them into immobility and suppression. The construction of the Mándy house preceded the rapid extension of the railway lines. At the end of the nineteenth century, during a golden age for Hungary, Budapest became a modern European city with underground, beautiful boulevards and electricity. Hungary still formed part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and no one could imagine or foresee the horrors of the twentieth century. During the twentieth century the Mándy family and the Railway Company fought several legal battles over the ownership of the territory. The house remained the property of the Mándy family, though the railway lines emanating from the nearby railway station gradually surrounded it.

In the previous chapters about *Sepharad* and the novels of Semprún and Kertész we have already seen how trains and railways acquired a new, menacing significance in relationship to the Second World War and the Shoah. In *Gloomy Sunday* the Western Railway Station symbolizes the mortal dangers, posed by both Nazism and Communism. It is represented as hostile for the family: “La gare était un Autre inquiétant et feroce qui tentait de les envahir. Elle crachait des locomotives jusqu’à la petite maison, elle étendait ses tentacules d’acier tout autour.” (22) [The railway station was the fierce and menacing Other that could swallow them at any moment. It spat locomotives at the house, its steel tentacles reached everywhere the eye could see.] The railway station appears early on, as the menacing “Other” for the everyday family, which threatens their existence. There is

no escape from the tentacles, they arrive everywhere. The same way, communism was a totalitarian regime, whose “steel tentacles” arrived everywhere and suffocated the population during the early years of Stalinism.

The very name of the Western Railway Station is a misnomer, since the railway lines do not go towards the West: “Le nom de nyugat lui-même, c’est-à-dire Ouest, promettait une autre direction aux futurs trains. Mais en dépit de cette appellation, ils foncèrent vers le nord, vers l’est et encerclèrent la maison.” (13) [The name itself predicted a different route to the future trains. Despite the name, *nyugat*, which means west, the trains headed for the North and the East and incarcerated the small house.] The lack of railway lines going to the West symbolizes the Cold War and the separation of Eastern and Western Europe by an Iron Curtain. To the East and North, Hungary was surrounded by “friendly socialist countries”, and the tentacles of the Stalinist Soviet Union enclosed Hungary the same way, those of the Nyugati Railway Station enclose the Mátyás house.

The following quote grasps the hopelessness many Hungarians felt during the Cold War: “Imre jalousait les passagers. Il avait grandi en detestant être immobile, bloqué à cette endroit précis où venaient s’échouer les bribes de vie de ceux qui existaient à la vitesse du train.” (17) [Imre envied the passengers. As he was growing up, he hated more and more the immobility: he was chained to the exact same place, where those lives, which advanced with the speed of the train, threw their leftovers away.] Imre’s feelings of jealousy and envy mirror the feelings of Eastern Europeans, who felt that their lives were inferior to Western Europeans and that Western Europeans have forgotten

about their existence. The act of throwing trash at the garden of the Mándy house illustrates that the “travelers” either ignore or depreciate the immobile world.

At the same time, we cannot help but think of the Jewish people who were deported from the railway stations, persecuted and captured by a highly “efficient” and industrialized army, represented here by the steel tentacles. This connection becomes explicit when before his death the grandfather writes a letter for his family and narrates how he participated in the deportation of Jews in Vojvodina¹⁵. The grandfather often repeats a phrase in connection with the Second World War when talking to the younger generations: “–Vous n’avez rien vu, rien. Vous ne savez rien.” (29) [You don’t know anything. Nothing at all.] When he notices his grandson and his friend “playing war” with toy soldiers, he destroys some of the soldiers and prohibits the boys from playing. At the same time, he never elaborates on his experience or explains anything, he keeps the past well-hidden. The following quote resumes the feelings of Ildikó, Imre’s mother about the war experience of the grandfather:

Ildiko ne savait pas ce que le grand-père avait pu voir. La Seconde Guerre mondiale avait été un chaos total durant lequel le pays avait servi de parc à thèmes aux Hongrois, aux Allemands et aux Russes qui l’avaient tout à tour contrôlé. Chacun avait eu son temps de barbarie et chacun en avait usé. Il y avait eu beaucoup trop à voir selon l’impression d’Ildiko.

[Ildiko had no idea what the grandfather could have seen. The Second World War was an eternal chaos, where the country served as a playground for the Hungarians, Germans or the Russians, whoever happened to rule at a given period. All of them had the opportunity to destroy in barbaric ways, and each maximized their opportunity. Ildiko had the feeling that not much could have been seen back then.]

¹⁵ Vojvodina or Vajdaság is an autonomous province in Serbia, which formed part of Hungary before 1920.

Ildiko's thoughts reflect the vulnerability of everyday people during the war. The playground evokes the image of carefree children, fully immersed in their activities, without paying attention to the rules. In contrast, a country serving as a playground to the occupying forces and their local collaborators evokes the image of soldiers fully immersed in committing atrocities and 'destroying in barbaric ways.' These laconic remarks illustrate the cruelty of wars from the perspective of the everyday people. The emphasis on their vulnerability in times of chaos links the members of the Mándy family with the protagonists of *Sepharad*, *Fatelessness*, *The Long Voyage*, *The Angel of Budapest*, and *Perlasca, the Courage of a Just Man*. Vulnerability to fate remains a common thread throughout the artistic productions analyzed in the present work.

Ildiko has no curiosity to find out what the grandfather could have experienced. She reflects on the inter-generational differences, and acknowledges her willingness to accept the silence of the previous generation:

Elle était née à la fin du conflit, tout comme Pál, et elle avait compris très tôt que ne pas avoir vécu la guerre constituait une frontière inamovible entre sa génération et celle de ses parents, celle du grand-père. Ils n'habiteraient jamais le même monde, ils n'auraient jamais les mêmes yeux. Alors, pourquoi poser des questions? Qui voulait partir à la recherche de verities que seul la palinka rendait supportables? Pas Ildiko. (29)

[She and Pál were born after the war, and Ildiko understood very early that the war experience raised an impenetrable barrier between her own generation and that of her parents, and the grandfather. They will never live in the same world; they will never see reality in the same way. Why pose questions then? Who felt like facing a reality that could be only faced drinking pálinka?]

Even though Ildiko considers that an 'impenetrable barrier' exists between the generation of her parents, who did experience the war and her own, the Second World War defined

the life of subsequent generations, in more than one way, and the children interiorized the trauma of their parents through post-memory. Here, as elsewhere the omniscient narrator shares the thoughts of Ildiko, and speaks for her. The missing voice of Ildiko herself underlines the lack of agency and invisibility of women in a male-dominated society.

It is only before his death that the grandfather decides to share the secrets of his life with the next generations. After his stroke, he is not able to talk anymore, so he writes a letter for his family, in which he asks for forgiveness for his sins committed against his family members and against the Jewish population of Hungary. He performed administrative tasks at the Vojvodina railway station, and felt deeply unsettled when he heard about the mass murder of Hungarian Jews in Budapest:

Mais s'il y a des gens dehors qui pensent que j'ai Aidé Hitler et que j'ai fait la Shoah, alors je veux demander pardon avant que la mort arrive et dire que c'était trop compliqué pour moi à l'époque de savoir où étaient le bien et le mal. Moi je voulais aider mon pays et protéger les Hongrois. Comment c'est devenu un massacre sur la glace sans qu'on sente qu'on en arrivait là, ça je ne sais pas. Je me demande.

Je voulais dire que je ne l'ai jamais voulu, et aussi que je ne suis pas raciste. Je suis désolé si j'ai mal agi. Je suis désolé si j'ai fait le monde un endroit pire.

Après ça, je voulais seulement la paix. (225)

[But if there are people out there, who think that I helped Hitler and that I took part in the Shoah, I prefer to ask for forgiveness now, before my death, than try to explain that back then everything seemed too complicated to know what was wrong and what was right. I wanted to serve my country and to defend Hungarians. How could this turn into mass murder on the ice, without us realizing that that's where we are heading, I have no idea. I absolutely have no idea.

I just wanted to say that I have never wanted this, and also that I am not a racist. I am sorry, if I acted wrong. I am sorry, if I have a part in making this world a worse place.

After this, I only wanted peace.]

This letter serves as the key to reveal the palimpsestic and interweaving nature of the grandfather's traumatic memories. The trauma of participating in the deportation of Hungarian Jewry during the Second World War and the violence of the war constitute the deepest, underlying layer of the grandfather palimpsestic memory. The forty-year-long Soviet occupation of Hungary constantly reminds the grandfather of the rape and suicide of his wife, the traumatic past casts a shadow on the present, the memories related to the Nazi and Soviet past constantly intermingle, submerge and emerge in connection with the historic events, such as the 1956 anti-Soviet uprising, or the collapse of Soviet-style communism.

The letter represents the grandfather as an outsider and witness, who only wants 'to serve his country.' He does not participate directly in the mass killings, and shows utter bewilderment when he finds out about the mass killings of Hungarian Jews. The image he presents of himself reminds us of the member of the Spanish Blue Division in *Sepharad*, who reacts with the exact same shock when he finds out about the mass-killing of the Jewish population in Narva. Neither the Hungarian grandfather nor the Spanish soldier can escape remorse for the rest of their lives. The Spanish soldier returns to Narva many years later, in search of the Jewish woman he met during the war, and the grandfather claims that this knowledge ruined the rest of his life: he apologizes for 'acting wrong' and 'making this world a worse place', as well as for not being able to act as a good husband and father. The use of conjectural structures underlines the exculpatory nature of his words. This final letter of farewell does not only serve to tell his

family about a long hidden trauma and the subsequent guilt, the grandfather hopes to be pardoned by his descendants in particular, and the next generations in general.

Nonetheless, the attempt to communicate with the subsequent generations comes too late, and is doomed to failure. The fact that the grandfather is not able to speak symbolizes that no inter-generational dialogue is possible about the past. Moreover, when the moment finally arrives, Imre does not know what to do with the letter. He hides it in the electric switch, just outside the house, and decides to deal with it later. Shortly afterwards the electric switch burns down in an accident, and the grandfather's confession is lost forever. The death of the grandfather and the burning of his letter demonstrate the incapacity of both the old and new generations to face the ugly events of the past, which form a palimpsest in the consciousness of the grandfather and the history of Hungary.

Shattered Dreams of the Mándy's

“This is a story with a happy ending,” starts Victor Sebestyen's book, *Revolution 1989: The Fall of the Soviet Empire*, which narrates the velvet revolutions and the collapse of communism in the Soviet satellites states of Eastern Europe. I, together with many Eastern Europeans, absolutely disagree with this statement. It may be true that the velvet revolutions triumphed quickly and bloodlessly, yet the euphoria of the masses disappeared quickly, as they struggled to learn what capitalism and free-market economy meant in practice: unemployment, inflation and a loss of basic security. The life experiences of the Mándy family demonstrate a tragic process of shattering dreams

During the transition period, when people began to speak more freely, Imre finally finds out that his grandmother was raped by Soviet soldiers at the end of the Second World War, and remained pregnant with Pál. Imre's grandmother committed suicide, she choked herself to death on a leek in the garden, because she could not live with the anger of her husband. The brutality and banality of her death stands in stark contrast with heroic notions of death in great moments of history. Perhaps the grandmother's fate illustrates best that even though the novel centers on the male figures of the family, the real protagonists are the women. Zeniter purposefully casts the women in invisibility to portray our present day world of male dominance. The various references to the difference of Pál from the rest of the family and the song *Gloomy Sunday*¹⁶ foreshadow both the rape and the suicide. Even the name, Pál, signals his

¹⁶ Sunday is gloomy
My hours are slumberless
Dearest the shadows
I live with are numberless
Little white flowers
Will never awaken you
Not where the black coach
Of sorrow has taken you
Angels have no thoughts
Of ever returning you
Would they be angry
If I thought of joining you
Gloomy Sunday
Gloomy is Sunday
With shadows I spend it all
My heart and I
Have decided to end it all
Soon there'll be candles
And prayers that are said I know
Let them not weep
Let them know that I'm glad to go

outsider, “bastard” status, as traditionally, all male members of the Mándy family are called Imre. In the song the poetic voice is that of an abandoned lover, whose sweetheart committed suicide and while looking at the coffin, they contemplate suicide to join them in death, instead of continuing life that has lost its meaning for them: “Angels have no thoughts / Of ever returning you / Would they be angry / If I thought of joining you.” Urban legend holds that dozens of young men committed suicide while listening to this song in the 1930s.

Interestingly, I was not familiar with this world-famous and fateful song before reading Zeniter’s novel. The twenties and thirties counted as a shameful period in the history classes of communist Hungary. We learnt about the “glorious revolution of the Hungarian Soviets” in 1919, and the period leading to the Second World War was condemned as a bourgeois and aristocratic counter-revolution and largely glossed over. *This period also coincided with the childhood and youth of my grandmother. I knew that my family owned a small drugstore and prospered, but during communism this was not a*

Death is no dream
For in death I'm caressin' you
With the last breath of my soul
I'll be blessin' you
Gloomy Sunday
Dreaming, I was only dreaming
I wake and I find you asleep
In the deep of my heart here
Darling I hope
That my dream never haunted you
My heart is tellin' you
How much I wanted you
Gloomy Sunday
Songwriters: Laszlo Javor / Rezso Seress / Sam M. Lewis
Gloomy Sunday lyrics © Warner/Chappell Music, Inc

legacy to be proud of, thus nobody ever answered our ever fewer questions about that period. For this reason, I have missed an important part of the many clues the novel gives about the suicide of Sára, the grandmother.

The gaps present in Imre's family history are not unique; silence about the past was wide-spread during communism. Criticizing the Soviet Union was prohibited; thus no one could speak publicly about the atrocities and rapes committed by the Soviet soldiers. Stories were whispered and told in many families, though rather as a way to resist and oppose the occupying power than as a personal experience or trauma. My grandmother, who was eighteen years old in 1945, told me that she was hidden under a thick blanket in the sickbed of her elderly aunt. I never questioned the story, and even if I had, I would have never gotten a different answer. Uilleam Blacker, a cultural critique of Eastern Europe, emphasizes the violent nature of silencing civil society:

When memory was booming in the West, it was being whispered in the East, as the Soviet Union and its satellite states invested much energy and violence into subjugating cultural memory to official history. Those who cultivated memory and mourning in divergence with official discourses found themselves in lethally dangerous position. (3)

I agree with Blacker that the Soviet-style communist regimes monitored closely the adherence of its citizens to official state history. Cultural memory was whispered at best, or even completely silenced, especially if it involved rape, a topic considered shameful, or criticizing the Soviet Union. As we have already seen in relationship with *Keep Quiet*, the story of Csanád Szegedi, and the accounts of Imre Kertész about his experience of silencing Holocaust survivors in the previous chapter, the Communist regime allowed for a single narrative of the past.

Another example for the lack of happy ending is that of Imre's mother, Ildiko, who can never fulfill her dream of transferring to the international ticket booth from the domestic section either, since a train hits her when she chokes on her sandwich, crossing the railway lines, and she dies at the moment in time when international travel becomes possible and the number of ticket booths and cashier positions proliferates in an amazing space. Imre resents her death: "Parfois, Imre en voulait à Ildiko d'être morte juste à ce moment-là. C'était absurde. [...] Elle avait raté sa chance alors qu'elle était si proche de voir son rêve se réaliser." (104) [Imre was sometimes angry with Ildiko to have died at that precise moment. It was absurd. [...] She lost her chance, even though she was so close to the fulfillment of her dreams.] Ildiko's death just before the transition and her shattered dreams represent the failed dreams of everyday Hungarians, for whom disillusionment came very quickly after the regime change.

In addition to this tragedy, in 1992, Imre's beloved sister Ági undergoes an abortion, when she finds out that alongside their six-year relationship her French lover, Étienne, has a wife and two sons in France. When Ági becomes pregnant by Étienne, she feels ready to marry the love of her life, and wears her prettiest dress to deliver the good news. Étienne disappears without trace, and Ági never recovers from the betrayal. She loses her will to live, becomes a shadow of her former self and moves back to the small house suffocated by the railway lines. The betrayal of the Frenchman has a symbolic

meaning. It evokes the Treaty of Trianon,¹⁷ and what many perceive as the betrayal of Hungary by the French.

It is in the wake of Ági's misfortunes that Panka, Imre's aunt, first shares the circumstances of his grandmother's death with Imre. Ironically, Panka has not become a mother either. Her first love in secondary school fought against the Soviet troops in 1956, and the young boy was hung after 1956, when the Revolution became a counter-revolution. The hanging was postponed until the boy's 18th birthday, and Panka never married. Thus, history with a big "H" played a crucial role in the tragic fate of three generations of women in the Mándy family.

The historian Hayden White, best known for arguing that history-writing uses narrative strategies the same way literature does, contributes a key function to realistic or historical novels in post-Holocaust societies. White relies on the concept of 'practical past' that is the past of "particular persons, groups, institutions and agencies, [...] the past that people as individuals or members of a groups draw upon in order to help them make assessments and make decisions in everyday life as well as in extreme situations (such as catastrophes, disasters, battles, judicial and other kinds of conflicts in which survival is at issue,)" (xii) and distinguishes it from the objective 'historical past,' which is of interest only to professional historians. White suggests that the 'practical past' "*is* amenable to a literary –that is to say, an artistic or poetic treatment –that is anything but 'fictional' in the sense of being purely imaginary or fantastic in kind," (ix) and the modern, realistic

¹⁷ The Treaty of Trianon (1922) formed part of the Treaties between the members of the Triple Entente and the Triple Alliance following the First World War. The Austro-Hungarian Monarchy was divided into smaller states, and Hungary lost two-thirds of its former territory.

novel serves precisely this purpose in Western societies since the nineteenth century. *Gloomy Sunday* corresponds to what White calls the ‘practical past’, and while it is imaginary, it is not fictional.

Gloomy Capitalism

Tim Wilkinson, the translator of Kertész’s book into English, describes the period of political transition to democracy as “the dying months of the ‘soft’ communist world of Kádárist¹⁸ Hungary, which was replaced by a virulent strain of capitalist exploitation (in many cases by the former ‘soft’ communist bosses).” (Web) Instead of freedom, democracy brings a new form of exploitation, capitalism. Yet, the structure of power does not change, the previous communist bosses continue to exploit the small people under a new ideological framework.

During the transition period Imre finds his first job in a sex-shop, and his next job working as a photocopier. These are new additions to the sphere of legal work as during communism sex-shops were outlawed, and printing (photocopying has not even existed) was controlled by the state in order to prevent the spreading of anti-communist propaganda. The arrival of these jobs represent a form capitalism and the promise of freedom, yet both only end up functioning as mere simulacra, as people find out that these serve as illusions of what they were searching for. Instead of entering into a relationship, Imre adores a paper doll representing a sex-symbol at his first job, while in the copy-shop he prepares duplicates of the originals, that is to say he produces only

¹⁸ János Kádár was the General Secretary of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party from 1956 until 1988.

imitations. Capitalism offers the illusion of happiness, without a clear path, or no path to achieving it.

During this period Imre's finally meets a flesh and blood woman, the German Kerstin. Kerstin and her sister Monica spent various years travelling around the ex-socialist countries of the East, to find adventure and authenticity. This time Kerstin arrives in Hungary from Western Germany alone to experience "real life" because Monica had an accident. She falls in love with Imre, who represents the exciting new society for her. Imre, in turn, sees his adolescent dream of Californian girls come true. Kerstin represents freedom, uninhibitedness and perfection for him. In contrast with the paper doll of the sex-shop, she is real, and really his. Nonetheless the co-habitation of different mentalities and different generations in the small house soon brings challenges.

Kerstin and Imre represent the difference between the Western and Eastern personalities. Growing up during communism, Imre lacks self-confidence and taking the initiative poses a challenge for him. He does not think critically and lives under the false impression that politics does not influence his life. Talking to Kirsten when they meet in Budapest represents perhaps the only occasion when he does take the initiative. As Kirsten moves into the small house, Imre gives up his "shameful job" of working in the sex-shop and starts working in a photocopy shop. Their marriage, and the eventual birth of his daughter give a glimpse of good fortune and hope for the family, yet the marriage of Imre and Kerstin ends after a few years.

The failure of Kerstin to learn Hungarian illustrates her defeat before the real challenges of the transition. The daily struggles in transitioning Hungary do not

correspond to the romantic vision Kerstin previously held about life in the East, and she returns to Germany with their daughter Gréta, cutting all communications with the paternal family of her child.

The chapter *Le Monde Vide [Empty World]* expresses perfectly the feeling of emptiness that the departure of Gréta and Kerstin leaves in Imre. He wanders without purpose in Budapest as the city transforms according to the logic of capitalist progress.

This emptiness reflects the unfulfilled promises of capitalism:

Il avançait comme s'il n'avait pas de maison. La ville avait changé. Les bâtiments neufs le long du Danube, hotels de luxe aux fenêtres teintées. Les banques aux couleurs vives. Les fausses trattorias qui vendaient des pâtes à prix d'or. La ville avait changé et il n'avait rien vu. Il avait l'impression d'être dehors pour la première fois. La poussière sur ses lèvres. Il y avait des travaux partout. Ils voulaient des trottoirs plus grands. Ils voulaient plus de métro. Il aurait pu se perdre en longeant des palisades de chantier. Il y avait de pissotières pour les ouvriers. Elles fuyaient. Odeur de la pisse dans la chaleur du soir. (234)

[He was wandering as if he had no home. The city has changed and he could not see a thing. New buildings grew on the banks of the Danube, luxury hotels with tinted windows. The banks were re-painted with live colors. Fake Italian restaurants sold pasta at exorbitant prizes. The dust stuck to his lips. He felt as if he had been in the city for the first time. There was construction everywhere. Everyone wanted wider pavement. More metro lines. He could have got lost; there were so many fenced construction sites. Mobile toilets everywhere for the workers that leaked the odor. The odor of piss spread in the evening air.]

Construction is ongoing everywhere, new metro lines, wider pavements, newly painted banks by the river Danube. Nigel Thrift derives the “magical powers” of contemporary capitalism from the combination of aesthetic pleasure and technological intimacy that result in a carefully calculated allure. (290) The new luxury hotels with tinted windows and live colors certainly offer an aesthetic pleasure among the old brown and grey

buildings of Budapest. The real pasta in the fake Italian restaurant offers sensory pleasure (taste). These glamorous commodities (both hotels and restaurants operate to gain profit) offer a “form of secular magic, conjured up by the commercial sphere.” (297) Their success lies in “in inviting just enough familiarity to engage the imagination, a glimpse of another life.” (297) The new image of Budapest holds a promise of attainability. The fact that Imre feels lost in this new city, where the new luxury hotels and luxury items are sold for exorbitant prices, reveals that the everyday needs of people are not covered. The odor of urine coming from the toilets of the workers contrasts with the fake glamour of the city and reminds us that the luxury goods remain unavailable for the masses of people.

Ironically, Kerstin moves back to Germany, when the family finally gets rich. In accordance with the logic of the early years of capitalism, luck plays a pivotal role: a photographer sees the three-year-old Gréta, and makes an offer to Kerstin to employ the child as a model for a giant commercial. The beauty of Gréta is the only merchandise the family is able to sell in the emerging capitalist market, therefore the enrichment of the Mándy family results from a random, undeserved act, obtained by a willingness to play by the exploitative rules of capitalism, and its ideology of merchandising feminine beauty. The company offers a fortune for the photos, the family falls apart nonetheless, and Imre remains broken forever. The old saying holds true: Money cannot buy happiness.

The giant poster of Gréta symbolizes the new neoliberal culture that takes hold in Hungary during the transition: a culture of eternal youth and beauty, living in the present,

and the erasure of the past. The poster advertises the opening of a new shopping center that provides access to a wide-range of goods, Hungarians dreamt of during the lean years of communism, and establishes a new culture of consumerism. Gréta's smile remains beautiful in the poster, despite the divorce of her parents, the sudden separation from her father forever, and the open wounds of her Hungarian family. Her child beauty stands in stark contrast with the battered face of the old grandfather, whom a stroke left with a distorted expression.

The substitution of the real child with an image of a smiling poster child demonstrates the unfulfilled promises of capitalism. Her complete and cruel separation from the rest of the family, who are left behind, resembles the process of exclusion of the Mándy family from the new system. They carry too many traumas to be able to adapt to the new system of "opportunities" and "success", they are permanently left behind. The unfulfilled promise of happiness leaves them even more desolate.

Gréta represents the generation born after the transition to democracy. On the one hand, her success demonstrates that the future of the new generation that has not experienced dictatorship will be different; on the other hand, the newly-found prosperity entails the erasure of the past. As Gréta is the only great-granddaughter in the family, this means the complete erasure of the memories of the Mándy family. As the giant poster with Gréta's face displaces the grandfather's letter, the images of publicity displace acknowledging a traumatic past.

The remaining members of the Mándy family are finally able to leave the house, surrounded by the railway lines, and move to a small house by Lake Balaton. However,

the ability to buy a new house does not result from the work of Imre, it is from the income they received for the giant publicity poster featuring Gréta. Lake Balaton has a special place in the Hungarian imagination, as Hungary does not have a sea, and Hungarians could hardly travel abroad. Thus, Lake Balaton stands for the unforgettable yearly or bi-yearly family vacation. Living at Lake Balaton has none of the vacation qualities for the Mándy family, instead of providing a bit of luxury, it only provides more misery. At this moment Imre realizes that it was not only the railway lines that held them prisoners, but also their incapacity to act and promote change:

Ils promenaient en eux leur propre force d'inertie que les trains n'avaient jamais réussi à secouer. Imre s'en rendait compte à présent. Ça n'avait jamais été la maison. C'était eux, les immobiles. Aucun d'entre eux, jamais, n'avait mis le pied sur la marche d'un wagon pour partir. Ils vivaient comme des collines. (252)

[They have had the inertia in themselves; the trains could no longer influence them. Imre understood it right then. It was not the house. It was they, who were immobile. None of them have ever put a foot on the train to go. They lived like hills.]

Due to the long periods of oppression, they have lost the will and ability to fight, they have accepted and internalized their oppression. Even though the railway lines do not imprison them anymore, the long-awaited change does not bring happiness to them. At the grandfather's funeral Imre's aunt, Panka, laconically remarks that happiness in Hungary remains impossible:

Quand le grand-père était mort, en janvier 2002, d'un seconde attaque, Pál, Panka et les deux enfants avaient marché derrière le cercueil sans un mot. Eszter vivait désormais au Brésil avec un dentiste à la retraite. Elle n'avait pas voulu faire le voyage.

—Je pense que je vais aller la rejoindre, avait dit Panka après avoir jeté une poignée de terre sur le cercueil. Elle a raison. Attendre ici, ça ne rime a

rien. On a attendu presque soixante ans. Ce pays n'a pas bonheur pour nous. (249)

[When in January 2002 the grandfathered died after a repeated attack, Pál, Panka, and the two children followed his coffin without a single word. Back then, Eszter already lived in Brazil with a retired dentist, and did not feel like making such a long journey to return.

–I think I am going to follow her, said Panka as she threw a pile of earth into the grave. She is right. We cannot wait forever here to make our fortune. We have waited for almost sixty years. In this country, there is no happiness for us.]

The funeral of the grandfather does not only symbolize the death of a whole generation that lived through the Second World War, the Holocaust and the communist dictatorship, but also the burial of hope for subsequent generations. Pál, Panka and Eszter have all grown up without happiness, the ephemeral moments of joy always ended in tragedy. Ági and Imre are infantilized and referred to as “children,” who lack the capacity to act as adults. The suicide of the grandmother, the recent death of the grandfather, and the accident of Ildikó represent the death of the previous generations, but the unborn baby of Ági, and the sudden departure of Kerstin and Gréta symbolize the hopelessness of the future. The orphaned Pál, Ági, and Imre vegetate in a bitterly cold house at Lake Balaton. The total lack of real and emotional warmth represents the final shattering of their dreams.

As we have seen, *Gloomy Sunday* represents the palimpsestic nature of Holocaust and dictatorship memories through the lived experience of the grandfather. The novel depicts how the second and third generations subconsciously inherit these traumas. The silences omnipresent in the Mándy family deepen the past traumas that haunt all members of the family. The transition to democracy offers some hope, as the grandfather,

and Imre's aunt start revealing the secrets and answering Imre's questions. The memories of the dictatorship and the Holocaust that cast a shadow over the family for decades emerge for the first time during this period. Yet, there is no closure, as the generation of grandchildren does not know how to confront these legacies. Imre hides the grandfather's confession in a little used shed outside the house, and never gets the chance to go back to it.

Imre and Ági, the grandchildren both seek to adapt to the new system. Imre plucks up his courage to talk to a woman, and marries Kerstin from Germany. The short marriage of the couple demonstrate the impenetrable barrier between the self-confident Kerstin, who grew up in a neoliberal system, and Imre, who grew up in a communist system, with an acute feeling of internalized inferiority to the West, and absolute lack of self-confidence. The members of the Mándy family are not capable to adapt to the sudden implementation of a market-economy, they continue to vegetate in the supposedly free, capitalist society. Capitalism leaves them with the illusion of happiness, where the radiant images broadcast by the neoliberal media stand in stark contrast with the struggles of everyday people.

Beyond the Silence of Francoism: The Impostor

In 2005 Europeans were preparing to solemnly commemorate the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Nazi concentration camps. For the very first time in history, Enric Marco, a "Spanish survivor," was to give a speech at the official commemoration ceremony in Mauthausen, the Nazi concentration camp where 7500 Spaniards were deported. Two-thirds of them were murdered and that's why Enric Marco, the then

President of the Amical of Mauthausen, an association of survivors, and José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, the Spanish Prime Minister, were to participate. During the final days of the preparations a scandal broke out in Spain and reverberated worldwide: Benito Bermejo, a not so well known historian, discovered that Enric Marco, one of Spain's most acclaimed Republican heroes and Nazi concentration camp survivors "did not tell the truth about his past" to put it mildly. The narrator Cercas insists that when Benito Bermejo revealed that Enric Marco was lying, he shed light on a much wider phenomenon than the dishonesty of a single person. Instead, he uncovered the dishonesty of a "whole nation"; "En el fondo, Bermejo no sólo desveló la impostura de Marco, desveló también –o eso es lo que sintieron muchos de los que buscaron convertirle en el malvado secreto de esta historia– la credulidad culpable y la falta de rectitud intelectual de cuantos aceptaron la impostura de Marco." (310) ["Bermejo didn't simply expose Marco's deception, he also exposed –or so felt many who sought to turn him into the villain– the culpable credulity and lack of intellectual rigour of those who fell for Marco's deception." (257)] The expression those 'who fell for Marc's deception' refers to the members of the general public who listened Marco's stories with awe, invited him to schools, to the media outlets, and official commemorations.

Marco's rise to prominence reveals important facts about current discourses on memory in Spain, regarding the events of twentieth century Spanish history and the Holocaust. As Javier Cercas also underscores, this book is not about Enric Marco, rather it is about the Spanish public's ambiguous relationship to the past, and the readiness of contemporary society to accept well-rehearsed and overused clichés. The individual

history of Enric Marco manifests the demand of the general public for self-made heroes who are easy to listen to and identify with, and it reveals similar patterns in the narration of different traumatic pasts.

Mario Vargas Llosa also points out in an article about the book that

...su enfermedad es una enfermedad de nuestro tiempo, la de una cultura en la que la verdad es menos importante que la apariencia, en la que representar es la mejor (acaso la única) manera de ser y de vivir. La ficción ha pasado a sustituir a la realidad en el mundo que vivimos y, por eso, los mediocres personajes del mundo real no nos interesan ni entretienen. Los fabuladores, sí. (El País, Web)

[Marco's illness is a disease of our time, that of a culture, in which truth is less important than appearance, in which to perform is the best (perhaps the only) way of being and living. Fiction has replaced reality in the world we live in, and average characters from the real world don't interest us. Fabricators do.]¹⁹

Vargas Llosa reiterates that the Enric Marco scandal reveals important lessons about the way contemporary societies relate to the narration of the past and present. The demand for interesting stories increasingly blurs the categories of truth and fiction. Cercas continues this line of inquiry when he points out, that writers often blur these categories as well, and repeatedly reflects about the role of truth in literature and the task of writers.

Cercas claims that his main aim is to understand the driving forces behind Marco's lies. He works through the concept of "blind spot", which means that the novel poses an unanswerable question and tries to answer it. This attempt is doomed to failure; nonetheless during the process of trying to answer the question, the author reveals something important about the society, finds a blind spot, which was previously undiscovered. According to Cercas, we may actually define the novel as genre, based on

¹⁹ I use the English translation of the article which appeared in the English edition of the book.

the type of question it asks, and the type of response it gives. As he explains in *El Punto Ciego* (2016), a collection of his lectures at the University of Oxford, the distinctive feature between the different genres such as the essay and the novel does not lie in their formal characteristics or their actual truth content, but in the type of question they ask. He claims that it's possible to define the novel "como un género que persigue proteger a las preguntas de las respuestas, es como un género que rehúye las respuestas claras, taxativas e inequívocas y que sólo admite formularse preguntas que no pueden ser contestadas o preguntas que exigen respuestas ambiguas, complejas y plurales, esencialmente irónicas." (39) ["it's possible to define the novel as a genre that pursues the protection of questions from answers, that is, as a genre that resists clear, specific and unequivocal answers and only accepts the formulation of questions that cannot be answered or questions that require ambiguous, complex, plural, essentially ironic answers." (40)] In the many interviews Cercas gave on occasion of the publication of his book, he repeatedly compared his work as a writer and investigator to that of a speleologist. Both of them seek to explore the realms of unknown territory. A speleologist submerges into deep and obscure caves, and the writer dives into the human psyche to explore. Their task is scary because neither of them knows what they will find. Cercas claims to have found "un espejo en el fondo de la cueva." [a mirror at the bottom of the cave.] We know from the tale of Snow White and her stepmother the Evil Queen, that looking into a mirror may be difficult and dangerous. As Paloma Aguila Fernández remarks, also using the image of a mirror: "El espejo de la dictadura nos sigue devolviendo una imagen inquietante en la que no nos gusta mirarnos." (317) "The mirror of the dictatorship shows us a disquieting

reflection that we do not like looking at.” So, what does the magic mirror of Cercas’ writing show us? Is the image appearing in the mirror disquieting? What is the blind spot he discovers?

Shifting Narratives: Transitioning in Spain

In *The Impostor* the moral question is why was Enric Marco lying? The questions remain unanswered, yet during the process of looking for an answer we learn about the need for a hero of Spanish society and the half-truths, silences and lies of the Spanish transition to democracy. The topics of dissecting a fake Nazi concentration camp survivor serves to reflect on the transition process and on the way many Spaniards remember it. In the novel the figure of Enric Marco symbolizes the process of inventing a new political memory during the political transition, Cercas criticizes the process of myth-making during the Spanish transition, and this is the blind spot he seeks to reveal.

Enric Marco, the Impostor, becomes “a symbol or very personification of his country; after all, his personal biography was a mirror image of the collective biography of Spain.” (13) This statement is frequently reiterated, Marco’s actions are frequently linked to the actions of the majority of Spaniards in the novel. One leitmotiv of the book is to point out how common and widespread giving a face-lift to the individual life stories was during and following the transition in Spain. In the following quote the narrator Cercas claims that everybody was involved in this process:

Marco se inventó un pasado (o lo adornó o lo maquilló) en un momento en que alrededor de él, en España casi todo el mundo estaba adornando o maquillando su pasado; es lo que ocurrió durante la transición de la dictadura a la democracia en España. Todo el mundo empezó a construirse un pasado para encajar en el presente y prepararse el futuro. Lo hicieron

políticos, intelectuales y periodistas de primera fila, de segunda fila y de tercera fila, pero también personas de todo tipo, personas a pie; lo hizo gente de derechas y gente de izquierdas, [...] No todo el mundo mintió con la misma pericia o descaró o insistencia, [sin embargo] todo el mundo lo hizo con tranquilidad, sin desazón moral, sabiendo que a su alrededor todo el mundo estaba haciendo más o menos lo mismo y que por lo tanto todo el mundo lo aceptaba o lo toleraba y nadie estaba muy interesado en hacer averiguaciones sobre el pasado de nadie porque todo el mundo tenía cosas que ocultar. (233)

[Marco invented a past for himself (or embellished it or gilded it) at a moment when, all around him in Spain, almost everyone was embellishing, or gilding, or inventing a past; Marco reinvented his life at a moment when the entire country was reinventing itself. This is what happened during the transition from dictatorship to democracy in Spain. With Franco dead, almost everyone began to construct a past to better face the present and prepare for the future. Politicians, intellectuals and journalists of the first, second and third rank did it, but also people from all walks of life, left-wingers and right-wingers. [...] Not everyone lied with the same skill, shamelessness and insistence, [nonetheless] they did so with no moral qualms, or few moral qualms, knowing that everyone around them was doing much the same thing and therefore everyone accepted it or tolerated it, certainly no-one was interested in delving into anyone's past because everyone had something to hide. (192)]

This long list is abundant in repetitions and duplications. The presence of multiple verbs “se inventó un pasado (o lo adornó o lo maquilló)” in this quote reminds us that the absolute truth may not be uncovered, and we have to keep questioning every word. The appearance of ‘todo el mundo’ five times in just one quote and the abundance of slightly altered repetitions for example ‘gente de derechas’ y ‘gente de izquierdas’ convey the all-encompassing nature of white and not-so-white lies. Nonetheless, framing Marco’s story as just one among many shifts the focus away from his guilt, and may be interpreted as exculpatory, or indeed offensive by those, who did not need to reinvent their past, or chose not to do so.

Even more troublingly, by widening the scope to everybody, Cercas ignores what Santos Juliá terms the asymmetrical effect of the “pact of silence,” namely that it benefits the Francoist elites and those who collaborated with the regime. Conflating Marco’s fabricated past as a resistance fighter against the Franco regime and his equally fabricated past as a Nazi concentration camp survivor remains problematic. While general myth-making about the Franco period certainly played a key role in prompting Marco to project himself as a figure of resistance, the controversies of the transition period cannot serve as his motivation for seeking media attention as a fake Nazi concentration camp survivor. Clumping these two fake narratives together, and trying to understand them through a distinctively Spanish lens, risks reiterating a simplistic representation of the legacies of the Holocaust, similar to the one examined in the novel.

Could the deception of Enric Marco have only happened in Spain? Various voices claim that “Esto solo puede pasar en España,” or at least Spain had the perfect political climate to produce the Enric Marco scandal since “en gran parte a causa de la dictadura de cuarenta años que siguió a la guerra, España estaba mejor preparada que casi cualquier otro país de Europa para generar el caso Marco,” (274) [largely because of the forty years of dictatorship that followed the Civil war, Spain was a more fertile ground than almost any European country to produce Marco’s case (226)].

Michael Richards, a social historian, explains that “the balance between remembering and forgetting is particularly problematic in the aftermath of revolutions and civil wars,” (126) since no ‘homecoming’ is possible. If a country loses a war against external enemies, its veterans still enjoy appreciation and empathy both in private and

public. Obviously, it was not the case for Republican veterans during the Franco dictatorship. Moreover, the ‘homecoming’ for Republicans with the death of Franco in 1975 would remain silent and without public recognition, because of the tacit agreement to forget the past. “The recent movement to identify and recover some of the Republican dead from anonymous burial pits is motivated by a desire to dignify the dead precisely by bringing the bodies home.” (127) In the context of the exhumation of mass graves of the executed Republicans during the first years of the twenty-first century, desires to provide belated justice to the dead, and of course the living, were wide-spread in Spanish society. Marco took advantage of those feelings when he presented himself as a persecuted Republican. One of the reasons behind Marco’s rising popularity was that his person symbolized Republican veterans, and provided the opportunity to offer long-denied public homecoming to them.

The individual characteristics of Enric Marco as a “conman” and “exceptional story-teller” also add to the appeal of stories produced for consumption at the peak of the so-called memory-boom: “en aqual tiempo de memoria, cuando más que la memoria, triunfaba en España la industria de memoria, la gente estaba deseando escuchar las mentiras que el campeón de la memoria quería contar. (279) [“in our era of memory, when more even than memory, what triumphs in Spain is the industry of memory, people wanted to listen to the lies the champion of memory had to tell.” (230)] This statement makes an explicit connection between the memory-work of the Spanish past and on the Holocaust, emphasizing how the Spanish narratives on the past influence the reception of other narratives, providing an example on the multi-directionality of these memories.

Thus, the so-called Spanish memory boom reinforced the willingness to pay attention to the narratives of the Holocaust. This reasoning reverses the more frequent process of using the insights Holocaust studies in order to understand the legacies of the Spanish Civil War and the Franco dictatorship, and conceives these processes as mutually influencing each other.

Scholars in Hispanic Studies predominantly focus on the implications of the Enric Marco scandal within the Iberian Peninsula, and search for explanations exclusively from within the Spanish context. A case in point is Hilaire Kallendorf's article "Cómo ocultar la verdad sin mentir" that discusses "the novel's own comments about truth and lies" "within the context of Spanish Catholic penitential discourse." (109) Kallendorf reaches back to the late Medieval doctrine of equivocation and casuistry in her analysis, concluding that the most disturbing aspect of Marco's fraud is that "he did not *need* to lie." (120)

I propose to broaden the focus of interpretation, and examine Cercas' novel through the lens of Holocaust studies, in order to contextualize Spanish memory work within a larger European framework, and to trace the shifting narratives of the Holocaust in Spain. When I talk about a Holocaust studies perspective in relationship with a fake survivor, I mean it in the sense Thomas Trezise examines the different responses to survivor testimonies: "just as psychoanalysis has always learnt more from pathology than from health, so perhaps shortcomings in the reception of Holocaust survivor testimony will prove more instructive than success." (9) The unprecedented success of the made-up accounts of a fake Spanish political prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp exposes that

the spreading of consumerist capitalism, and the commodification of the past, resulted in producing similar shifts in the narratives of different traumatic pasts during the twenty-first century.

Shifting Narratives: The Holocaust in Spain

The Impostor continues in the footsteps of *Sepharad* and looks at the Spanish past in connection with other European narratives, namely that of the Holocaust, offering a new connection: instead of looking back at the Middle Ages through the concept of Sepharad, it engages with the Holocaust through the fate of Spanish Republicans, deported to Nazi concentration camps from Vichy France. In *Sepharad* the connection with the Holocaust is indirect, Spaniards only appear as witnesses to the atrocities committed by the Nazi Germans. The protagonists persecuted by the Nazi regime are either Sephardic Jews, whose ancestors were expelled from Spain 500 years ago, or foreigners. In *The Impostor* the connection is more explicit, since the protagonist is Enric Marco, a current inhabitant of Spain. While *Sepharad* does reflect on the connection of the past and present, and brings together stories of different traumatic pasts, it does not reflect on the reception of Holocaust narratives in Spain. Cercas, in turn, dedicates a substantial part of the book to this topic.

Cercas constructs a careful chronology about Enric Marco's rise to fame, and he claims that even though Marco mentioned the fictitious concentration camp survival story in passing as early as the end of the 1970s, he only elaborated it and added to his previous claims of fighting in the anti-Franco resistance in 1999. As part of his investigation, the author/protagonist Cercas reads interviews with Enric Marco that appeared in print

several decades before Marco gained national fame. In the following quote he confirms that narratives about the Holocaust held little interest for the Spanish public during the transition period:

(apenas sacaba a relucir, por el contrario, su pasado no menos ficticio de prisionero en Flossenbürg [...] sobre todo porque no podía resultarle útil, ni dotarle de autoridad entre sus compañeros: baste recordar que en aquella época ni siquiera la izquierda consideraba que la segunda guerra mundial, el Holocausto y los campos nazis formasen del todo parte de la historia española). (218)

[(On the other hand, he barely mentioned his no-less fictitious past as a prisoner of Flossenbürg [...] mostly because it was unlikely to be useful or afford him any influence over his comrades. It should be remembered that, at the time, even the left-wing did not consider the Second World war, the Holocaust and the Nazi camps relevant to Spanish history.) (179)]

In this quote the narrative voice claims that most Spaniards did not pay attention to the narratives about the Holocaust, or about the Spanish survivors of the Nazi concentration camps at the beginning of the transition process to democracy. As we have seen in the previous chapter about Semprún, the same situation prevailed at the beginning of the 1990s when he returned to Spain. His books about Buchenwald gained him fame and glory abroad, but not in Spain. It was not until the last few years of the twentieth century and definitely at the beginning of the twenty-first that the Holocaust gradually appeared in the Spanish public consciousness through American and European TV series and films. Like in most countries of Europe and the United States, the two most successful films were *Schindler's List* (1994) and *Life is Beautiful*. Furthermore, the official commemorations of the 50th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz were widely broadcasted on Spanish television, together with several documentaries about the

Holocaust. (Baer “Voids of Sepharad” 99) In Spain the first exposure to the topic of the Holocaust happened through the popular medium of television, and fiction, whereas in most European countries the first exposure to the topic of the Holocaust happened through the education system, as we have seen the case of Hungary in the present Chapter. This difference may explain in part the responsiveness of the Spanish general public to the tropes and clichés of Holocaust representation omnipresent in Marco’s speeches.

What explains the success of Enric Marco’s deception? The narrator Cercas frequently reiterates the lack of historical knowledge in Spain about the Holocaust and the Second World War. The following quote grasps well the irony of the situation, pointing out the collective weakness of Spanish memory work: “nuestra relativa ignorancia del pasado en general y del nazismo en particular: aunque Marco se vendía como un remedio contra esa tara nacional, en realidad era la mejor prueba de su existencia.” (42-43) [“the relative ignorance of the recent past generally and of Nazism in particular: although Marco promoted himself as a remedy for this national failing, in fact he was the finest proof of its existence.” (26)]

The late absorption of the Shoah as part of the European, and eventually Spanish past explains to a great extent the success of Enric Marco. This is certainly one of the arguments the narrator brings up, stating that “El caso Marco quizá solo pudo darse en España, un país con una compleja, deficitaria digestión de su pasado reciente, [...] donde todavía a principios del siglo XXI apenas existían estudios fiables sobre las víctimas españolas del genocidio nazi y donde el Holocausto no figura en un lugar principal en la

memoria colectiva o de eso que suele llamarse la memoria colectiva. (271) [“Spain, a country with a complex, flawed ability to assimilate the recent past, [...] where even in the early twenty-first century there were few reliable studies about Spanish victims of the Nazi genocide and where the Holocaust doesn’t have a major role in the collective memory, or what we usually call the collective memory.” (224)] In addition to the particular Spanish situation, the dictatorship, and the lack of knowledge about the history of the Holocaust, a no less important factor is what the narrator Cercas calls the “sacralization of the Holocaust” and the “blackmail of the victim.”

As the discourses on the Holocaust became part of the institutionalized narratives, Germany and the German way of dealing with the past became the obvious point of comparison. Cercas, as many others, puts Germany and their way of facing the past as a positive example to follow. Cercas sets *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, the German model of “coming to terms with the past” as a positive model for Spain. In an interview, Cercas praises Germany’s efforts to confront its past saying that “yo no conozco ningún país en el mundo que haya afrontado su pasado con la valentía y claridad con que lo ha hecho Alemania” (Cercas and Samson 161) [“I don’t know any other country that faced its past as bravely, and as clearly as Germany”]. Cercas gave the interview during his stay in Berlin, in 2013, the same year *Generation War*,²⁰ a German mini-series about the Second World War appeared on television. The mini-series attracted millions of viewers and caused great controversy.

²⁰ The original German title *Unsere Mütter, unsere Väter* means our mothers and fathers, adding a personal connection that is missing from the English translation.

Historians dealing with the German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* point out that national obsession about how to come to terms with the past and transmit the memory to the new generation in Germany resulted in an ever-increasing distance between the present generation and the previous ones. The younger generations continue to grapple with the past, and entangling the intertwined categories of bystander, perpetrator and victim. As Mary Fulbrook, a British historian argues, one may only hold the position of bystander only for a few seconds, following that one either decides to act or look away, and becomes complicit. Fulbrook maintains that the question is not what the everyday Germans knew but what the everyday Germans did not do.²¹ As time passes and the generation that participated in the Second World War passes away, it is easier to recalibrate the national identity and create a myth of innocent bystander. This discursive strategy also appears in the Spanish discourses; we have already seen its manifestations in *Sepharad* and we will observe it in later artistic productions, such as the Spanish ‘hero-movie’, *The Angel of Budapest* (2011), that I am analyzing in Chapter 4. While German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* may look like as flawless process for Cercas, the transgenerational dialogue and memorialization of the atrocities committed remains problematic in Germany, as well.

Shiny Image, Gloomy Reality

Why did the Spanish audience respond so eagerly to Marco stories? As we have seen, the answer to this question lies in part in the silences that surrounded Francoism and the transition to democracy, with events such as the thousands of Republicans deported to

²¹ *Lessons and Legacies Conference*, Saint Louis, November 1-4

Nazi concentration camps, and in part thanks to the Francoist myth of Spanish neutrality during the Second World War and her role as savior of Jews.

In fact, Enric Marco did not appear in the limelight as a “Nazi concentration camp survivor,” but as an anti-Francoist resistance fighter and political leader. During the transition period he became first the regional, and then the national leader of the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo [National Confederation of Labour], or C.N.T for short, the confederation of anarcho-syndicalist unions in Spain. How did this happen? There are various reasons that are related to both the values of neoliberalism and the chaos of the transition. Marco was an exceptional speaker, who combined his youthful appearance with perceptiveness to the shifting mood of his audience. In contrast, “los dirigentes del exilio que rodeaban a Marco en el estrado eran momias o muertos vivientes, viejas glorias extraviadas que pronunciaban discursos guerracivilistas y disparatados.” (215) [“the exiled leaders surrounding Marco on the stage looked like mummies or zombies, resurrecting ancient heroes thundering preposterous Civil War speeches.” (177)] The real leaders of the trade union movement, who returned from exile, grew old and bore visible traces of their traumatic past, thus they could not correspond to the neoliberal image of good-looking, full of life heroes, constantly appearing in blockbuster movies. The narrator replicates this image by qualifying the Civil War veterans as mummies and zombies.

Here we encounter once again a key element of capitalism at work: glamour. Instead of the allure of objects as we have already seen in transitioning Budapest, this time it is about the allure of people, who turn into celebrities with an image of glamour.

What is Marco's allure based on? Why does his narrative and his appearance appeal more to the general audience than that of the genuine Civil War veterans? According to Nigel Thrift, glamorous celebrities are "persons who are things. They are a 'something.' They exist in the realm of mediated imagination, as stimuli promoting further exploration, [...] desires and identifications. (304) Marco was something in the sense that he represented living history for some, the image of a hero for others, and the opportunity to rehabilitate the long-silenced Civil War veterans. These celebrities "need to be 'small' enough to provide intimate connections to personal memory and 'large' enough to satisfy the imaginary hopes and desires and needs of a public whose members often possess contrary expectations." (304) Marco offered a successful combination of the 'small enough' as he provided his audience with a sense of intimate connection to the national past, at the same time as a 'hero' and 'resistance figure,' he embodied the hopes and desires of the public, elevating it from the national level to the international.

Moreover, according to Thrift's definition, glamour is based on precise calculation, even though it appears "as effortless." "So glamour is selling. It is manipulation. It is seduction. It is a certain form of deception." At the same time, it is "meticulous selection and control." (298-299) In general, glamour is a carefully constructed image, based on manipulation and "a certain form of deception", in Marco's case the manipulation and seduction was literally based on total deception, but it worked essentially the same way as the allure of celebrities, hence the denomination a "veritable rock-star of memory." The concept of heroism becomes a commodity that sells well in the neoliberal media.

The stories of Marco were well-received by the general public because his accounts corresponded to the narratives of the Holocaust the Spanish public increasingly became familiar with at the end of the twentieth century. The tragic events of the past evolved into heroic tales with an entertainment value, since we strive for the simple solutions of a black and white world. Should we have lived in the past, we would regard “our hero” as a role model who we had fought with arm in arm against every kind of oppression. This is not unique to Spain, since all countries have myths regarding their immediate past, including the Holocaust.

The following quote explains the reasons why journalists preferred interviewing Marco to the actual survivors, giving a good insight into the priorities of profit-oriented media:

Los periodistas lo adoraban, se volvían locos por él, se peleaban por entrevistarlo. Es natural. Los otros deportados o exiliados o ex combatientes de la Segunda República, los demás protagonistas de la memoria histórica, eran en su mayoría ancianos caedizos y con la memoria averiada, y entrevistarlos representaba a menudo un calvario: había que sonsacarles las palabras, arrancarles las historias y repetirles las preguntas, incluso detener de vez en cuando la entrevista para que se fuesen al baño o dejarasen de toser o recuperasen el hilo extraviado del relato. (294)

[Journalists loved him, they went crazy for him, they fought to interview him. It’s not surprising. The other prisoners or exiles or veterans of the Second Republic, the other stars of so-called historic memory, were mostly elderly and frail, their memories were failing: interviewing them was a chore: you had to wheedle information, coax their stories from them, constantly repeat questions, even pause the interview to give them pause to go to the bathroom, to stop coughing, or to find the thread of what were they saying. (242)]

Frail memory, aging, coughing, having to use the bathroom and showing signs of trauma are all part of the natural aging process, yet these traits convert the interviews into a

chore. The veterans are portrayed without any sign of empathy or adoration, their person and accounts are dismissed as not worthy of the effort and attention. Marco, in contrast was a delight to interview because

Marco lo recordaba todo y lo contaba todo, su discurso era un chorro de palabras saturado de anécdotas coloridas, historias heroicas, terroríficas y emocionantes y reflexiones didácticas y conmovedoras sobre la solidaridad y pundonor de que es capaz el ser humano en circunstancias extremas, todo ello ilustrado con ejemplos extraídos de su propia experiencia y contado con un orden y una coherencia” (294)

[Marco remembered everything and recounted everything, he poured forth a torrent of words, a blend of colourful anecdotes, heroic, harrowing or heartbreaking stories, poignant and edifying reflections on the solidarity and honour a human being is capable of in the most terrible circumstances, each illustrated with examples of his personal experience and told with such a narrative structure and coherence. (242-243)]

The narrator Cercas provides the key elements for a successful narrative, colorful, heroic, harrowing, heartbreaking, edifying, and first-person. Marco himself brings up similar arguments for his defense as well, for example that “él les presentaba la historia a los chicos en primera persona, palpitante y concreta, sin ahorrarles sangre, sudor y vísceras, él les hizo llegar la historia con todo su colorido, su sentimiento, su emoción y aventura y su heroísmo, ella encarnaba y revivía ante ellos.” (39) [“he presented history to the schoolchildren in the flesh, living, breathing, never sparing them the blood, the sweat, the guts, he offered them history in all its colour, its emotions, its adventure and its heroism, he was history incarnate and he relived it for them.” (23)] In Marco’s words history is a cold, dry subject that does not hold any interest for the younger generations, who need a different kind of narrative in order to pay attention. Blood, sweat, emotions, heroism, color, these words take us to the realm of popular culture, for example love-

stories and adventure movies. The fact that the general public requires these elements to listen to a story indicates the consumerization of history/historical memory, and the past. For example, the train journey to the Nazi concentration camp remains a key feature of Enric Marco's accounts:

Marco aguarda un tren que debe conducirle a un campo de concentración: 'Hacía frío, mucho frío. [...] Tembloroso y constipado, se sentía solo, muy solo. [...] El tren de mercancías llegó y los soldados les hicieron subir a los vagones. [...] Estaban amontonados como animales. [...] Enric pudo ver por una rendija el nombre de la estación: Fossenbürg. Las puertas se abrieron, dejando entrar un aire helado. [...] Y los SS estaban por todas partes. GOLPES, PATADAS, AZOTES, MORDISCOS. (127-128)

[Marco is waiting for the train that is to take him to the concentration camp: 'It was cold, very cold. [...] Trembling and constipated, he felt alone, utterly alone. [...] The train arrived and soldiers forced them to climb into wagons [...] They were packed like animals. [...] Enric peered through a crack in the slats and saw the name of the station: Flossenbürg. The doors opened, allowing icy air to rush into the wagons. [...] And the SS were everywhere. Punches, kicks, whips, bites. (102)]

These images about the arrival at the concentration camp immediately resonate with the general public, as familiar. As the narrator puts it: "Es un clásico: la llegada de los deportados a los campos de concentración. Hay centenares, tal vez miles de relatos de los supervivientes; el cine y la literatura lo han recreado también, infatigablemente. No menos infatigablemente lo reinventó Marco en sus conferencias, artículos y entrevistas." (129) ["It is a classic scene: the arrival of prisoners at the concentration camps. There are hundreds, perhaps thousands of survivors' stories; they have been tirelessly re-created on film and in literature, too. Marco reinvented the scene no less tirelessly in his conferences, his articles and his interviews." (103)] And these tropes moved the audience to tears again and again. The expression "classic scene" implies that most representations

of the Holocaust follow a “classic pattern,” and that the general public is familiar with those patterns of representation. Similar descriptions appear in Semprún’s *The Long Voyage*, and in the movies *Perlasca* and *The Angel of Budapest*, analyzed in Chapter 4.

Phrases like history in its colors, emotions, adventures and heroism, as well as the tears of the audience demonstrate the omnipresence of emotions. If we specifically look at the encounter between history and memory in Holocaust testimonies, we note a major shift in “the dominant conception of Holocaust memory and representation.” Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer, scholars of memory studies, explain that as oral testimonies gradually gained prominence over the written ones, their main function became affective transmission instead of providing factual information. In order to be able to transmit the affective experience, the non-verbal means of bodily enactment, for example muteness and tears gained importance, and even precedence over verbal narratives. (159)

Truth, Fiction and Lies: The Fiction-less Novel

The relationship of history and memory constitutes a recurring thread in Cercas’s novels. He acknowledges that this debate is present in all his novels and that “Cada libro tiene una solución distinta, tiene una perspectiva completamente distinta.” (Cercas and Samson 159) In *The Impostor* the perspective of history triumphs over memory. In a somewhat unusual manner, the narrator Cercas favors history over memory, and categorically condemns what he calls the “blackmail of the witness.” He claims that “memory is threatening to replace history” and according to him:

Mal asunto. La memoria y la historia son en principio, opuestas: La memoria y la historia también son complementarias: la memoria es individual, parcial y subjetiva; en cambio, la historia es colectiva y aspira

a ser total y objetiva. La memoria y la historia son también complementarias: la historia dota a la memoria de un sentido; la memoria es un instrumento, un ingrediente, una parte de la historia. Pero la memoria no es la historia. (278)

[This is bad news. Memory and history are notionally opposites: memory is individual, partial and subjective; history is collective and aspires to be comprehensive and objective. Memory and history are also complementary: history gives sense to memory; memory is a tool, an ingredient, a part of history. But memory is not history. (229)]

The author Cercas explains in an interview that “La historia tiene prohibido inventar; la novella tiene la obligación de inventar.” (Cercas and Samson 159) Ironically, the narrator Cercas’s examples to support his arguments in *The Impostor* do not come from historians, instead, we need to rely on the experience of invented characters in Stendhal’s and Tolstoy’s novels. Even more ironically, ‘the novel without fiction’ that advocates so vehemently against memory and the industry of memory centers on two invented characters: Enric Marco, the fake survivor, and the character/writer Cercas. As Sara Brenneis remarks “Cercas turns a blind eye to the non-Jewish victims of Nazi aggression in *El impostor*, aligning the author more than he may have intended with the false survivor at the core of his narrative.” (367) She also adds that “By writing *El impostor*, the author implies that the creation of the myth surrounding a false survivor is more engaging and worthy of examination than the real memories of the thousands of Spaniards who did pass through Nazi camps.” (371) Despite conceiving the book as a “quest for the truth”, Cercas chooses to interview Enric Marco over the “elderly and frail” survivors of the Nazi concentration camps, the same way as the journalists before him.

According to the narrator Cercas, it is history that looks for the truth, and not literature:

Un historiador no es un juez; pero la forma de operar de un juez se parece a la de historiador: como el juez, el historiador busca la verdad; como el historiador estudia documentos, verifica pruebas, relaciona hechos, interroga a testigos; como el juez, el historiador emite un veredicto. (278)

[A historian is not a judge, but the ways in which they work are similar; like the judge, the historian studies documents, corroborates evidence, connects facts, questions witnesses; like the judge, a historian pronounces a verdict. (230)]

Once more, we read the words of a categorical narrative voice, who, like the historian and the judge pronounces a verdict, and this verdict is not favorable to memory, which is “subjective.” In contrast with the views expressed here, the historian Michael Richards argues against historians “wanting to act as judges or to make political propaganda.” (143) I agree with Richards that historians should not pronounce a verdict, since historical evidence is always incomplete, new facts and documents emerge constantly. Richards quotes the Italian philosopher, Benedetto Croce, to emphasize his point: “*Those who, on the plea of narrating history, bustle about as judges, condemning here and giving absolution there, because they think that this is the office of history...are generally recognized as devoid of historical sense.*” (121) He rightly suggests that historians should instead “constructively complicate popular images of the past” (143) from a social historical perspective, and explore the grand narratives “to unravel the web that knits together our myriad images of the Spanish Civil war from what we refer to vaguely as ‘memory,’ ‘history,’ ‘nostalgia,’ ‘amnesia,’ and forgetting.” (128) The expressions ‘unravel the web’ and ‘knits together’ refer to the entangled nature of history and

memory, present in all works analyzed in this dissertation, and add one more element to the tightly woven cobweb.

Cercas repeatedly describes *The Impostor* as a fiction-less novel, “a rigorously true story without the slightest trace of invention or imagination.” (10) The inventions of Enric Marco and Cercas’ frequent reflections about the use of fiction in literature opens up the debate about the complex relationship of truth, truthfulness, literature, history and memory. In fact, specifically addressing this issue and opting for a form of truthful representation is one of the common threads that links all works analyzed in this dissertation together.

“Reality kills, fiction saves” stands as one of the leitmotifs in the novel, reiterated periodically, with slightly different wording. It also serves as one of the author’s main argument to demonstrate the driving force behind Marco’s lies. All across the novel, Cercas compares Marco to Don Quijote, and himself to Cervantes, and argues that the reality of living an ordinary life would have killed Marco, and his invented past saved him. This parallel may make us wonder, where does literature stand in the perceived fight of history and memory? Cercas repeatedly insinuates that, like Marco, he himself, and novelists in general are impostors:

“mi vida era una farsa y yo un farsante, que había elegido la literatura para llevar una existencia libre, feliz y auténtica y llevaba una existencia falsa, esclava e infeliz, que yo era un tipo que iba de novelista y daba el pego y engañaba al personal, pero en realidad no era más que un impostor.” (17) [“my life was a charade and I was a charlatan, that I have chosen literature in order to have a free, happy and authentic life whereas my actual

life was false, servile and unhappy, that I have pretended to be a novelist, and succeeded by deceiving and cheating people; in reality I was nothing more than an impostor.” (5)]

To achieve credibility, Cercas demonstrates an arsenal of resources, considered reliable: a careful reconstruction of Marco’s biography, video footage of the conversations, which his son shoots, detailed descriptions of various encounters, including detailed descriptions of clothing, attitudes, conversations, and menu items. In additions to the many conversation partners, who appear with their full names, positions, and relationships to the author, the book portrays photos, archival documents, describes a visit to Flossenbürg, and various visits to archives.

Whereas in Marco’s case the narrator frequently expresses hesitation by adding questions or synonyms with different meanings, the narrative voice affirms its own authority by using precise and detailed descriptions. We may observe this strategy when the narrator explains the historic circumstances and contextualizes Marco’s lies. In contrast with Cercas, Sebastiaan Faber defines the fiction-less novel as “an alcohol-free beer: watered down, a tad too sweet, and a bit puritanical” (192) Faber identifies the following four “ingredients” necessary to prepare a fiction-free novel: the narrator is explicitly identified with the author, “a scope of self-referentiality,” a “generous dose of autobiography” and “a quarter pound of essays marinated in a philosophical sauce (home brand: *El País*). “The fiction-free novelist doesn’t offer invention he is trafficker in truths.” (193)

How does the concept “trafficker of truths” works? If we look at the works examined in the present work, *The Impostor* and *Sepharad* show the most common

features, as both construct their narratives in similar ways. In both novels the authors emphasize the lack of fiction and invention. Cercas calls his novel a “fiction-less” novel, and Muñoz Molina insists that he invented very little in the life-stories. The writers remain present in the novels and claim credibility by demonstrating the process of gathering information, conducting interviews and declaring their sincerity. The identification of the narrator with the author Cercas is complete, whereas in *Sepharad* the explicit statement of the writer “I, Antonio Muñoz Molina” is missing, thereby always leaving the possibility open, to hide behind a fictional character and to dismiss the identification of the real-life author with the narrator.

Cercas and Muñoz Molina both belong to the group of public intellectuals who have benefited enormously from the so-called memory boom, perhaps exactly because they have not pushed the majority of the society past a line they were not ready to go. Even though both of them have predominantly looked back at the Spanish society during and after the Spanish Civil War and Francoism, they also linked the Spanish narrative with the narratives of the Holocaust. Both *Sepharad* and *The Impostor* look at the Holocaust narratives from and through a particular Spanish perspective. I argue that both novels are constructed as a cobweb, with the author/narrator acting as a spider, moving the threads around themselves and weaving an intricate cobweb to trap the reader. In both “factions,” it is the author who holds the ultimate power, in the same way as the spider dominates its web. Both novels weave around the way contemporary societies deal with the memories of the past taking an elitist attitude and targeting a readership with regards itself as intellectual. *Gloomy Sunday*, in contrast is admittedly fictional. Yet, Zeniter’s

literary account, interwoven from various life-stories and fictional elements, does take into account and reflect the experience of everyday Hungarians. Maybe, a novel with fiction is not a bad idea, after all, as it may give a truer reflection of the life-experiences of everyday people than a novel without fiction.

CHAPTER V: EL ÁNGEL DE BUDAPEST AND PERLASCA: THE COURAGE OF A JUST MAN, NATIONAL NARRATIVES IN THE CINEMATIC REPRESENTATIONS OF THE RIGHTEOUS AMONG NATIONS

Introduction

If we were to walk in the streets of the old Jewish quarter in Budapest, we could not miss a colorful mural dedicated to Angel Sanz Briz (1910-1980), the chargé d'affaires of the Spanish legation in Budapest during 1944. The mural, the work of Okuda San Miguel, a Spanish graffiti artist, was commissioned by a joint initiative of the Spanish Embassies in Budapest, Bucharest and Sophia. Its unveiling in October 2016 added one more occasion to the long list of commemorative events promoted and organized by the Spanish Embassy in Budapest to honor Angel Sanz Briz, the so-called El Angel de Budapest. In September 2015, the Budapest Jewish Festival started with the opening of an exposition dedicated to the life of Sanz Briz, who rescued 5200 Hungarian Jews from deportation and almost certain death during the Holocaust. The exposition became an itinerant one, and traveled to museums and cultural centers all across Hungary since then. Around the same time, a street was named after Angel Sanz Briz in both the Spanish and Hungarian capitals. José Ángel López Jorrín, the Spanish Ambassador in Hungary since 2014, refers to the inauguration of the monument, dedicated to the memory of Sanz Briz as “the most touching and most decisive” experience of his professional career in Budapest. In 2015, *La encrucijada de Sanz Briz*, directed by José Alejandro González Baztán, a documentary sponsored by the city of Zaragoza and the State of Aragón was

released and is now showing in Cervantes Institutes all across the globe. After a near complete silence of seven decades, how and why has the figure of Angel Sanz Briz been thrust into the limelight?

The Making of a Hero

In 2005, a Spanish journalist, Diego Carcedo, set out to write the biography and thus preserve the memory of the Spanish Angel Sanz Briz in *Un Español Frente al Holocausto* [*A Spaniard in the Face of the Holocaust.*] During the Franco dictatorship (1939-1975) the Spanish State had no diplomatic relations at all with Israel, and barely any contact with communist Hungary. Even though diplomatic relationship with Israel were resumed in 1986 and information from Hungary became more readily available following the regime change in 1990, Sanz Briz's name remained virtually unknown both in Spain and Hungary until Carcedo's book was published. Carcedo draws the picture of a perfect gentleman, honoring and documenting Sanz Briz's role in saving thousands of lives. The book contains interviews with survivors who owed their life to Sanz Briz's rescue efforts, and with Sanz Briz's family members, since Sanz Briz passed away long before his rescue efforts merited attention in Spain.

Carcedo's book was adapted to the screen and was first broadcast as *The Angel of Budapest*, a four part mini-series in RTVE in 2011. The mini-series, directed by Luis Oliveros and featuring popular Spanish actors, attracted millions of viewers and gained various international awards, such as Best Film at Zoom Festival for European TV movies, Silver Medal at the 2012 New York Festivals TV and Film Awards, Premio Ondas for the Best TV mini-series in 2012. The film repeatedly appears in both the

Spanish and Hungarian televisions in prime time reaching a wide audience in both countries with a seductively easy narrative discourse. Later, the film was also released as a feature film. No doubt, *The Angel* became a popular movie and succeeded in directing attention to the previously largely unknown story of Sanz Briz.

His story, like Oscar Schindler's, had been forgotten for more than half a century and resurfaced in the new millennium. Most Hungarians and Spaniards alike first heard about Sanz Briz when they saw the film in the movie or on TV. Even though the name of Sanz Briz may not have been familiar to Hungarians, the activity of issuing safe conducts evokes a familiar narrative, a piece of history familiar to most. In this respect the movie fills a gap by bringing Sanz Briz into focus, as his rescue activities deserve to be remembered.

Ángel Sanz Briz served as the chargé d'affaires of the Spanish legation in Budapest from April until November 30, 1944 during the most tragic period in the history of Hungarian Jewry. The Jewish population of Hungary was over 800,000 inhabitants in March, 1944, when the German troops occupied Hungary. The systematic mass deportation of Jewish Hungarians started shortly after the Nazi occupation, with the collaboration of the newly installed pro-German government. In less than two months 438,000 Jews were deported from rural Hungary, most of whom perished in the gas chambers of Auschwitz. In July, 1944 temporary relief arrived for the more than 250,000 Jewish inhabitants of Budapest since Regent Horthy stopped deportations and intensified his efforts to sign an armistice with the Allied Powers. On October 15, 1944, a few hours after Horthy's announcement of reaching an armistice, the fascist Arrow Cross Party

carried out a coup d'état and formed a new government with German backing. The Arrow Cross party installed a reign of terror, the Jewish population in Budapest was forced to ever smaller ghettos, brutally murdered and violently persecuted. The deportations to the extermination camps which resumed in August became the top priority for the occupying German forces, and the fascist Arrow Cross gangs readily collaborated. Terror reigned on the streets of Budapest and mass shootings of the Jewish population in Budapest became frequent.

In November, 1944 Sanz Briz was recalled from his post due to diplomatic reasons: the Spanish state did not intend to recognize the new Hungarian puppet-government, led by the National Socialist Arrow Cross Party. Moreover, the Soviet troops were approaching Budapest and the Franco regime fought against the Soviet Union, which supported the Republicans, a few years previously during the Spanish Civil War. Sanz Briz left for Bern a few weeks before Soviet troops reached Budapest in January 1945. Historians estimate that by then approximately 600,000 Jewish people were murdered in the Nazi extermination camps, which means that 75% of Hungarian Jews perished in the gas chambers of Auschwitz and other camps.

Nonetheless, *Un español frente el Holocausto* and *The Angel of Budapest* are not the only existing accounts of the rescue activities of the Spanish legation during 1944. The Italian Giorgio Perlasca (1910-1992) worked together with Angel Sanz Briz to save the lives of thousands of Hungarian Jews by providing safe conducts and accommodation in safe houses for them during 1944. Both Perlasca and Sanz Briz were awarded the title 'Righteous Among the Nations' for their role played in saving the lives of 5200

Hungarian Jews during the Holocaust. Perlasca, a committed fascist who fought in the Spanish Civil War, sought protection at the Spanish legation. First he became one of Sanz Briz's aides and later his self-proclaimed, unofficial successor, "The Impostor." Perlasca managed to convince the Hungarian authorities that he was officially in charge of the Spanish legation and succeeded in maintaining the protection of the Spanish houses until January 1945, the arrival of the Soviet troops. He wrote his memoirs and in the last years of his life agreed to have his biography written by an Italian journalist, Enrico Deaglio.

Deaglio embarked upon writing the life-story of Giorgio Perlasca based on interviews with the elderly Perlasca, as well as Hungarian survivors and historic research. His book *The Banality of Goodness, The Story of Giorgio Perlasca* (original title: *La Banalità del Bene: Storia di Giorgio Perlasca*) appeared in 1991. The title paraphrases Hannah Arendt's famous and controversial journalistic report, *The Banality of Evil* on the trial of Nazi SS-Obersturmbannführer Adolf Eichmann. In *Banality of Goodness*, the image of an ordinary man, who could not face the atrocities around him and saved as many lives as he could, is juxtaposed to the image of Eichmann the ordinary man who was ready to send millions to death to receive a promotion.

Deaglio's book was adapted to the screen three years before Carcedo's book appeared. *Perlasca un eroe italiano* (2002) (English title: *Perlasca, The Courage of a Just Man*), directed by Alberto Negrín, was first broadcast in 2002 as a hugely popular two part mini-series of RAI, and eventually turned into a feature film. The two films, *Perlasca, The Courage of a Just Man*, an Italian-Hungarian co-production about Giorgio Perlasca and *The Angel of Budapest* (2011), a Spanish-Hungarian co-production

about Angel Sanz Briz have almost identical plots, except that one narrative centers around the character of the Italian Perlasca and the other on the character of the Spanish Angel Sanz Briz. Despite their remarkable similarities, the two biographical films demonstrate striking differences, as well.

Studying these two films together demonstrates that both artistic representations and discourses on memory remain fragmented and strongly influenced by national discourses and ways of remembering. The existence of the two differing narratives, and the very fact that we have an Italian and a Spanish version of the story underscores that we do not have a common European narrative for any of the historic events that took place during the twentieth century, our grand-narratives in history books and artistic representations alike contain competing and contrasting national versions.

Studying the two films together reveals a competition between the filmmakers to portray “their” hero as the main protagonist and primarily in charge of saving lives. The lives of the Perlasca and Sanz Briz were intertwined during a couple of weeks, the artistic representation of their life and discourses on their memory remain competitive. We can draw from Michel Rothberg’s concept of multidirectional memory in this regard, for with respect to these films, it seems that both memory and heroism are still perceived as a zero-sum game in which the two historical heroes are pitted against each other. Both films have a single protagonist: the Italian Perlasca in the Italian movie and the Spanish Sanz Briz in the Spanish movie. The other diplomat, or ‘fake’ diplomat in the case of Perlasca— only appears as a minor character, following the lead and helping out the main

character. I will explore how the differing representations of Perlasca and Sanz Briz achieve the goal of constructing a single lead hero and its implication.

In addition to analyzing the narrative and cinematic techniques these films employ to construct the story of a single hero, I also examine these rescue narratives in the wider context of Holocaust narratives. How do these films represent the tragedy of the Holocaust? Does constructing the story of an outstanding hero contribute to projecting a false image of the Holocaust? What image does the films project of Jewish and Non-Jewish Hungarians? How do the added fictitious elements and the entertainment component of the films impact historic veracity? How do these films represent the Holocaust in Hungary, and the role Francoist Spain played during World War II? Do they have an agenda of influencing and modifying public discourses on memory?

I am hesitant to give a negative review to films which fulfill an extremely important mission by putting the spotlight on Giorgio Perlasca and Angel Sanz Briz whose heroic actions were forgotten and who deserve to be remembered not only by those whom they saved. I maintain that despite the striking similarities in plot development and conventional mise-en-scene, the two films also differ fundamentally. While both of them preserve –and slightly beautify the character and actions of the rescuers,– the Italian movie reflects the tragedy of Hungarian Jewry more faithfully by showing the frequent failures of Perlasca to save people despite all his efforts and by amply representing violence and brutality on the screen. The movie *The Angel of Budapest* distorts historic reality by showing an overly triumphalist perspective and by

emphasizing repeatedly the humanistic commitment of the Franco government based on Catholic principles to save Jewish lives.

Both historical dramas were filmed in the original location, Budapest. Both *Perlasca* and *El Angel* reinforce traditional representations of World War II, the persecution of Jews and diplomatic life alike: we see huge yellow stars sewn on the dresses of the Hungarian Jews, Jewish representatives are pictured as orthodox Jews with huge beards, diplomats are always impeccably dressed, wearing suits and ties, drinking whiskey and having elaborate dinners, Nazi officers wear black uniforms, giving Heil Hitler salutations and smiling cruelly.

Both films use similar images to juxtapose diplomatic and street life. The world of diplomacy is projected as non-stop glamorous receptions with champagne and occasional Nazi intruders and brightly lit rooms. This world co-exists and contrasts vividly with the grey and black of the dark streets, where danger may appear at every corner.

The stereotypical mise-en-scene means that there is no need to think about the categorization of people, as they are identified for us. Hungarian Jews invariably appear with a huge yellow star, the acts of the Spanish legation are usually accompanied by a flying Spanish flag. Both the Spanish flag and the yellow star are exclusively associated with good people. The fascist Arrow Cross Party members or the members of the German army always wear a uniform and an armband, even the steam-engine of a train ready to start to Auschwitz is decorated with a huge flag with a swastika. I hold that this iconography reflects a simplistic and binary division and makes identification with the right side comfortable and easy for the spectators.

In *The Angel* we always find Sanz Briz at the center of the action, in *Perlasca* it is Giorgio Perlasca. The respective hero makes the decisions, everybody looks at him for solutions, and he always provides one. The employees of the legation, who are of Jewish origin, are portrayed as grey mice, conservatively dressed, extremely efficient, constantly scared and dependent on Sanz Briz in *El Angel* and Perlasca in *Perlasca*. Farkas, the lawyer of the legation repeatedly tries to warn the lead hero against the dangers and craziness of his actions in both films, thus underscoring the heroism and self-sacrifice of his respective boss.

The main characters are played by handsome and popular TV series actors in both productions, Sanz Briz by Francis Lorenzo in the Spanish adaptation and Perlasca by Luca Zingaretti in the Italian. We observe the events through the eyes and subjectivity of Sanz Briz in *The Angel*, we find out that Sanz Briz's wife is expecting a baby at the same time as the happy father, we witness the suffering of the Jewish population with him and we feel his sorrow when he says farewell to his beloved wife who gives birth to their second child in Spain. In *Perlasca* we follow closely the actions and emotional reactions of Perlasca.

Both films follow a traditional 'Hollywood-style' story-telling pattern and focus on the process of the central character's growing involvement and risk-taking in rescuing Hungarian Jews in mortal peril. They construct the narrative around characters with positive traits such as honest, loyal, devoted, brave, self-sacrificing, kind and loving. The development of the plot is chronological, starting with the moment of getting involved and finishing with the rescuer leaving Hungary.

The Angel of Budapest opens with a magnificent diplomatic reception, setting the scene nicely for the spectators and introduces us to both the personal and professional life of the main character. The bird's eye view shot of Budapest and the ballroom gradually zooms in on a conversation between Angel Sanz Briz, his wife, Adela, and Ángel de Muguero, his superior, and Muguero's wife. This short glimpse into the life of the Sanz Briz couple offers us an idyllic picture of a harmonious married life.

As for the professional aspect, a short conversation in a secluded balcony informs Sanz Briz and us that his superior will return to Spain shortly. Muguero asks Sanz Briz to carry on with his mission of protecting Jews. At this point Sanz Briz is still a reluctant angel, so Muguero appeals to his conscience. Later on our gaze is focused on the transformation of Sanz Briz and his growing involvement in saving Jewish lives.

This process is carefully documented, the camera repeatedly follows his gaze to show the spectators the scenes Sanz Briz is watching, and then returns to show a close-up of his face and the emotions reflecting on them. The first transformative experience takes place when Sanz Briz accompanies Muguero to the Spanish safe house where 500 Jewish children are waiting for an exit visa from the German authorities to leave for Tangier. The camera first shows the images of the children, then redirects to the face of Angel Sanz Briz to capture his emotions. The abundance of point-of-view shots helps the audience to identify with the main character. Throughout the film we are given unmistakable clues as we witness how the distance between him and his surroundings vanishes. When Sanz Briz witnesses an Arrow Cross Party initiated book burning from his diplomatic car, the fire is reflecting right by him on the windshield, symbolizing and

reinforcing the inner fire of Sanz Briz. Eventually, the prophecy of Muguiro comes true: Angel Sanz Briz will indeed be unable to sleep at night and vividly remembers the voice of his predecessor while desperately turning from one side to the other. The film finishes with a solemn and deeply moved Angel Sanz Briz leaving the embassy and all employees standing face-to-face with him to say farewell and show their admiration. The men take off their hats to pay respect and everybody goes to Sanz Briz and one by one they express their gratitude. These expressions range from a strong handshake to a tearful hug.

Perlasca follows the same linear narrative pattern: the plot starts at the moment when Perlasca fails to escape from Hungary on a cattle train; shows his first transformative experience which takes place in a hospital ward (the very same white framed hospital beds appear in both films)—where he encounters Hungarian Jews who are hiding;— and focuses on his growing involvement in the rescue activities. After Sanz Briz's departure, the people hiding in the Spanish legation all turn their expectant gaze on Perlasca, who decides to stay in Hungary until the end of the war and pretends to be the new Spanish representative. When the doors of the ghetto finally open, Perlasca stands face to face with a grateful crowd. Finally, he succeeds in getting on a train to Italy and waves goodbye to the small group of people he rescued.

The arbitrary choice of the initial and final moment of the plot serves to highlight the protagonism of the lead hero and overshadow the role of the other. The plot in *Perlasca* presents events from September 1944 to January 1945, and ignores the rescue activities of the Spanish legation which took place before his arrival. *The Angel* in turn, finishes when Angel Sanz Briz leaves Hungary on December 1, 1944 and ignores the

period when Perlasca took over the role of Sanz Briz. Besides adapting the time framework of the plot to the actions of the lead character, both films emphasize the admirable character traits of the heroes. Both of them appear in a traditional patriarchal role, as the defender of a mother and child.

Adela, the wife of Sanz Briz, is portrayed as the perfect housewife, providing ideal background for her hard-working husband, taking care of their first child and expecting the second. Her image corresponds perfectly to that of an ideal housewife in the Franco period. She always appears carrying out her duties: the perfectly elegant and beautiful companion, indispensable for a diplomatic period, a caring and loving mother who soothes her child, and a woman deeply in love with her husband, which manifests in her tearful eyes and worried look. The Sanz Briz couple displays emotions in a reserved fashion: shaking voices, tearful hugs, kisses on the forehead and deeply felt separation. We have no knowledge about the circumstances and emotional life of Perlasca in the Spanish film. In contrast, in *Perlasca* we have no knowledge about the family of Sanz Briz, our attention focuses on Perlasca. Only the “heroes” have emotional relationships in the movies, since the presence of a wife or child evokes a strong emotional response and sympathy from the spectator and helps the identification process.

In *Perlasca*, we find out from a letter that his wife awaits him in Italy and that Perlasca seeks desperately to return to her. During a Nazi ambush, Perlasca saves the life of Magda and her daughter Lili and continues to take care of them. In fact, he arrives at the Spanish legation seeking protection for them. The presence of a helpless woman and child justifies the actions of Perlasca, who virtually conquers the place, forcing his way

into the building and demanding protection. He behaves with authority and gives explanations to a startled Sanz Briz.

In *The Angel* the encounter between the two men takes place in a different way. Giorgio Perlasca asks for Sanz Briz's help and protection to escape persecution. Sanz Briz does not hesitate to grant a Spanish passport to him, since the Italian fought on the side of the Fascists during the Spanish Civil War. The roles are clearly different this time: when Perlasca joins the efforts of the Spanish legation to rescue Jews, he remains one of several aides, he often looks at Sanz Briz, asking for directions, the same way as everybody else.

Alongside the same events depicted in different ways in the two movies, we find almost identical scenes as well, where *The Angel* clearly draws on *Perlasca*, except that the protagonist is different. For example, we contemplate a railway-station rescue scene, where people with safe-conducts are literally taken off the train ready to depart to a Nazi extermination camp both in *The Angel and Perlasca*. In *Perlasca*, the Italian arrives in a diplomatic car, with a flying Spanish flag, he confronts the chief of the station (the very same railway station) and manages to rescue several people, taking them off of a whistling train. In *The Angel* we witness the arrival of the same black car, with Angel Sanz Briz in it, and the scene is repeated to the exact detail, such as taking children off the train, asking people on the list to come up with additional names, a nearly fatal final confrontation with the authorities, and a handful of people leaving on a truck. Since the Spanish movie is posterior to the Italian one, the substitution of Perlasca with Angel Sanz Briz clearly seeks to put Sanz Briz back on central stage.

Besides the difference in the person of the rescuer, the only modification between the two scenes becomes apparent at the end when the trucks leave with the lucky people, whose lives have just been saved. Following Perlasca's successful intervention, the enormous train and the small trucks start moving at the same time. The huge train moves forward to death, while the tiny trucks take a turn and return back to life. By showing the simultaneous movement of the enormous train and the tiny trucks, the film demonstrates the scales, and contrasts the few lives saved with the masses going to death. The gaze of the rescued follows the departing train, making sure the spectators also focus on it. This viewpoint is missing from *The Angel* where the camera always focuses on the grateful faces of the rescued, thus emphasizing survival and the success of the rescue. I argue that this alteration contributes to the differing representations of the Holocaust in the two films.

In other instances, the scenes in the two films differ slightly to emphasize the official nature of Sanz Briz's activities. In *Perlasca*, the protagonist participates in a high-class reception in the hope of obtaining false papers. Unfortunately, the reception is interrupted by the arrival of Nazi soldiers, who arrest several high-ranking Hungarian soldiers. We never find out who the arrested high-ranking soldiers or the other participants were. Neither do we know when the reception took place. In contrast, the reception which Angel Sanz Briz attends is organized by Regent Horthy, the governor of Hungary. The black boots ascending through the red carpet on the stairs (we observe the same contrast of black boots and red carpet in both films, the same upward movement to indicate that they hold the power, and the same interruption of a reception) belong to the

Nazi plenipotentiaries Adolf Eichmann and Edmund Veessenmayer. The loud knocks of the majordomo on the ground and his announcement of the two high ranking Nazi officials shatter the peaceful reception. The sound and focus on marching legs evoke the sounds of an occupying army. Their unexpected arrival mirrors the Nazi occupation of Hungary and the abrupt end of peaceful daily life. Despite World War II being waged all around, Budapest remained an island of peace and a safe haven for Jewish people until the German military occupation on March 19, 1944. Even though the look on the governor's face illustrates perfectly the complexities of the situation, it fails to convey the implications of Horthy's failure to remain in power and to defy Nazi intentions to exterminate Hungarian Jewry. The presence of governor Miklós Horthy, Adolf Eichmann and Edmund Veessenmayer emphasizes the position of Angel Sanz Briz as the official representative of a neutral state and the importance of his role. In the light of this luxurious state reception, Perlasca's glory clearly fades.

Diego Carcedo, articulates his views regarding the protagonism of Perlasca and Angel Sanz Briz during a public lecture series titled Heroes in 2014. Answering the question whether Perlasca himself contributed to promote his protagonism and minimize the role of Sanz Briz Carcedo states that:

Sin duda alguna, yo creo que sí, totalmente, lo hizo en una manera bastante descarada, buscando un protagonismo que no tuvo, [...] compartió protagonismo, tuvo unas actuaciones que son muy dignas de ser elogiadas, ... pero yo creo que fundamentalmente supo vender muy bien lo que había hecho, siempre olvidándose de lo que había hecho Angel Sanz Briz; y que todo lo que había hecho ha sido gracias a Sanz Briz, a la protección de Sanz Briz [...]. Supo venderlo muy bien, a través del gobierno italiano también, que tenía mejores relaciones internacionales que el español para cultivar estos asuntos. (Héroes, Web)

Carcedo expresses his belief that Perlasca shamelessly claimed a protagonism which did not correspond to him. He claims that Perlasca's fame is due to his ability to sell his story and to the support of the Italian government in selling the story internationally. These words are particularly revealing since by using the verb "vender" or 'sell', Carcedo admits that the story of rescuing Jews functions as a commodity to be sold for gain. By mentioning the Italian government Carcedo concedes that governments also have a stake in making these stories known, since they may gain political capital from them. Carcedo stresses the injustice and inappropriateness of Perlasca 'undeservedly' becoming a hero, yet by following the same logic, we need to ask whether we face a new intent of selling a story, supported by the Spanish state?

Carcedo continues by expressing how inappropriate it would be to try to establish competition between the two personalities, then proceeds to underlining that Angel Sanz Briz played the central role, thus effectively establishing a competition:

Sería muy mal intentar establecer una polémica entre Perlasca y Angel Sanz Briz, porque yo creo que bueno, los méritos de ambos están bastante diferenciados y bastante estratificados, diría yo, pero en cualquier caso son méritos de dos personalidades, dos personas que contribuyeron algo muy importante para el mundo judío que es lo que ya dice el Talmud que quien salva a una persona es tan importante como si hubiera salvado la humanidad y estos dos han salvado a muchos [...] por lo tanto, establecer algún tipo de polémica, yo personalmente me niego completamente hacerlo, aunque no puedo ocultar que de todo lo que investigué, de todo lo que fui descubriendo, averiguando oyendo, escuchando, yo creo que Sanz Briz es él que tuvo el protagonismo máximo en esta historia. (Héroes, Web)

Carcedo's words show a perception of heroism as a zero sum game, and while condemning the role of Perlasca and the Italian government in inflating the story, he exposes the unreliable nature of the discourses on the past, as well as its potential use for

present and future benefits. It's not possible to point out how others manipulate the past and maintain that our own account shows nothing but the truth.

History and Fiction

The best example to illustrate the enormous impact of a biopic is *Schindler's List* (1993) by Steven Spielberg, the best-known movie about the life of a righteous gentile, who saved the lives of Jews in Poland during World War II. The movie had a huge impact all over Europe and helped to draw the attention of the general public to forgotten heroes who risked their lives to save Jews from deportation and death. The movie remains controversial today; many praise it for being able to present the Shoah to the general public, and others criticize it for its shallow approach and Hollywoodization of the Holocaust. *Schindler's List* was the first box-office hit movie showing the Holocaust from the perspective of a rescuer, and many more similar productions followed across the globe.

Critics and fans agree on one thing about *Schindler's List*: the movie changed the ways the general public perceives the Holocaust. What could be a better way to illustrate the tremendous effect of the film on public memory than the fact that it even transformed the memories of the survivors? Experts working on collecting the testimonies of survivors often encounter that survivors incorporate scenes from the film in their testimony. The following quote appears in the memoir of a young woman who decided to investigate the life of her ancestors during the Holocaust:

I had just come from interviewing Grandma Fela in Atlanta and related to a historian my grandmother's harrowing tale of near death in the gas chamber at Auschwitz. The door slammed shut, on the chamber, Grandma

Fela said, and she and her sister knew that death was seconds away. Then a miracle. The phone rang. Workers were needed. [...] But the historian harshly shook her finger at me. ‘That didn’t happen.’

‘What do you mean it didn’t happen?’ I asked. ‘My grandmother told me that story yesterday.’

‘And I am sure that’s how she remembers it,’ the historian said. [...] Your grandmother saw the scene in *Schindler’s list*. After the movie came out, I started hearing the story all the time. Suddenly, everyone had a phone call in the gas chamber. The people who tell it remember it vividly. They believe it happened. The movie was very real. It brought a lot of things back for these people. They were reliving a lot of things and the movie itself became part of their memory.’ (Einhorn 99-100)

In other words, the imaginary events of *Schindler’s List* became facts for a number of survivors. For various members of the younger generations, who did not have any personal connection to the Holocaust *Schindler’s List* became the only point of reference. The film did not only commemorate the Holocaust, it became part of the discourse on memory and shaped the way current generations (re)construct the past. It is precisely this power of shaping discourses on memory which led me to analyze the two films which followed in the footsteps of *Schindler’s List*.

In both films the phrase “based on a true story” appears early on: as a subtitle on the DVD cover of the *Perlasca* film and right after the opening titles—evoking World War II and Budapest,—even before the start of the actual film in *The Angel*. Such privileged locations signal a strong intention to claim historicity. We have already seen that despite this claim the two films present a different version of the events.

I argue that several factors contribute to our false sense of veracity in *The Angel de Budapest*: the film was shot in the original places of Budapest, the spectator gets information on the historic background from sources that are considered trustworthy: the

radio, newspapers, conversations among diplomats, black and white WWII footage. In addition to Sanz Briz, several historic personalities appear on the screen: the diplomats of the neutral countries in Budapest: the Swedish Raoul Wallenberg, the Swiss Carl Lutz and Monsignor Angelo Rotta, Apostolic Nuncio, who all cooperated in saving Jewish lives. We also see Admiral Horthy, the governor of Hungary, Gábor Vajna, the Minister of the Interior following the Arrow Cross Party's coup, Edmund Veessenmayer, the National Socialist military governor in Hungary and Adolf Eichmann SS Obersturmbannführer.

The film narrates events that took place within and in relation with the Spanish legation in Budapest based on extensive archival research, to give some examples, Sanz Briz forwarded a report to the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs about the Nazi extermination camps, Sanz Briz increased the limited number of safe conducts the legation was able to provide by first issuing family documents instead of individual ones, and later by adding letters to the numbers. The Spanish legation intervened when the Hungarian authorities detained the Jewish employees of the legation. Nevertheless, as Carcedo acknowledges, the film also “introduce algunos variantes que –si me permiten la palabra– pueden hacerla más comercial” and adds that “están bien”, “me quedé satisfecho” porque el filme “refleja bien los méritos del personaje”, y “esto es lo fundamental.” (Heroes, Web) I do not agree with Carcedo’s view that the most important feature of the film should be to reiterate the merits of Sanz Briz and I argue that for example the introduction of a Jewish-Gentile love story and the presentation of their

death as the epic climax raises important issues regarding the representation of the Holocaust.

The diplomats of neutral countries were in the best position to intervene for the lives of Hungarian and European Jewry because neutral countries continued to maintain a legal presence in the Nazi occupied countries. The representatives had first hand experience on the situation in the occupied capitals and had certain privileges due to their diplomatic status. The Swiss Carl Lutz, the Swedish Raul Wallenberg, Monsieur Rotta, and of course Angel Sanz Briz met regularly to co-ordinate their rescue activities. All of them received the title Righteous Gentiles from Yad Vashem, and the Hungarian public is somewhat familiar with their rescue activities. In the Hungarian public opinion the name of Raul Wallenberg is the most well-known. As the tragic fate of Raul Wallenberg clearly illustrates –he was detained by Soviet troops in Budapest and died in a Soviet prison,– those who chose to take part in the rescue mission either with or without the support of their respective governments risked their lives.

Bureaucracy lies in the heart of both *The Banality of Evil* and in the heart of *The Banality of Goodness*. As many scholars have pointed out before, both deportations and rescues happened based on lists compiled according to bureaucratic criteria. In most cases neutral countries intervened for citizens who had certain connections to the given state. Most scholars explain the increasing role of the Spanish state in resuing Hungarian Jews by the definitive turn in the tide of the war. In the Spanish case, the legation first helped those whose ancestors were expelled from Spain in 1492 or who had relatives

living in Spain. Later, the protection of the Spanish state was also extended to Askhenazi Jews.

Tens of thousand of Jewish survivors all across Europe owe their lives to the intervention and protection of the diplomatic missions of neutral countries. Yet, the very nature of diplomatic protection during Word War II helped to maintain the illusion of normality. The very fact that neutral diplomatic missions could negotiate with the local and occupying authorities, issue safe conducts and maintain safe houses enjoying extraterritoriality and protection –at least in principle– provided a macabre resemblance to the existence of law and order. Being able to secure or buy a safe passage either in the form of a safe-conduct, legal document providing protection within an occupied country or an entry visa to a non-European country, or getting into a safe house meant the difference between life and death.

Nazi Germany and most European countries were intent upon maintaining the illusion of legality and lawfulness. The discrimination against the Jewish population in Nazi Germany and the occupied territories was enacted in ever-more restricting laws and regulations againt the Jewish population. The allies of Germany followed the lead and enacted their own racial and dicriminatory laws. For example mixed marriage between Jews and Christians was prohibited by law in several countries and this ban was respected internationally. What did it mean in practice? For example mixed marriages were prohibited in Germany and not prohibited in the Netherlands. Yet, German citizens could not get married in the Netherlands if they did not fulfill German regulations.

As many Holocaust scholars have pointed out, stateless Jews were always the first to be the victims. As certain territories changed hands due to international treaties or military occupation, Jews became stateless, lost their protection and were either killed on the spot or deported to the Nazi concentration and extermination camps. When Poland was invaded by the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, and ceased to exist as an independent state, the consequences were not only tragic for the people living in Polish territories, but also for Polish Jews living in France, who lost their legal status in France.

Arrow Cross militias and Nazi soldiers often ignored the diplomatic protection of the international safe houses; safety was a non-existent category in those days. During an interview a Hungarian survivor called “safe houses” a misnomer because round-ups and shooting occurred in them despite the diplomatic protection of neutral countries. Survivors often mention that Spanish safe conducts guaranteed more protection than the documents of other neutral countries because the Spanish legation issued a much smaller number than other Embassies, thus guaranteeing a greater level of protection. In addition, due to the ideological closeness and friendly relations between Franco’s Spain and Nazi Germany, Hungarian and German authorities regarded these documents more highly. Notwithstanding, in *The Angel of Budapest* all incidents involving individuals living in safe houses or possessing safe conducts are successfully resolved and every protected person manages to get back to safety due to the interventions of ‘El Angel.’

Furthermore, *The Angel of Budapest* largely avoids disturbing images of violence. Shots are quite sporadic in the course of this film. We don’t see any of the tragic mass shootings that occurred in Budapest. Disturbingly, most images of violence are related to

the actions of Jewish resistance, who attack Germans to get their rifles and we see more German soldiers dead than Jewish victims. By focusing on the successful sabotage actions on the resistance group, the film defies stereotypical representations of Jews “going to slaughter like sheep.” Yet, the only scene with multiple shots in the film leaves dead the protagonists of a fictional love thread, a Jewish-non-Jewish couple, three Arrow Cross men and three German soldiers.

Perlasca, the Courage of a Just Man portrays violence differently from the Spanish movie. Here we get to contemplate violence in its most brutal form, we witness many instances of ruthless murders and losses. We see the face of Giorgio Perlasca reflecting infinite sadness and with tears in his eyes. The close-ups of Perlasca’s face both reflect the character’s emotions and prompt the spectators to identify with the main character and feel the same hopelessness. In this film the representation of deportation and genocide is more layered, since we also see non-Jewish Hungarians stand up to oppression, for example in the hospital where they are hiding Jews in the wards and bravely stand up to the Nazi soldiers.

Perlasca frequently bribes officials to save life which was a historical fact. Corruption among both Hungarian and German Nazis was rampant and paying to save lives was a wide-spread practice in Hungary. In *The Angel of Budapest* there is not a single act of “buying lives,” the money of Sanz Briz from his private funds is used to buy toys for the orphans and to cover the cost of maintaining the safe houses and buying food. Perlasca uses the money given by him to buy livestock for his Italian firm. The risks of trying to bribe members of the pro-Nazi Arrow Cross Party or station chiefs are

demonstrated in the movie. In one scene Perlasca's life is in danger in two different ways to highlight the risks of intervening on behalf of Hungarian Jews: an Arrow Cross thug holds a knife to his throat and at the same time forces him to lean out backwards from a high terrace. The knife at his throat is a barbaric and bloody way of killing people while being thrown over the barrier would also kill him. This scene foreshadows the death of Farkas who is persecuted by the Soviet soldiers and dies falling down. Despite his precarious situation Perlasca agrees with the thug and gets to save several Jews.

Even though he manages to save Magda, one of "the heroines," he arrives too late to save many others. He gets to contemplate dozens of corpses and we realize that despite all his efforts, he cannot save everyone. Several inhabitants of the safe houses are badly tortured and some of them have been murdered. When we see close-ups of Perlasca's face the emotion reflected in it is despair and hopelessness. The tears in his eyes reflect the impossibility of saving even those few who managed to put their names on a list and get diplomatic protection.

During the autumn of 1944 Hungarian Jews were regularly lined up at the bank of River Danube and shot into the river by the Arrow Cross militia. In the *Perlasca* movie we witness the brutality of one such mass shooting. The inhabitants of the safe house were either killed on the spot or force-marched to the river bank. The victims were tied together two by two, and to save bullets only one of them was shot to death before the two of them fell into the river. It means an even more terrible death for those unfortunates, who are condemned to die suffocating in the river. Perlasca arrives at the river bank shortly after the massacre. All he is able to do is contemplate the terrible loss.

He manages to save a single survivor from the icy Danube with the help of a Hungarian gendarme.

In February 2012 Hungarian Holocaust survivors were invited to the University of Oregon to give testimony. Even though I am from Hungary, this was the first time of my life to meet a survivor. Official history teaching in communist Hungary pretended the Holocaust happened in another time and place. The state never encouraged discussion with or about survivors living among us.

At the dinner following the testimony, I heard the story of a woman who was seven years old during WWII. In a round-up she was taken to the bank of River Danube with her grandparents. Her grandparents were shot dead and she also fell to the river with them because they were holding hands. Later she managed to swim ashore. At that time my niece was seven and I imagined her and my mom holding hands and waiting to be shot. This was the moment when I understood that “the order and quiet of our lives always hangs from a thread that can snap so easily; our everyday secure, familiar reality can suddenly shatter in a cataclysm”—as Antonio Muñoz Molina, an acclaimed Spanish writer puts it.

Two scenes of murder in the two films highlight these different representations of violence. In both instances we witness the murder of a couple, where the murderers, who have been hiding behind the corner, suddenly appear in a truck, confronting the unsuspecting victims and kill the male part of the couple. The women become hysterical with grief after seeing their loved one dead, and in both cases a ruthless Nazi officer calmly puts the pistol to their temple and shoots with cold blood. In *Perlasca*, this is one

of the first brutal scenes the protagonist witnesses. It happens at night, we can hardly see in the darkness. The Jewish couple was trying to escape from a hiding place following a Nazi deception. We have no information about the previous life of the couple; the everyday nature of such murder is emphasized by the fact that the Nazi officer keeps steadily smoking while shooting. The fact that there is no dramatic emphasis in a single death reflects the everyday presence of murder in the streets of Budapest.

In contrast, in *The Angel* the murder scene of the couple is carefully constructed, tension mounts from the beginning of the film. At the same time, when the Governor of Hungary, Miklós Horthy is giving a magnificent reception in a beautiful palace, Sophie and Antal, the two lovers secretly meet in an obscure doorway. They are not married and they do not even have a chance of having a normal relationship, since Antal is Jewish and Sophie's family is anti-Semitic. Her brother, Lajos, is a member of the National Socialist Arrow Cross Party, and none of her family members know about her love affair. The first encounter holds a special importance, since this is when Sophie asks for and receives Antal's necklace with a star of David. The necklace worn because of a loved one and discovered by the enemy is an overused trope, and we know or at least have the suspicion from the very beginning that she will get into trouble for wearing it. Moreover, the suspense grows when on his way home Antal meets drunken Arrow Cross Party members and escapes narrowly by pretending to be dead. One of the Arrow Cross Party members urinates on him. We later find out that Lajos, one of the Arrow Cross thugs is the brother of Sophie, thus this encounter foreshadows the fatal confrontation.

Sophie is the romantic heroine in the film, she is portrayed as deeply in love, her encounters with Antal are usually passionate; full of desperation and kisses, and we even see a scene in bed. Their story of hiding and stolen kisses is juxtaposed to the “idyllic life” of the Sanz Briz couple in several ways. Of course, we have to treat “idyllic” with a grain of salt, since they are in a war-torn city, and they eventually have to separate. Yet, they can meet each other without having to resort to subterfuge. Adela, the wife of Sanz Briz is never portrayed as a “sexual being.” The deep connection between the married couple is demonstrated by meaningful looks, a kiss on the forehead or a tearful phone conversation. The only time we see Adele in bed is when she tries to put her daughter to sleep.

By the time Lajos realizes that his sister is having an affair with a Jew and decides to take revenge, the viewers have developed a strong sympathy for the heroic couple. Sophie witnesses the theatrical confrontation when her brother and Arrow Cross friends shoot Antal dead. She turns against his brother when a German soldier appears on the scene; he finds the necklace with the David star and shoots Sophie, despite Lajos’ protests. When Lajos sees that her sister is dead he shoots the German soldier. In the end three Hungarian Arrow Cross Party members and three German soldiers mutually kill each other and all of them lie dead on the pavement. The scene is laden with tropes, from start to finish, and instead of a tragedy it turns into a tragicomedy. Sophie is not Jewish and we are left with a feeling that her death is “a mistake.” Various questions arise in relation with this scene: Would her death be perfectly acceptable or at least more acceptable for us if she were Jewish and shot to death wearing her own necklace? Would

her death be less tragic? What is the whole purpose of this scene? Does it intend to show that even the most brutal anti-Semites love their own family? Or that violence is uncontrollable and unstoppable? Why do we see more Nazi soldiers and Hungarian fascists dead than Jews in this film?

I argue that the two films project different images of Hungarians. In *The Angel of Budapest* there are no everyday people in the streets. I mean, there are no non-Jewish Hungarian people, other than Sophie. In a brief scene we see the father of Sophie, we briefly see an onlooker in the window and we see common people in the cellar of the house during the Allied bombing. The Hungarian employees of the legation all follow the lead of Sanz Briz, and I cannot help thinking that they are “purified by being in contact by Spaniards,” the same way as some claimed Sephardic Jews were different due to the good influence of co-existing with Spaniards. On the one hand we see the efforts of heroic diplomats and employees of the Spanish legation, led by Angel Sanz Briz, and Jewish people are portrayed as heroic resisters and innocent victims, which they were, no doubt. On the other hand, the predominant image projected about Hungarians is exclusively that of collaboration.

When we consider the image this film is projecting about Hungarians, we also have to keep in mind that the Spanish public often times focuses its attention on the atrocities of the Spanish Civil War and its consequences, perceiving the Holocaust as a distant European tragedy, unrelated to the past of their country. Even though Spain now commemorates the Holocaust on January 27, together with other European countries, it was only in the middle of the 1990s that the Holocaust became part of the public

discourse. This change is due to the screening of *Schindler's List* and the broadcasting of the 50th anniversary commemoration events of the liberation of concentration camps on television. Yet, generations of Spaniards grew up without proper knowledge about the extermination of European Jewry and the ways Spain was related to it.

Furthermore, the events take place in Budapest, a place so close, yet so distant and unknown for most Spaniards. Generations grew up in Francoist Spain hearing about the evils of Communism and never setting foot in the territories behind the Iron Curtain. Now a film is shown in prime time on Spanish television, with famous actors and actresses playing the heroes combating the forces of evil. The main character, a Spanish angel, fights against the evil represented by brutal Hungarian Arrow Cross Party members. The only Hungarians who appear in this film are persecuted Jews, hateful and drunken Arrow Cross party members in the process of committing crimes or bureaucrats willingly collaborating with the Nazis. The film draws a black and white picture, where the Spanish legation is white and Hungarians are black. Literally, as Hungarian Nazis wore black uniforms. The complexities of the role played by Spain vis-à-vis the European Jewry in mortal peril and Nazi Germany are not depicted.

The movie *Perlasca* shows a more nuanced image of Hungarians. *Perlasca* portrays cruelties more faithfully and shows an abundance of violence, yet we find a more complex image of Hungarians. The confrontation between the Nazi soldiers and the personnel of the hospital hiding Jews also shows of black and white contrast: the doctor and nurse whose mission is to save human life wear white, while the Nazis, who kill people, wear black.

The film *The Angel* employs an intricate web of explicit references to historic events, mostly in the form of dialogue between the characters of the film. These references help us to situate the events precisely. I argue that even though the film does make references to the historical circumstances in Hungary, but they are too subtle and cannot be understood by the general public in Spain. For example, we eavesdrop into several small group conversations, commenting on contemporary events and aiming to set the historical context for us. For the spectator with thorough knowledge of Hungarian history, the comment “I hear the Governor and Prime Minister Sztójay are not in complete agreement” is an important reference which helps to define the historic context, since Sztójay’s appointment marked a significant change in Hungarian politics. It does not help international spectators with generalized, superficial information about the Hungarian context. *The Angel de Budapest* is a Spanish-Hungarian co-production, with a Spanish director and two very well-known and popular Spanish protagonists, projecting a distinctively Spanish discourse on the events of deportations in Hungary during 1944. Most critical responses to this film come from Spanish critics, laying the emphasis on the Spanish perspective and devoting little or no attention to the Hungarian side of the story.

Sanz Briz comes across a book titled *Sephardies* and finds the legal formula for protecting Jews when he witnesses a book burning scene. If we think about it, it’s quite absurd that the whereabouts and fate of the ancestors half a millennium ago can influence our destiny today. Unfortunately, the book *Sephardies* symbolizes inherent self-interest as the fundamental motive behind the actions of diplomacy. Diplomatic protection only applies to the citizens of the state or to those who can prove that they

have strong connections to the state or sufficient funds to provide for themselves. A legal formula is needed for any humanitarian action.

Deaglio's book describes the June, 1944 book burning in Budapest:

On June 16, in the presence of numerous German military officers and civilian officials, a bonfire was held in Budapest, to burn books written by Jewish authors, Hungarian and foreign. The government had prepared a detailed list, giving book stores, libraries, schools and other institutions fifteen days to deliver the books. The list contained one hundred and twenty Hungarian authors and one hundred and thirty foreigners. Some 44,627 books were collected, enough to fill twenty-two freight cars. They were unloaded in the middle of the square and burned to sound of applause; Hungary finally freed itself from the malevolent influence of Judaism. The ceremony was filmed. The fire burned on for hours: books of literature and medicine, politics, the abhorrent theories of psychoanalysis, poetry anthologies. (55)

In relationship with the book burning scene, I refer to a review in the comment section of port.hu, perhaps the biggest entertainment portal in Hungary. The user criticizes the film for the lack of historicity and points out major 'historical mistakes' in the film:

A film először nekem is jónak tűnt, de a történelmi hűsége katasztrófális, és ez tönkreteszi az egész filmet. A film legelején is már nyilasok, nyilas zászlót lengetve égetnek könyvet TÉLEN. Ez 1944/45 tele lehetett volna csak, mert 1944 okt. 20-án vették át a hatalmat, Erre a film közepe táján, időrendben tehát később jelentik be a Hitler elleni Stauffenberg merényletet ami 1944 július 20. (ehhez képest kabátban van minden szereplő a bejelentésekor) Majd szinte rögtön a következő jelenetben megint tél van. Közben Horthy még a kormányzó a film szerint, miközben a nyilasok már karhatalomként lépnek fel. A nagykövetek megbeszélésen azt mondják, hogy az ország fele már bolsevik kézen van, de közben megint kiderül, hogy nyár van, ami csak '44 nyara lehet. '44 nyarán még nem volt frontvonal Magyarországon, csak a román kiugrás után, ami '44 augusztus végén volt. Katasztrófálisan rossz lett a film ezek miatt, szemétre való vacak. (Web)

[The film seemed good to me at first, but its lack of historicity is simply catastrophic. At the very beginning of the film, the members of the Arrow Cross Party burn books, waving the Arrow Cross flag IN WINTER. It could only have been the winter of 1944/45 because the Arrow Cross Party

took over the power by coup on October 20, 1944. Then around the middle of the film, that is to say chronologically later the Stauffenberg intent of murder against Hitler is announced, which happened on July 20. (It's worth mentioning that all protagonists wear a coat). And in the following scene, it's suddenly winter again. At the same time Horthy is still the governor in the film, when the Arrow Cross Party appears as being in power. When the ambassadors [of the neutral countries] meet, it is announced that half of the country is occupied by Bolsheviks, and it's summer again. It could only be the summer of '44. However, there was no frontline in Hungary during the summer of '44. The front only reached the country after Romania opted out from the war. This only happened at the end of August '44. That's why the film is just horrible, it's trash to be thrown away.]

These contradictions are only noticeable for the attentive and dedicated movie fan or history buff. Nevertheless, the anonymous commenter is right; all scenes which happen at or around the railway station have snow in them, even though historical references clearly indicate that they occur in June and July. The book burning occurred in the middle of June, yet we see snow patches all around.

These inconsistencies indicated for me that the actual filming in Budapest took place during the winter months. Practical considerations, like the availability of the actors and financial considerations prevailed over the need to follow weather patterns and the omnipresent historic references. Indeed, the film was shot in Budapest between November 9 and December 23, 2010.

Nonetheless, I hold that the movie's narrative discourse displays a far more significant lack of historicity than a couple of inadequate snow patches in the scenes of June and July: notably the repeated insistence on the humanitarian nature of the Franco government. Whereas Hungarian spectators feel confused about the contradictions between the carefully constructed historical references which place the events between

spring and at the autumn and the omnipresent winter scenes, Spanish spectators mainly react to the images of Francoism presented. The reactions are mixed; spectators equally celebrate or condemn the film in the web portal filmaffinity.com. Here I present two contributors who critique the film arguing that it intends to clean up the image of the dictator Franco:

23 de diciembre de 2011

18 de 34 usuarios han encontrado esta crítica útil

Primero reconocer a Ángel Sanz-Briz y otros diplomáticos españoles que arriesgaron sus propias vidas y aportaron de su propio bolsillo cantidades económicas para salvar a un alto numero de judíos de ser aniquilados por los nazis. Para mi, realmente unos héroes.

Por otro lado, denunciar que en este film se intente lavar la cara del dictador fascista y colaborador con los nazis Francisco Franco. Patético! (Web)

27 de diciembre de 2011

16 de 27 usuarios han encontrado esta crítica útil

Pues sí, rectificar es de sabios. Y como aprendiz de sabia que una es, yo entono un mea culpa y rectifico.

Hice aquí hace un par de días una crítica demoledora de esta historia para la televisión en torno a un diplomático español que en la Hungría de la II Guerra Mundial, dominada por los nazis, consiguió salvar a muchos judíos sefardíes que acudieron en su ayuda. Mi crítica era básicamente política más que cinematográfica porque durante toda la película tuve la sensación de que se intentaba exculpar al régimen franquista de su desidia en este asunto y de su evidente connivencia con el régimen hitleriano. Ni que decir tiene que la susodicha crítica obtuvo algo así como mil puntos negativos que yo me tomé deportivamente como los niños con los suspensos: me tienen manía.

Pues bien, no era manía, ahora lo sé; era pura incomprensión. Y muy lógica. Confieso que no terminé de ver la película, tal era mi cabreo, y que hice la crítica bajo el influjo del malestar que sentía. (Web)

The second critique also indicates the polemic nature of the reception of the film, since it is an apology offered to those who did not agree with the outrage of this spectator. The

very fact that this user admits feeling so outraged that s/he has not finished watching the film signals that the film may elicit strong emotional reactions from viewers and indicates the lack of consensus regarding contemporary narrations of past events.

Tabea Linhardt Spanish literary scholar in the United States has been very critical of Carcedo's book:

...Carcedo's *Un español frente al Holocausto* [...] reiterates many of the recurrent myths about the protection of the Jews. The constant commonplaces and clichés that cement the legend of Spanish benevolence toward Jews also appear repeatedly in Carcedo's text. Carcedo resolves the contradiction of the period (the dictatorial government implemented a brutal repression in Spain and simultaneously defined the protection of the Jews in occupied Europe as humanitarian and charitable) by implying that the Francoist government itself was humanitarian and acted on principles of Christian charity. Carcedo emphasizes, as the Franco regime did, that religion, not race defined who was Jewish in Spain; the violent political repression that took place in postwar Spain is not discussed in the book. (Linhardt 111)

I argue that the movie transmits the same message as the book. In the film not a single scene portrays the suffering of everyday people within the boundaries of Spain. The only scenes that we observe in Spain take place within the walls of the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with well-dressed diplomats discussing Sanz Briz's actions in Hungary. There is no mention of the atrocities committed by the government of Franco within Spain, in contrast phrases like "I don't doubt the humanity of your government, but you have to act" from the Vatican Nuncio intend to underscore the humanity and compassion of a brutally repressive Fascist dictatorship.

The film shows a special relationship between Angelo Rotta, the Apostolic Nuncio and Sanz Briz. We observe Sanz Briz receiving communion, accompanying the Nuncio to his dressing room and to the catacombs where the Catholic Church provided a

hiding place for (converted) Hungarian Jews. In a conversation between Sanz Briz and the Apostolic Nuncio we find out that Hungarian archbishops can delay the deportations by weeks going against the Governor and the government. An incredulous and deeply Catholic Sanz Briz repeatedly asks how a Catholic government can persecute Jews, and emphasizes that the Catholic government in Spain “has very different stand.” These conversations about the humanistic principles of Spanish Catholicism between Sanz Briz and the Apostolic Nuncio remain highly problematic. The film clearly continues with the Francoist myth of “Spain, the savior of Jews.” Yet, many historians claim, and I agree with them, that Francoist Spain intervened more actively on the part of Sephardic Jews only after the tide of the war turned definitively and the Allied troops landed in Normandy in June, 1944.

The extraordinary emphasis on Catholicism in *The Angel* becomes more apparent when we consider that Monsigneur Rotta, the Apostolic Nuncio, does not even appear in Italian the movie, even though Perlasca was a practicing Catholic as well, and it is apparent from the book that Perlasca and Rotta knew each other and met several times. Perlasca visits the Great Synagogue of Budapest and talks to the rabbi. In contrast, the Apostolic Nuncio appears on various occasions in the Spanish movie and plays an important role in the life of a deeply Catholic Sanz Briz. Catholicism lies behind Sanz Briz’s –and Spain’s– actions as the basic moral principle, whereas in the *Perlasca* film the stress is on humanitarianism, even though Perlasca was also a nationalist and Catholic.

The film *The Angel* also portrays obtaining the necessary documentation as if it had been smooth, easy and quick. Polite, smiling employees hand over the necessary documentation to every applicant. In reality, the process of securing protective documents was an excruciatingly slow and difficult process. The movie underplays the difficulties of obtaining legal documents and leaves us with the false impression that there was or could have been a salvation for all. Furthermore, it suggests that all the Jews had to do to be saved was to show up at Spanish legation to have their documentation issued by smiling employees.

Antonio Gómez López-Quiñones and Susanne Zepp offer a good summary of the contradictions between the self-congratulatory Spanish discourse about issuing protecting documentation and the tragic reality:

It is true that the issuing of Spanish passports to Sephardic Jews in Salonica and Hungary in 1943 and 1944 saved many Jews from deportation and death. But although the version launched and propagated by Franco himself (that Spain, beyond all self-interest, rescued countless Jews from deportation and destruction) functioned to guarantee an isolated nation some added prestige in post-war Europe, it must be seen in its true dimension for what it was. Instead of a rapid, un-bureaucratic rescue operation, the Spanish government actually did not become active in the effort until quite late, and far too late for many Jews. (9)

Hungarian Jews received much more help from the Spanish government because their deportation occurred late in the course of the war. By that time the Francoist government was actively seeking ‘good points’ with the Allies. After the war Francoist discourse underscored these actions to gain political capital.

Finally, during the final credits, the movie uses one more tool to increase the impression of historical veracity. It shows real-life photos of the main characters and tells

the audience about their future fate. The same way as at the beginning, we are reminded that the main characters of the movie are historic figures. In addition to the future diplomatic career of Sanz Briz, Perlasca's activities are also mentioned briefly. We learn that he continued the job of Angel Sanz Briz, pretending to be the new Spanish charge d'affairs. He also received the title "Righteous Gentile" from Yad Vashem in Israel. The rolling credits tell us that Adolf Eichmann was captured in Argentina in 1960 and taken to Israel to face trial. Some of the employees of the legation appear as well. We find out that Farkas, the lawyer of the legation died in February, 1945 from a random shot.

Anita Gates, a critic of the New York Times, considers that the *Perlasca* movie could not match the standards set by Schindler's List: "Giorgio Perlasca, who has been compared to Oskar Schindler, deserves better than this Italian television film. [...] Schindler is credited with saving fewer lives –1,000 to 1,300– but Perlasca is a far cry from Schindler's List." (Web) I conclude that *The Angel* is a far cry both from *Schindler's list* and *Perlasca*. Sanz Briz also deserves better than this Spanish television drama.

The Waves beyond 'The Silence of the Sea'²²

Based on these films, we would never imagine that the lives of the heroes continue in the most unheroic and common ways, often in complete oblivion, as was the case of both Perlasca and Sanz Briz.

Why were these stories kept silent during many years? Did the "mythical" year of transition when the Berlin Wall fell and communism collapsed and so many hidden

²² This is a reference to Vercor's *Silence of the Sea*, a novel of the French Resistance during World War II.

stories came to light have to do anything with it? Why is Deaglio, the journalist author of the book sitting in the living room of Giorgio Perlasca in 1989? Is it another story that came to light due to the political changes in Hungary and all over Eastern Europe?

It was the autumn of 1989. At the end of September, several Italian newspapers, in the column reserved for 'news briefs,' had carried a report from Jerusalem about an Italian citizen who had been decorated with prestigious state honors; Signor Giorgio Perlasca, aged 80, who in Budapest, in 1944, had succeeded in saving thousands of Hungarian Jews destined to be sent to concentration camps. A few more lines added that his story remained untold for almost a half a century, and had only been brought to light thanks to the tenacious research of a group of survivors. [...]

I was sitting in a small living room of a house in Padua opposite Signor Giorgio Perlasca, who was telling me his story. (1-2)

We are tempted to believe that the fall of the Berlin Wall and communism made possible the re-emergence of Perlasca's story, yet this is not the case. However, the reasons behind the long silence in Italy, Spain, Hungary and elsewhere, as well as the success of rescue narratives lie in the reluctance of present generations to face the unspeakable past.

As Deaglio tells us, the official acknowledgement of Giorgio Perlasca happened thanks to a private enterprise of survivors, who tracked him down in 1987:

...Perlasca learned exactly how he had been found. It wasn't that some institution or historian had remembered him. He had been tracked down by a group of women, who, now that they had located him, also wanted to help him. But above all, they wanted his name to be remembered. (18)

This group of survivors consisted mostly of women, as the title of the chapter captures beautifully: *Memory Is a Woman*. Women play an extremely important role in preserving social memory as they take care of and raise children and grandchildren. The coincidence of the "re-discovery" of Perlasca and the fall of the Berlin Wall made it easier for Hungarian survivors to speak up, but the long silence and lack of acknowledgement is not

due to the existence of the Iron Curtain. Non-communist Europe was equally eager to remain silent about the past.

Deaglio quotes Perlasca as he narrates how nobody was interested in his story after the end of World War II:

‘It is odd that all of this would happen to me now. It is strange because when I came back, I tried to tell the story, but it seemed that nobody believed it. It probably wasn’t interesting or it just seemed like an exaggeration. [...]

And so it happened that, slowly but surely, I began to forget about it myself. I thought about it often, naturally, but I started to have my doubts. [...]

What happened to Perlasca, the savior, was also what happened to the victims. As Primo Levi always recalled, the idea that they were not believed was common to many of those who had been prisoners in the concentration camps. [...] Primo Levi did not succeed in publishing *Survival at Auschwitz* until thirteen years after the end of the war. (9-10)

The Hungarian survivors could not contact Perlasca after World War II since most of them became stuck behind the Iron Curtain, his fellow-Italians and the world was not interested in hearing about the atrocities. Deaglio explains well the Italian attitude towards the past:

...People did come to know, naturally, about the Italian Jews, who were deported. But not quickly. And not everything. Italy was ready to absolve itself

Of responsibility for their fate, preferring instead to boast about the humane popular network that had provided so many of them with a hiding place and other assistance. The crimes were blamed on the German domination. [...] And, even today, few people know, that the deportation of 8,566 Jews from Italy was carried out, unfortunately, with active collaboration of the Italian bureaucracy and anonymous informers.[...]

None of the Italians responsible for the deportation were punished. And, according to the unwritten law of compensation, there was silence about the saviors as well. That’s what the wall was made of –the wall Perlasca ran into when returned home. (9-11)

Postwar societies were not ready to acknowledge responsibility for the murder of millions, and preferred to keep silent about the atrocities committed. The survivors of the Nazi concentration camps had similar experiences to Primo Levi: nobody wanted to hear about their infernal experiences.

The Italian attitude of blaming the crimes on the German occupation and forgetting about the role local population played in it, is sadly shared by most occupied countries, including Hungary. Deaglio describes the ever-present silence reigning over Hungary regarding the extermination of its Jewish population. Even after the fall of communism, silence continued:

In 1990, the new liberalized Hungary was visited by 38 million tourists. As in other countries of Eastern Europe where freedom of speech has returned, research into the archives has begun. Opposition leaders have come to light; some of the dead have been rehabilitated. But rarely has the research gone farther back than 1956. The researchers only go back beyond that date after a lot of resistance, when they do it at all. With regard to the extermination of Hungarian Jews, the only country where the Nazis failed to complete their project, the previously unknown story of Giorgio Perlasca has been just about the only “new fact” to emerge. (128-129)

The same way as in Italy, the deportation of the Jewish population took place with the collaboration of the Hungarian bureaucracy and police forces. All nations tend to emphasize the –way too few– actions of rescuers and projected them as a symbol for national action. We can observe this sort of narrative discourse in the case of *Perlasca*, *The Courage of a Just man* and in *The Angel of Budapest*, as well. Both films focus on the rescue actions of an individual and project it as a characteristic inherent to the whole nation or even as an official state policy.

‘What would you have done in my place?’—is the question Giorgio Perlasca asks.

Deaglio repeats his question:

‘What would you have done in my place?’ It would be nice to be able to answer, ‘I would have done the same thing.’ It would fit well with the self-image of Italians: *‘brava gente’* (good people), people so humane that their humanity needs no rational elaboration but comes from the gut and springs forth—despite all the orders, uniforms and ideologies to the contrary—at the mere sight of someone being humiliated or abused; (3)

‘I would have done the same thing’ fits well not only with the self-image of Italians but also with the collective self-image of all nations and the individual self-image of all of us.

The best description of our potential behavior in a crisis situation comes from Timothy Snyder, an acclaimed and controversial Holocaust historian. He describes the present-day in some extent as hypocritical, misleading, with a treacherous attitude toward the past:

Most of us would like to think that we possess a “moral instinct”. Perhaps we imagine that we would be rescuers in some future catastrophe. Yet if states were destroyed, local institutions corrupted and economic incentives directed towards murder, few of us would behave well. There is little reason to think that we are ethically superior to the Europeans of the 1930s and 1940s, or for that matter less vulnerable to the kind of ideas that Hitler so successfully promulgated and realised. [...] Separated from National Socialism by time and luck, we can dismiss Nazi ideas without contemplating how they functioned. It is our very forgetfulness of the circumstances of the Holocaust that convinces us that we are different from Nazis and shrouds the ways that we are the same.

The tragic events of the past evolved into heroic tales with an entertainment value, since we strive for the simple solutions of a black and white world. Should we have lived in the past, we would regard “our hero” as a role model who we had fought with arm in arm against every kind of oppression. The film *The Angel of Budapest*, the cinematic representation of Sanz Briz’s life and the invented life story of Enric Marco, we have

seen in Chapter 3, owe their success to the same reason: the Spanish quest for an internationally acclaimed Holocaust hero.

The emotionally charged, beautiful and easy to listen tales of Marco had an unprecedented success. In the same way, an emotionally charged, beautiful and easy to watch film also enjoys an unprecedented, if not universal, success.

After the end of World War II the Francoist propaganda simply appropriated the actions of its courageous diplomats and created the myth of Spain, as “the savior of the Jews” to adapt its image to the changing post-war circumstances. Yet, the omnipresence of the Spanish flag throughout this film implies an official state policy, thus masking the complicity of Franco’s Spain with Nazi Germany and the Holocaust.

Bernd Rother, one of the most acknowledged scholars writing about Spain and the Holocaust, summarizes this relationship as follows: “This is not a story of heroism and altruism but of propaganda and lies, of legends and national self-deception. It is also the history of one of the most effective propaganda campaigns of the post-World-War II era, with lasting effects which can be felt today. How is it that the fairy tale of Franco as the benefactor of the Jews has been so successful?” (51) The very title of his article *Myth and Fact – Spain and the Holocaust* indicates that the efforts of the Franco dictatorship to create a myth, a legend portraying Franco as the savior of the Jews lingers into the present, and many Spaniards still like to think of the Spanish role in World War II in a more heroic and positive light. Rother explains the survival of the legend by an unusual consensus between the left and the right. Albeit for different reasons, everybody prefers to see a nicer image of Spaniards:

Why does the legend persist? First, because there is a factual nucleus in Spain's refugee policy. Next, there are published the testimonies of Jewish refugees. Third, in spite of academic publications, which try to correct the hagiographic picture is the continuing popularity of works where the legend lives on.

Conservative followers of Franco are still an important group in Spain and use the legend to show that not everything about Franco was bad. Among anti-Franco groups, many cite the courage of diplomats and the tolerant and helpful attitude of ordinary Spanish people towards the refugees, constructing out of this a more progressive version of the legend. Although they also exaggerate the scope of Spain's role in helping the Jews, they do not attribute it to the Franco regime. Their motive is to show that ordinary Spaniards were better than the dictator and the government. (Rother 63)

As a Hungarian, I much prefer watching or reading about the good deeds of Hungarians than about mass killings committed by Hungarians. I admit being part of the same national discourse I am critiquing, therefore wanting to see Hungarian heroes and resisters, or at least people who remain humane and act the right way even in the most difficult moments. It is so much easier and tempting than facing the ugly past.

CHAPTER VI: CONCLUDING REMARKS

What is democracy?

A few years ago, when I wrote the introduction to this project, my statements raised more than one eyebrow. I claimed that “A common notion is that the European Union is in a way a victim of its own success, so successful at creating peace that the reason for its existence is forgotten. The advocates of the European Union recreated the narrative of leaving the violent past behind forever and building a better future. It makes us forget once again, how many times in the past this belief proved to be false. Animosity in Europe are cyclical, and when you think something belongs to the past and is long forgotten, then suddenly, it presents itself again, out of nowhere, and you just stare and stare in disbelief and incomprehending. The European Union was born as an economic project and continued to focus on the economic aspects of promoting neoliberal economic policies throughout its whole history. Its formation contributed to the erasure of historical memory. Now more than ever we are in danger of losing any sense of historical specificity and a bigger (if more detailed) picture of cause and effect. I think recognizing this pattern and listening to the warnings and working for preventing the horrors of the past from happening again is the most important task for all of us, growing up or growing older in the present historical moment.”

In 2012, these claims sounded ridiculous to most people. Today, seven years later, the political climate has profoundly changed. The image of a democratic European Union shattered dramatically when millions of refugees and migrants from the war torn countries of the Middle East and Africa arrived at its borders both over the Mediterranean

Sea and by land. Large segments of European population refused to give refuge to the ever greater number of new arrivals, and old rhetorics of exclusion and hate reemerged.

In 2016 Great-Britain held a referendum about British membership in the European Union, and to the astonishment of many, the majority voted to leave. A new term, Brexit suddenly formed part of the political vocabulary. During the same year, Donald Trump became the president of the United States, and the deep cracks within the US society became visible overnight. Once again, I was profoundly unsettled: my experience in 2016 in the United States mirrored precisely my previous experience in 2006 in Hungary, even though the United States did not live under a dictatorial regime at the second half of the twentieth century. Nonetheless, the very notion of democracy suddenly came under fire.

In her 2018 documentary film director Astra Taylor poses a seemingly simple question: What Is Democracy? Various responses emerge throughout the multiple conversations, such as justice, freedom, the ability to self-govern, a form for living together, and these responses demonstrate that the term democracy invites several interrelated, yet slightly different interpretations. While there is no consensus on the exact meaning of democracy, there is consensus on another issue: democracy is in serious trouble at the moment.

Timothy Snyder, a historian, takes a look on the collapsing of democracies into right-wing or left-wing authoritarian systems in his short book, *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century*, and suggests that examining the breaking down process of European democracies during the twentieth century may provide the twenty-

first century US society with useful lessons to fight against tyranny. Snyder's suggestions include "Believe in truth. To abandon facts is to abandon freedom. If nothing is true, then no one can criticize power because there is no basis upon which to do so." "When listening to politicians, distinguish certain words. Look out for the expansive use of "terrorism" and "extremism." Be alive to the fatal notions of "exception" and "emergency." Be angry about the treacherous use of patriotic vocabulary." "Take responsibility for the face of the world. Notice the swastikas and the other signs of hate. Do not look away and do not get used to them." These concrete actions encourage resistance in civil society, because as Snyder puts it "Americans are no wiser than the Europeans who saw democracy yield to fascism, Nazism or communism. Our one advantage is that we might learn from their experience." Snyder mentions 1918, 1945 and 1989 as key historic opportunities in twentieth century European history that ultimately failed to deliver the long-lasting democratic system for which many have hoped. By examining the conversation that followed these historic junctures, as they appear in influential artistic representations, and shedding new light on the shared failures of the discourses of the past, we can open up conversations about the fragility both new and established democracies share.

Hatred of all kinds manifest an "attack upon human diversity", as Hannah Arendt put it. Their aim is to create a homogeneous society, where all roles, including gender and social, are tightly defined. As Peter Hayes, a Holocaust scholar has pointed out, the prevalence of one prejudice is a likely indicator of others, restraining or denying a right

for one group will lead to the restriction of other rights as well as the restriction of the same right for other groups. (Hayes)

In 2006 Jobbik and other parties on the far-right were certainly loud movements, they organized street-protests and openly generated anger in the society. At the same time, they were also fringe movements, who quickly toned down their rhetoric the moment they entered parliament. After receiving 16.7% of the votes in the 2010 elections, Jobbik broke with the extreme right-wing elements of the party, and backed out from supporting the Hungarian Guard. That same year Viktor Orbán's Fidesz obtained a landslide victory and set out to transform Hungary into what he calls an illiberal democracy. When I arrived in the United States in 2011, few people knew where Hungary exactly was on the map, let alone the name of the Hungarian Prime Minister. In 2015, when a quarter of a million refugees and migrants reached the borders of the European Union, Hungary decided to build a fence on its Southern border. At the same time strong government-sponsored anti-immigrant, anti-Semitic and anti-European Union publicity campaigns began. There was a boom of giant posters with slogans "If you come to Hungary, don't steal," or "If you come to Hungary, don't take the jobs of Hungarians!" Initially, Hungarian civil society responded with giant posters mocking government slogans: "If you come to Hungary, don't steal. The government does not tolerate competition." "If we Hungarians even hate each other, how do you expect us not to hate you?" As FIDESZ tightened its control over civil society, the counter-propaganda signs slowly disappeared. The "Stop Soros," "The people have decided: the country must be protected! Let's send a message to Brussels, so they understand too!" signs remained.

Rhetoric considered unpalatable a mere decade ago has made it to official government communication.

Similarly to Hungary, the political situation in Spain has changed in unprecedented ways. The global economic crisis of 2008 hit Spain particularly hard, and initiated a series of changes that ended the status quo Spain implemented following the death of Franco. The crisis redirected the gaze of Spaniards, who instead of contemplating the past, swiftly re-focused their attention on the present. A few prominent corruption scandals and the economic hardships led to mass protests and to the emergence of new anti-establishment movements. Ciudadanos and Podemos turned into political parties, and the stability of the bi-partisan system gave way to a more complex multi-party constellation. In recent years neither “the left” nor “the right” has been able to form a lasting coalition, stalemates, a successful motion of no confidence, and convocation of premature elections dominate the political scene.

In the meanwhile, the direct and indirect legacies of Francoism continue to play an important role in the politics of present day Spain. For example, Juan Carlos I, the King of Spain, abdicated in 2014, marking the end of his almost forty years of reign. Juan Carlos I entered the throne in 1975 because Francisco Franco named him his successor, and even though his role was re-affirmed by the 1978 Constitution, his abdication symbolized one step further in dismantling the legacies of Francoism that still intersperse the democratic system. The impunity of Francoist crimes, the unconstitutionality of the Catalan referendum and the subsequent judiciary procedures against Catalan politicians based on the 1978 Constitution, serve as other examples for the persistent legacies. After

long years of legal battle, the Supreme's Court finally ruled in September, 2019 that Franco's remains are to be exhumed and moved from the Valley of Fallen, a gigantic mausoleum, carved out of rock in the hills surrounding Madrid. Franco's remains were placed next to his wife in a municipal cemetery in Madrid. The representatives of the Spanish Socialist Party Worker's (PSOE) and the descendants of Republicans welcomed the decision, while Franco's family and many on the right, for example the far-right Vox, protested. The long and divisive battle signals that the ghosts of the past still haunt Spanish society.

Where Hungary and Spain are headed remains an open question for the moment. My hope is that by putting their narratives about the past into conversation, we may be able to better understand where they are coming from, and explain their deep divisions in the present. As Faulkner rightly says, and Cercas so frequently reiterates: "The past is never dead. It's not even past."

New Narratives in Spain and Hungary?

This dissertation project, as all such projects, took a long time to take shape. My main focus of interest has always been the shift in the discourse about the past, which accompanied political transitions of all sorts. Do the processes of memory recovery and repression show a similar pattern in the afterlife of different political dictatorships, Franco's Spain and communist Hungary? Do nations use similar or different strategies to rearticulate their past in the new political regime? As I turned more towards Holocaust Studies, the project gained a new element of complexity. How to integrate the memory of the Holocaust into the framework of shifting narratives after the political transition? As I

read more about the commemoration of the Holocaust, I realized that our narratives about the Shoah have also shifted, what's more, the political transitions in both Spain and Hungary resulted in new ways of narrating the Shoah.

Once I narrowed the project down to the interaction of Holocaust and dictatorship memories in Spain and Hungary, I searched for artistic representations in which both the memories of the dictatorships and the Holocaust appeared. In the wake of the memory boom in Spain, I could not find any. Most of the books focused entirely on the Spanish past and employed a particularist approach, treating Spanish history as separate and exceptional, which had nothing to do with the rest of Europe. For a while I was considering using *The Frozen Heart* (2007) by Almudena Grandes, one of the many memory novels, portraying the past of Spain through the life of three generations from the Spanish Civil War until the twenty-first century. I could have demonstrated the lack of interaction between the Spanish and other European narratives. Nonetheless, as the present regained its precedence over the past during the economic crisis of 2008, and Spanish audiences were ready for new kinds of literature.

While during the so-called memory boom it was virtually impossible to find works which cast their glance outside Spain, ten years later, such novels abound. Novels linking the narratives of Germany and Spain include Aroa Moreno Durán's *La hija del comunista* [*The Communist's Daughter*] (2017) which tells the story of an exiled Spanish family, who escape to communist East Germany, Verana Boos's *Naranjas De Sangre* [*Blood Oranges*] or Almudena Grandes's *Los pacientes del doctor García* [*The Patients*]

of *Doctor García*], which deals with the Blue Division and the front of Narva in a more detailed way than Muñoz Molina's *Sefarad*.

Los pacientes del doctor García illustrates perfectly the subtle change taking place in Spanish discourses. It is the fourth volume of a series about the Spanish Civil War and its aftermath, *Episodios De Una Guerra Interminable [Episodes from an Unfinished War (My translation)]*. The first three volumes talk exclusively about Spain and the life of the vanquished republicans within Spain and in exile in France. There is hardly any reference to the international context, for example only occasional remarks of the main characters refer to World War Two.

Los pacientes del doctor García, the fourth volume departs significantly from this standpoint, as the extermination of European Jewry and its legacies play a key role in the story. The events and legacies of the Spanish Civil War and the Shoah are interlinked, the Blue Division and its participation in the atrocities in Estonia, as well as their retreat to Germany and the arrival of the Soviet troops to Berlin are not only interwoven with the threads of the multiple Spanish life-stories, but the support and involvement of Francoist Spain to the Nazi perpetrators to flee to Argentina and find safe haven there constitutes the main thread of the story.

Nonetheless, Grandes ultimately places Spaniards on the same side with the Jewish victims, as according to the narrator, both the Jews and the Spaniards were betrayed and abandoned by the United States and Britain in favor of the geopolitical considerations of the Cold War. The main character directing the clandestine network is Clara Stauffer, whose figure was modelled after the real-life Clara Stauffer, who was

involved in helping Nazi Germans to escape to Argentina after the end of WWII. As in Muñoz Molina's *Sepharad*, the foreign perpetrators, the Nazi German officers, Rumanian, Croatian and Hungarian collaborators are mostly portrayed as monsters. Grandes defines the Francoist elit, a small group that committed crimes in the name of Spain, and separates them from the everyday people, who suffered under the oppression. This latter group stands for the "real Spain", the same way as de Gaulle's France declared itself the successor of the resistance fighters, Grandes considers Spain exclusively as the successor of the Republicans. The danger of this way of reconstructing the identity of a country lies in the refusal to deal with the dark chapters of the past of the nation. The Spanish biographical film, *The Angel of Budapest* (2011), that I analyze in the last chapter, exemplifies representing Spaniards as good people, fighting against the evils of Nazism.

I consider that the shift of the narrative focus to include non-Spanish threads results from the increasing presence of European discourses on the Shoah in Spain, and signals that Spaniards increasingly regard their history as part of a larger story. The appearance of a growing number of artistic representations from both well-established, popular authors, like Grandes and Cercas, as well as upcoming writers, will strengthen the process of interlinking.

As part of this process, we may observe a noticeable shift in the geographic orientation of this newly emerging conversation. Traditionally, the point of reference for the inhabitants of the Iberian Peninsula has been France, their closest neighbour on the other side of the Pyrenees. The ongoing memory work in Spain invites comparisons with

Vergangenheitsbewältigung, the struggle to overcome the Nazi past that has taken place in Western Germany since the 1960s. References to the German way of addressing the legacies of a genocidous past appear in *The Impostor*, as well. Exploring the new forms of interweaving Spanish and German life-stories and history in various recent novels by Spanish authors may give us a more nuanced understanding of the shared patterns of memory work.

Is a memory-boom, similar to the Spanish process, taking place in Hungary? Will the recent and not so recent past become a topic of hundreds of artistic productions and thousands of private conversations? I certainly perceive a narrative shift in the current artistic productions, especially in the most recent films of both emerging and established directors. Márta Mészáros's 2017 film, *Aurora Borealis – Northern Light* presents a similar family drama to *Gloomy Sunday*, where the grandson shows interest in finding out about the well-kept family secrets. In a slow detective-story fashion we find out that the grandmother was raped by Soviet soldiers and one of them fathered the child. *Aurora Borealis* forms part of the recent wave of Hungarian artistic creations which look back into the past through a critical lens, finally raising questions about long-denied events and long-avoided topics.

In addition to representing a small-shift that may or may not lead signal a paradigm-shift, *Aurora Borealis* and *Los pacientes del doctor García* demonstrate one more common feature: their stories are narrated by female authors and evolve around strong female characters. This perspective is missing from the artistic creations I have considered in the present work, since male authors in Holocaust literature, and elsewhere,

commonly represent women as peripheral characters. Antonio Muñoz Molina, Jorge Semprún, Imre Kertész and Javier Cercas, either model their protagonists on themselves, as Semprún and Kertész, appear as co-protagonists, in a novel that centers around a male protagonist, such as Cercas, or are simply present as the author/narrator Muñoz Molina.

The Spanish male authors invariably present themselves as omniscient intellectuals in their writing, making ample references to other intellectuals, such as Maurice Halbwachs or Primo Levi, and frequently mentioning friendly encounters with internationally recognized authors, for example Mario Vargas Llosa and Robert Bolaño in the case of Cercas. References to books, poems, philosophical works, often only available in foreign languages also abound. The approach of these male authors is clearly elitist, they are not targeting the masses, their aimed readership is the cultured "elite" or middle class. Though *Fatelessness* offers an exception to this pattern, hence the protagonist is a fourteen-year-old, Kertész's other works follow the same pattern of elitist intellectualism. Alice Zeniter, the only female author to not be present in their novel as a character. Zeniter is also the only one whose work is entirely devoid of references to foreign authors and other renowned intellectual. She tells the story of an everyday family, in a way that is easily understandable for an everyday family.

If we compare female and male narratives of the Nazi concentration camp experience dissimilar patterns of representation emerge. Charlotte Delbo and Jorge Semprún, the two communist resistance fighters in France, use different narrative strategies, that many associate with gendered ways of expression. In Delbo's account various members of the community of survivors talk in first person singular. The multiple

voices Delbo uses show us that each “revenant” has difference experience, that every single experience is individual, Delbo is just one voice, one member of a strong community of women. Delbo does not narrate a story in the first person singular, she narrates the story of a group. Semprun, in contrast, talks from a different perspective, he emphasizes his experience, his interactions, his memories, his way of dealing with the trauma and his need to speak. He talks about how he affects other people and how he was affected by the unimaginable horrors. Other voices are also present in his book, but they are always present through him, in connection with him. Women are treated as mere objects of the male sexual desire.

By shifting the focus of my research to women, I hope to find more effective patterns of interweaving and reconciliation. After all, our society usually associates weaving with women. Are women more apt in weaving multiple threads, multiple voices and memories together? As of now, I conclude that the recent artistic productions that incorporate narratives on the Holocaust seek to mask the complicity of Franco’s Spain by focusing on the actions of Spanish rescuers or portraying Spanish protagonists exclusively as outside observers. In Hungary we observe similar patterns of oblivion and silence, the transition to democracy did not bring a breakthrough in the narratives on the Holocaust, as silence prevailed. The fact that the Nobel laureate Kertész remains a controversial figure in his home country reveals collective anxieties about how the Holocaust should be memorialized.

As I continue researching into the ways of narrating the past in Central Europe and re-articulate the current ‘bloc’ image of the former Soviet satellite states, I add the

lived experiences and multiple voices coming from within the region. I move into analyzing mother-daughter relationships in the works of Central European female authors (Magda Szabó) and Central European émigrés (Kati Marton, Susan Faludi, Ruth Klüger) living in the United States. I am also intrigued by the growing number of recent historic novels by Spanish female authors. What is the role of women in transmitting memories of a troubled past? How do the inquiries of the second generation living abroad differ from the second and third generation remaining in the country? I examine how Western projects of feminism relate to the experiences of women living under a communist regime, and I move into studying in-depth feminist theory that opens up new ways of looking at women.

I believe that memory work contributes to the advancing of human rights and thus helps create a world of peaceful co-existence. In order for this to happen, discourses of memory need to supersede the currently omnipresent divisions of “innocent us” and “guilty them” and function as an interwoven: acknowledging shared responsibility of the past and accepting the notion that should we have been unlucky enough to live through traumatic times, we ourselves may not have been the heroes all of us admire and identify with.

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