
This is the **published version** of the bachelor thesis:

Cabrera Vert, Irene; Springer, Bernd, dir. (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. Departament de Filologia Anglesa i de Germanística.). The function of historical memory in Crabwalk by Günter Grass and Soldiers of Salamis by Javier Cercas. 2016. 28 pag. (836 Grau en Estudis d'Anglès i Espanyol)

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**THE FUNCTION OF HISTORICAL MEMORY IN
CRABWALK BY GÜNTER GRASS AND *SOLDIERS
OF SALAMIS* BY JAVIER CERCAS**

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June 2016

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ABSTRACT

How a nation should deal with a conflictive past has been often debated: punishment, silence and forgiveness have been the most widely used terms for this purpose. However, none of these have proved to be effective. The authors that we will analyze in this project try to create reconciliation with the past of their nations through their literature, evaluating the respective processes which eventually caused problems to both of them. This paper is divided in two main parts: Germany and Spain. Both sections include a historical context, the way in which those nations dealt with historical memory after a traumatic past and also an analysis of a novel aimed to preserve historical memory: *Crabwalk* by Günter Grass (2001) and *Soldiers of Salamis* by Javier Cercas (2001). The aim of this TFG is to acknowledge the usage of historical memory, especially in literature, on the aftermath of the Second World War and the Spanish Civil War. Despite these contexts being very different, we find some similarities in the way both countries faced their past years later, having “silence” which was broken through literature and other arts in common.

1. INTRODUCTION

When we think about historical memory we are referring to a series of memories which have been created after particular historical periods or events. When a war conflict happens, it is important how the affected nation is going to reconstruct its historical memory as it is something that affects the present and the future generations. The way in which a nation is supposed to come into terms with its past is mostly given by the winners and that subjectivisation of the topic has led many times to bad consequences, which will be explained further on.

Günter Grass and Javier Cercas were both conscious that their countries had dealt with their past not in the correct way and through their novels they try to fix it suggesting how it should have been done. They also show the readers a different perspective from the one that was imposed at a time when the respective nations were having struggles with the consequences of a bad historical memory.

Cercas and Grass are not the only ones concerned about the past. In *Memoria, ¿Un remedio contra el mal?* (2009), the philosopher Tzvetan Todorov realizes an accurate analysis of the different ways in which historical memory can be processed. According to Todorov (2009), the function of memory is to free us from the innate evil factor which characterizes us. One of his main premises is that “si uno recuerda el mal llevado a cabo en el pasado, se supone que se podrá evitar en el presente” (p.7). However, it is obvious that the constant remembering of the past and efforts to avoid future conflicts have resulted unsuccessful. The philosopher claims that this happens because we are doing it wrong; we are using processes related to historical memory which are not the appropriate ones.

The treatment a traumatic event receives might have two different aims. The first one is related to justice, where crimes are punished and the courage rewarded. The other

one is a process that cares about the well-being of the individuals inside the society. It is no secret that historically, the selected option is the one dispensing justice. However, when we talk about justice, we talk about avenging the offence through a punishment equivalent to the one caused. By doing this, we create a gap in society that isolates criminals as a different species not belonging to the human race and this leads to a future repetition of the events (Todorov, 2009)

One of the first things we have to understand to reach reconciliation between both parts (victims and criminals) is to acknowledge that criminals are humans too and that the evil is not something genetic that creates a difference from others. We have to find the reasons and circumstances that rooted the evil in the criminals and be conscious that it could appear in all of us as we are humans too. As Todorov states, “la memoria histórica resulta inútil si construimos un muro entre el mal y nosotros” (Todorov, 2009: 37), proposing a “restorative justice” when a conflict happens, a kind of justice that does not punish but allows the former criminals and victims to live together.

In contrast, the German judge and writer Bernhard Schlink is more extreme on his idea of dealing with a conflictive past. In his collection of articles, *Guilt about the past* (2009), he specially focuses this topic on post-war Germany. For him there are two options when a nation has to deal with criminals: “The perpetrators and those who were implicated in one way or another in the crimes could have either remained within the circle of solidarity or have been cast out of it.” However, in the following lines, he makes a radical point saying that solidarity implies guilt, even if the individual who shows it is not involved in the crime: “one becomes entangled in another’s guilt if one maintains or establishes solidarity with that person” (Schlink, 2009:14). He agrees with Todorov (2009) that a constant remembering is neither a good option, not on the basis that it would prevent a repetition of the events but because it will not work as an

acquittal: “what is mistaken, however, is the idea of fixation on the traumatic past would somehow guarantee being set free from it” (Schlink, 2009: 35)

Nevertheless, Schlink (2009), as well as Todorov (2009), claims that it is possible to achieve reconciliation between two parts through an understanding and states that “the victim has to understand the perpetrator, even if they can understand them only in disbelief or in disapproval. Reconciliation requires a truth that can be understood; it requires understanding” (Schlink, 2009: 80).

If reconciliation seems to be the best option to overcome a controversial past, why is it never the first option? According to Schlink (2009) this happens because reconciliation requires an understanding for both sides and that is not always possible in most cases, for example in Germany and Spain, which are the two nations we are going to discuss. The aim of this project is to question the processes that these nations followed in order to reconstruct their historical memory. This will be done through the analysis of two novels: *Crabwalk* (2003) and *Soldiers of Salamis* (2003), both aimed to criticize the processes followed in their respective countries and show a fair memory to their readers.

2. GERMANY

2.1. Germany’s historical context

After the World War I, the Treaty of Versailles left Germany in a very humiliating position. Germany was forced to disarm, make substantial territorial concessions, and pay a huge amount of money to the winning countries. These actions weakened the country and caused a hate development in German people towards the other European countries. This instability benefited Adolf Hitler’s rise to power by promising a return to their glorious past and blaming Jews and other “non-Aryan” groups for the problems

in Germany. Hitler proclaimed himself “Führer” in 1933 and constructed a one-party state, a dictatorship where opponents of his regime were imprisoned in concentration camps and in which laws restricting the rights of Jews and other minorities were approved.

Hitler also performed an expansionary policy, which triggered the beginning of the World War II at the time he invaded Poland in 1939. As Germany had become a very powerful force, it conquered successfully most Europe during the war. However, Allied forces (France, Britain and the United States, among others) liberated the conquered lands and invaded Germany. Having no strategies to move forward, Germany finally surrendered unconditionally in 1945.

After the war, Germany was stripped of all its conquests and divided into four different zones. The Eastern part was occupied by the Soviet Union, while the three Western ones were occupied by the Allies. The tensions between these both sides led to an era known as the Cold War, prompting a clear separation between the East and West territories by the proclamation of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the German Federal Republic (GFR) respectively.

The recovery was rapid in West Germany after the war, which was under the leadership of its first chancellor Konrad Adenauer. East Germany, meanwhile, did not recover so quickly. The GFR reflected the prosperity of the new republic, a fact that enraged the communists. Consequently, in 1948 the Soviets tried to force the Western powers out of Berlin, which was also divided in two parts, which caused thousands of East Germans to fly to the GFR through West Berlin. To stop this massive migration, the GDR built the famous wall in 1961 on the ground that they were protecting themselves from fascism.

Due to the crises and pressures that the GDR suffered, the fall of the wall finally took place in November 1989. A year later, the Western powers of France, Britain and the United States formally waived their postwar rights of occupation. Germany was finally reunited after more than 40 years of division.

After the German reunification, there were many economic and social problems, especially in the Eastern states, which greatly delayed the economy throughout the 1990s. During this period, it is also important to mention the appearance of extreme-right ideologies due to the rejection of communism, which was now meant to live together with capitalism.

2.2. Germany and Historical Memory

Almost immediately after the World War II, it began a revision of the Nazi past along with a series of judicial proceedings. Among these we find the “Nuremberg trials”, held by the Allied forces in 1945 against prominent members of the political, military, and economic leadership of the Nazi Germany. Out of the five thousand accused, eight hundred were sentenced to death. At the same time, the American military government carried out a dismissal policy of State functionaries (Dominguez, 2015)

Since accusing the high Nazi officials required hard investigations and a lot of evidence, it was easier to start by prosecuting minor crimes. The problem was that in after-war Germany, we find a devastated country where the main goal of the population was to survive, even if this required stealing. The result was a nation in which almost everyone was a criminal and in that context the creation of a new republic was inconceivable.

As a solution, by the end of 1949, the conservative government of Konrad Adenauer, the first chancellor of the GFR, approved an Amnesty law:

La ley conlleva la amnistía para todos los delitos cometidos antes del 15 de setiembre de 1949 con penas de un máximo de seis meses de prisión. Pese a que la mayoría de las cerca ochocientas mil personas que se benefician poseen delitos de los años del hambre y del mercado negro, la aplicación de la ley también afecta a los delitos no prescritos de la época nazi. En ella además, un artículo beneficia a los funcionarios nazis de régimen y miembros de las SS, que esquivan la internación y las “desnazificación” a través de adoptar una identidad falsa. (Domínguez, 2015: 139)

The application of this and other similar laws created a huge feeling of injustice among Germans. This was due to the fact that many high Nazi officials still remained in administrative positions and also because all the trials were held by the Allied forces, which by the way did not receive any punishment for the crimes they committed. Dominguez (2015) claims that there was a resentment among the German population, who saw this political strategy as a way of dismissing the Nazi past: “La paralización activa de la sanción de los crímenes nazis significa no sólo la protección activa de los culpables, sino también la perpetuación de un estado de descomposición moral generado por la renuncia consciente al esfuerzo de la justicia” (Frei, 2009, cited in Domínguez, 2015: 139). More importantly was the repercussion this had on individual memories, which were severed from the public ones.

In the 1960s, there was a change of perspective and the reason is that “en 1958 tienen lugar en todo el territorio federal numerosas pintadas esvásticas, lo que se interpreta como un déficit de la política del pasado del gobierno de Andenauer” (Domínguez, 2015: 139). As from this point, a more rigorous review of the past is recuperated. It is at this time when a series of “políticos, abogados, artistas e intelectuales [(including Günter Grass)] se oponen a los que continúan abogando por que se ponga punto final” (Domínguez, 2015:140). However, the majority of the population claimed to put a stop to the conflict because they wanted to end with their suffering.

The first generations felt ashamed of their past and did not want to talk about it, while the second one blamed them for letting those horrible crimes happen. Unlike the former generation, this one is willing to talk without beating about their past crimes, not only favoring the creation of a collective guilt but also dismissing the Germans' suffering which led to serious consequences in the 1990s, as we shall discuss later.

Up to this point, the Jewish people had not had any opportunity to have a voice in this issue. They were just called to testify against Nazis, who many times rejected their statements causing them a humiliation. In 1961, some members of the *Mossad* (Israel's intelligence service) captured Adolf Eichmann, a German Nazi SS- lieutenant colonel and one of the main organizers of the "final solution". Eichmann was brought to Israel to stand trial for committing crimes against humanity. He alleged in his defense that the actions were committed under the obedience to his superiors, but the trial sentenced him to death by hanging. Addressing this issue, it is also important to mention the "Frankfurt Auschwitz trials" which took place between 1963 and 1965. The prosecution was led by Fritz Bauer, who without any kind of support was one of the first Germans that started looking for the guilty ones and judging them. Unlike the previous case, Bauer only condemned to death the defendants who had killed without instructions to do so. However, most were judged as accomplices to murder and therefore sentenced to a few years in prison. Bauer's labor prompted the public debate about the holocaust during the sixties.

In 1979, the American documental series *Holocaust* achieved to thrill the whole German nation, drawing the required attention to their historical memory. The project was extremely popular despite receiving some criticism. The society's will to come into terms with its past led to a variety of debates which put an end to the repression of National Socialism and Holocaust in consciousness.

Moving back to the general picture, Germany suffered a complex process of understanding their Nazi past. After the unification, the German Nation had to bring together two ways of dealing with the memory of their past, which led to what is called a “divided memory” (Schulze, 2004). The GFR developed a “culture of memory” through the increase of Holocaust memorials, which continued even after the reunification. The intention was to remember the “genocides in hope of preventing their recurrence” (Schulze, 2004: 640). In opposition, the RDA remained aloof to that conflictive past claiming that they were communists and they were victims. They would usually attack the GFR using the argument of a “not-surpassed past” to discredit politically and morally their democracy. However, after the reunification the West culture imposed over the East one.

The strategy achieved by Germany in order to deal with its past led to the creation of a “negative remembrance”, which recalled the crimes committed by the Germans, rather than the crimes they also suffered. This focusing on the negative part led to the creation of a guilty feeling among all Germans, which was tried to be acquitted in 1986 through the *Historikerstreit*, a controversial debate which attempted to obtain “una exculpación de los crímenes nacionalsocialistas, es decir, el pueblo alemán no es el único en haber cometido hechos atroces” (Domínguez, 2015: 141). However, this and other statements were discredited on the ground that what had happened during the World War II in Germany was a unique event, incomparable to other similar cases in history.

This “negative remembrance” was also instigated by the so called “68 generation”, which failed in its task of reconstructing historical memory. The 68 generation focused on the crimes that the Germans had committed during the holocaust, silencing the suffering of the Germans. As mentioned before, this generation blamed

their parents for allowing all those crimes; they refused to see Germans as victims because that would have been a way of forgiveness and this was unconceivable. All this obviously brought terrible consequences: In the 1990s, a new generation willing to listen to their grandparent's stories appeared; stories about how much the Germans suffered during the World War II. The feeling of rage joined the communist rejection and led to the appearance of extreme-right ideologies in this period, which included terrorism and the appearance of Neo-Nazi groups, which proved Germany's inability to overcome its past.

2.3. *Crabwalk* by Günter Grass

Having already won the Nobel Prize for Literature, Günter Grass published *Crabwalk* in 2002, a novel addressing to the subject of how the past affects the present. The novel blends historical facts, such as the sinking of the *Wilhelm Gustloff*, and fictional ones, like the members of the Pokriefke family who directly and indirectly suffer the consequences of that event.

In his novella, Grass presents us the story of the *Wilhelm Gustloff*, a civil boat¹ sunk by the Soviets in 1945 resulting in the death of thousands East Prussian refugees. The boat had been named after *Wilhelm Gustloff*, a Nazi leader murdered in 1937 by a Jewish student, *David Frankfurter*.

The story is told by *Paul Pokriefke*, who was born the day of the sinking, after her mother, *Tulla*, was rescued. At first, he is reluctant to tell the story as he has grown up overexposed to the story that his mother retells with great affliction over and over again. Eventually, *Paul* agrees to tell the story encouraged by the insistence of his mother “not because the old man is breathing down my neck, but because mother never

¹ In fact, the *Wilhelm Gustloff* was not only carrying civilians, but also army soldiers and the soviets did not know that.

eased up” (Grass, 2002: 28). The old man is Paul’s friend and also encourages him on his writing and is said to be Günter Grass himself².

Grass’s concern for the past, its importance and its consequences of dealing with it in a wrong way are exemplified by Konrad Pokriefke, Paul’s son and the third key element of the novel. Paul, as a representative of the 68 generation, had failed to teach his son about the suffering of the German people and her mother is the one in charge to fill his grandson with all those concepts. “When her son Paul [...] does not take up the emotionally and psychologically encumbered task, Tulla begins to groom her grandson Konny for this purpose” (Baker, 2010: 232). The fact that Konrad is 17 years old makes him a highly impressionable target. Günter Grass was also 17 when he joined the Waffen-SS, so Konrad’s character provides him an opportunity to justify how impressionable someone can be at that age: “these kinds of constructions help Grass communicate his own personal error at 17 when he joined the Waffen-SS tank division” (Baker, 2010: 240). This is the reason why Konrad makes his own interpretation of the tragic events and starts developing “Neo- Nazi” thoughts that are expressed on a webpage discovered by his father while he investigates about the Wilhem Gustloff. The same as Paul, we are witnesses of the online debate impersonated by Konrad, as Gustloff and Wolfgang Stremplin, a German boy who embodies David Frankfurter. The “tug-of-war” relation between these two characters seems innocent at first, but it ends tragically when they meet face to face and Konrad shoots his online acquaintance on the ground that he “fired because he [was] a German” (Grass, 2002: 188). This unexpected outcome is the result of a bad canalization of the past, as the events that took place years ago are happening again. To emphasize this repetition of the events, Grass makes

² “a thinly veiled Günter Grass acting in meta-narrative capacity” (Baker, 2010: 239)

Konrad to shoot the same number of bullets and in the same places as David Frankfurter did.

In *Crabwalk*, Grass approaches different topics related to the German Nazi past and the importance of historical memory. Starting from the title, Grass focuses on the importance of revising a tragic past. The same as crabs, we need to move backwards in order to go forward. We have to assume and understand our past in order to move on. This “crabwalk” becomes a recursive technique in the novel when the narrator needs to explain a past episode so as to continue his telling.

The importance that the author draws towards the Internet is very significant. He also shows that a virtual reality can be perceived as real for some people, such as Konrad. The context that Grass creates in the novel allows him to create a mean of communication in order to warn future generations about the danger of the internet. It is also interesting how Paul A. Youngman (2008) establishes a relation between the real and virtual elements, claiming an existing connection between Konrad’s behaving and the Nazi Regime:

She [Tulla] buys him the computer with network connection, symbol of virtuality, and the pistol, symbol of reality. When the line between the two is blurred, killing can ensue. This is nothing new. The Nazi regime ran one of the most effective media propaganda machines in modern history. They, too, provided virtuality through media and reality through guns. Their virtuality was expressed with pamphlets, books, newsreels, and blockbuster films and they were able to realize their make-believe world with weapons. (Youngman, 2008: 197)

It is not the first time that the Germans are presented as victims in literature³. What is original in Grass’s novel is that he does it using the story of the sinking of the Wilhem Gustloff, a topic that became taboo not only among the German population, but also among the communists:

In the Reich the sinking of the once beloved KDF ship was not reported. Such news might have weakened the will to stay the course. There were only rumors.

³ Some examples related to the topic are listed in Baker, 2010: 230

The Soviet supreme command likewise found reasons not to publish in the Red Banner Fleet's daily bulletin [...] (Grass, 2002: 164)

Therefore, *Crabwalk* becomes a way of giving voice to the innocent victims who perished during the maritime disaster and “a tribute to all the innocent victims of all wars, past, present and to come” (Bullivant, 2002: 96)

According to Baker (2010), Grass presents three ways of dealing with a traumatic historical past: repetition compulsion (Tulla) that leads to Konrad's action-oriented behaviors, his seek for revenge, and dissociation (Paul, before he decides to write the story). However, any of these forms are the proper ways to deal with historical memory as they are proved to be a failure. Baker indicates the existence of a “middle voice” between these two extremes:

Paul takes his place in the middle, both inside and outside the action, as he conflates his narrative reflections on the past and historiographical reconstructions with claims of victimization against the backdrop of overwhelming criminal perpetration. Grass's narrator describes these events as someone preoccupied with documents and with the interconnections of stories of German victims and Nazi perpetrators, such that the drama and emotion of the tragedy take on a tone that is firmly in the middle. In Paul Pokriefke, Grass presents a main character that recognizes the despondency of the active perpetrator and passive victim in elements of his own life's story, and negotiates a narrative between their opposing tendencies from his position in the middle. (Baker, 2010: 242)

Through the novella we see how Günter Grass admits that Germans have committed many mistakes while dealing with their past: “The history we Germans have repeatedly mucked up is a clogged toilet. We flush and flush, but the shit keeps rising” (*Crabwalk*, 2001: 122). The book was published at the beginning of the new Century, at a time when all the consequences that had happened throughout the 1990s were evident. It was a mistake silencing the crimes committed by the Allies and also leaving this issue into the hands of the extreme right. Konrad is the character that embraces all those mistakes and is pushed to the limit by Grass in order to show how extreme the situation can get if

there is a partly avoidance of the past. In *Crabwalk* the author claims for a full reconstruction of the past at all levels of society, as there are still people unaware of it.

3. SPAIN

3.1. Spain's Historical Context

The two different ways of conceiving Spain advocated by right and left-wing parties, the anticlerical policy implemented by republicans, the radicalization of the unions because of the economic crisis and Republic inability to resolve the conflicts of Spanish society were, among others, some of the reasons that favored a climate of tension before the war. It was not until 1936, when the republicans assassinated Calvo Sotelo, an important leader from the conservative party that the Civil war started. The militia, which was already preparing an insurgency against the Republic, decided to act. The war divided the country in two sides: republicans and nationalists led by Franco, and the mutual intolerance between them led to clashes even inside Spanish families. Gradually the Republicans started losing territory until April 1939, when the civil war ended giving the victory to the insurgents, led by Franco. Despite that European powers signed a non-intervention act, some international countries got involved: The Republican Spain received assistance from Russia, Mexico and the International Brigades while Franco's Spain was aided by Germany and Italy.

At the end of the war, Franco was proclaimed Head of government and the first he did was to suppress the rest of political parties, establishing a totalitarian dictatorship. His will was to regenerate the country under the premise "Orden, Patria y Religion". As a result of the war and an autarchy-based economy, the country found itself immersed in an economical crisis that led the regime to its fall. Franco died in November 1975, leaving the country in hands of Juan Carlos de Borbón, ensuring the restoration of the

Spanish monarchy existing before the Republic. Here it started the Spanish transition to democracy.

In his coronation speech the king made clear his reformist intentions, a different path from the one that the dictator and his supports had imagined. After Arias Navarro, the king entrusted Adolfo Suárez to form the government. He started a series of essential reforms for the triumph of the transition. This period culminated after the 1982 elections that gave the victory to PSOE by an absolute majority, starting this way a democratic legislature. It was the first time since the 1936 elections that a left-wing party was going to form the government. To this triumph, it should be added the entry of Spain into the European Community in 1986.

3.2. Spain and Historical Memory

It is very significant how Spanish politics disregarded the issues concerning its past during the first years after the end of the dictatorship. They just drew a veil over so many problems without doing any favor to the Spanish people. *La Ley de Amnistía* in 1977 (also called *pacto de silencio*) was a milestone in the development of historical memory. This law conceded amnesty for political prisoners, as well as for a wide range of offenses including political acts, rebellion, sedition, crimes and offenses committed before the date December 15, 1976. This law provided the country a kind of a fresh start, leaving the past in the past on the way to democracy. “Although Franco was notoriously vindictive toward the losers of the Civil War, the opposition understood early on that the only way to overcome the war was to renounce any desire for punishment or revenge” (Faber, 2005: 207). But obviously it was not that easy, that law caused the people not to talk about Francoism, turning it instead into a taboo subject, occasioning what has been called a “collective amnesia”. But that law caused other

problem, it also invalidated any complaint submitted for crimes, such as genocide or disappearance, committed during the civil war and dictatorship. In face of this, global organizations such as the “Human Rights Watch” and “Amnesty International” started asking Spain’s government to derogate *La ley de amnistía* as it infringed basic human rights. However, that request was not successful due to the fact that the Spanish constitution did not allow revocations of laws concerning criminal liability.

The insignificant effort of the government to reconstruct historical memory during post- Franco years was meaningless compared to what actually was achieved in other areas, such as literature and cinema. At the beginning of the transition to democracy there was an explosion of works dealing with the recent past, which included literature, films and documentaries (Colmeiro, 2011: 26). Probably because of government’s lack of support for the cause this production did not last much longer, just a few years:

There were no official channels for public remembering and not enough collective desire to remember either. Spanish society embraced the new liberties and the experience of modernity without much interest in remembering the sordid past, on the contrary, it actively tried to disassociate from this past very rapidly. (Colmeiro, 2011: 26)

Nevertheless, after the thirty-year long *pacto de silencio*, a new hope appeared in the landscape of Spain’s historical memory. In 2000, the *Asociación para la Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica* was founded to relocate 30000 cadavers killed and buried unmarked during the civil war. Unlike the previous occasion, the government was making efforts to unveil the events occurred during the past sixty years. The first big attempt was befallen during Zapatero’s government:

The Zapatero government also seems committed to cleaning house in a more general sense. Iconic in this last respect was the decision, in March 2005, to remove a prominent statue of Franco from the Plaza Mayor de San Juan de la Cruz in Madrid, where it had stood since 1959, surviving the dictator’s death by thirty years. For the first time, too, the Spanish government is attempting to reach a form of reconciliation by *working through* the past instead of ignoring it. (Faber, 2005: 206)

After this, it was not until 2007 (during Zapatero's government), when a formal law regarding historical memory was proclaimed. We are referring to *La ley de Memoria Histórica*, which included the recognition of the victims of both sides during the civil war, and especially of the victims of Franco's dictatorship. It also requested the opening of mass graves in which insurgents of the regime were still buried. This law was not adopted unanimously: members of the conservative party *Partido Popular* were against this law, claiming that it was reopening past wounds. That opposition caused the law to be abolished during *PP's* government in 2013.

At the beginning of the new Century, people who had lived during the civil war and Francoism were passing away and whereas their children were conditioned not to talk about it, their grandchildren want to know what happened (Faber, 2006: 211). This is the reason why we found another boom of works aiming to reconstruct historical memories from that conflictive past. This time though, there is a full implication, including in politics, as we have seen, and also on TV. However, Colmeiro (2011) differentiates two kind of tendencies while dealing with the past memories of Spain: the first one is a commercial one, which only uses Francoism as a context to develop a series of events, not concerning problematic issues from the past but "featuring glamorous TV actors and actresses, appealing to a retro aesthetic, with fancy period dresses and décor" (2011: 29). The second kind is the actual conscious one, in which we can find an actual reevaluation of the past and the influence that it has in our present day. On this category, the works appeal to "realistic modes, in an effort to better capture the work of memory, the experiences of trauma, the silences and the voids of the past, the historical discontinuities, and the elusive nature of historical narrativization" (Colmeiro, 2011: 29-30). Inside this latter group we find Javier Cerca's novel *Soldiers of Salamis*, which will be analyzed further on.

The problem goes further when we talk about the absence of historical memory or even of the concept of identity in the nationalities from the periphery. Quoting one of the most famous Franco's mottos «España una, grande y libre», that “una” automatically annulated any culture in Spain which was not the Spanish one. Basque, Catalan and Galician cultures were highly repressed, up to the point that local literature, film and music were forbidden and also their local languages were banned, as the only language that should be spoken in Spain was Spanish. However, “repressed historical memory formed a vast corpus of oppositional counter-memories as forms of cultural resistance many of them produced clandestinely or from exile” (Colmeiro, 2011: 24). The impact of Francoism in these places was not the same as in the rest of Spain and so was not the situation after the regime. They not only needed to recover a historical memory but also identity, or how Colmeiro calls it: “historical nationality”, and for them the most important thing after the dictatorship was the restoration of the local institutions of government rather than a “backward-looking justice” (Colmeiro, 2011: 25).

3.3. *Soldiers of Salamis* by Javier Cercas

Published in 2001, *Soldiers of Salamis* is one of the most relevant novels regarding Spanish historical memory. Despite the subject of Francoism and civil war were being overused at that time, what differentiates "Soldiers" of other contemporary works is the fact that the author chooses “una atrocidad cometida por los rojos” (Cercas, 2003: 27) as a starting point.

This best-seller explains the odyssey of a journalist (Javier Cercas himself) who becomes obsessed with the history of Sánchez Mazas, one of the founders of *La Falange española*. The story he hears about locates Sánchez Mazas in 1939, when he was captured by some defenders of the Republic which, by the way, was almost on its

end. Afterwards, he was grouped with other prisoners to be executed. While facing the firing squad, at the hearing of the first shots, Sánchez Mazas decided to run into the forest eluding the bullets successfully. He hid in the woods covering himself with mud and leaves but he was finally discovered by a Republican soldier who, staring at him, denied to his companions having seen anybody and therefore, saved Sánchez Mazas's life. Then he would spend a few years hiding in the woods with the help of some people who are called "the forest friends". This anecdote shocks the writer in a way that he will try to reconstruct the whole story and, most importantly, discover what triggered the Republican soldier not to kill Sánchez Mazas knowing who he was.

The novel is divided in three parts. The first one is a kind of introduction written in first person, in which the investigations of the journalist are explained after hearing Sánchez Mazas's anecdote. The second one consists of the novel that the protagonist has written once he has put all the pieces together, explaining Sánchez Mazas's life and the famous anecdote. In the third one, we are brought back inside the life of the protagonist who feels that his novel is unfinished as something is lacking. After a friend tells him the history of a Republican soldier called Antoni Miralles, he realizes that this man might be the soldier who saved Sánchez Mazas's life and therefore the part that his novel is lacking, so he tries to find him desperately. By the end of the novel, the journalist finds Miralles and gets to talk to him. He refuses to confess whether or not he is the man that the protagonist is looking for, but lets out a complicit smile that causes a growth in the uncertainty of the journalist and the readers.

Another way in which the book differs from other contemporary novels is that it narrates a life passage of one of the main founders of *La Falange española*, a right-wing party and one of the main bases of Francoism. This case was not the most usual, as by the end of the repressive regime francoists were considered as "the bad guys". However,

although the author narrates the survival of a Falangist, he does not only defend the Republican side, but also tries to understand the Fascist one. According to Sebastian Faber (2006) this could be a kind of “reconciliation”:

In *Soldados de Salamina*, Miralles’s life-saving act becomes the object of the narrator’s obsessive quest because he sees it as containing a “secreto esencial”, a key not only for understanding the war but for finally overcoming its divisions – something as a recipe for national reconciliation. This explains at least in part the book’s tremendous popularity. (Faber, 2006: 150)

Returning to the peculiarity of this novel, we also see that the narrator does not describe Sánchez Mazas as a Politician, he describes him as a very intelligent and enlightened man and focuses on his facet as a writer lauding his novels and poetry. Apart from trying to understand Falangism, what the narrator seems to do with Sánchez Mazas is trying to save him from the slanders surrounding the Francoism he defended:

Perhaps Sánchez Mazas was never more than a false Falangist, or else a Falangist who was only one because he felt obliged to be one – if all Falangists were not false and obligatory ones, deep down never entirely believing that their ideology was anything other than a desperate measure in confusing times [...] (Cercas, 2001: 130)

Victor Lemus in his article also supports this idea by saying that “para el narrador, Rafael Sánchez Mazas no hace parte de los derrotados. Inadaptado al franquismo – al cual presto su ideario-, gracias a una jugosa herencia, se retiró [...]” (Lemus, 2007: 122).

The main purpose of the novel, however, is not to promote the figure of Sánchez Mazas, who was already famous, but to give voice to the people who survived or perished the civil war and then were forgotten. Miralles is the real hero of the novel as he embodies the “triumph of humanity over politics” (Faber, 2005: 149). The narrator uses Miralles’s individual memory to project a collective memory. In Cercas’s own words, Sánchez Mazas anecdote acts as a simple bait whose function is to take us to Miralles (Cercas, 2003: 127)

The novel has had many different interpretations, for example that it lauds a Falangist figure, as some of the letters that the author received stated; that it is a way of reconciliation between both sides (Faber, 2005); or the need for a republican soldier as the only way to close a novel around a falangist (González, 2008); etc. However, in *Diálogos de Salamina*, Javier Cercas himself claims that “la novela, básicamente, habla de los héroes, de la posibilidad del heroísmo; habla de los muertos, y del hecho de que los muertos no están muertos del todo mientras haya alguien que los recuerde. (Cercas, 2003: 21)” This heroism is represented by Miralles and his act of humanism, who even having many reasons to kill Sánchez Mazas, he did not.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Having analyzed the treatment of historical memory in the aftermath of a conflictive period in Germany as well as in Spain, we can reach the conclusion that “silence” in memory is not favorable to a nation who has suffered a war conflict. Despite having this in common, these countries followed different processes at the time of reconstructing their past memories and eventually both tried to redress the wrongs of the past.

Though 50 years apart, both countries, which had been living in a Republic, saw themselves immersed in a totalitarian dictatorship. Still that is a little similarity compared to how different the events progressed in each of the countries. After the war in Spain, we found a nation divided in two bold sides (republicans and francoists), whereas in Germany there was a whole nation blamed to be murderous and guilty of all the crimes committed during the World War II. In Spain there were winners and losers, who both reached the agreement of not processing or punishing the rebels in exchange of democracy (“Pacto de Silencio”). On the contrary, in Germany it was the people who felt ashamed about their past and refused to talk about it while the nation as a whole was

considered globally guilty and the rebels were punished by foreign countries (Allied Forces).

Another main difference is the treatment which the dictatorship symbols received. In Germany, the Allies were responsible for the “cleaning” of Nazi symbols right after the end of the *Third Reich*, and also for the reparations of the victims (not including Germans). In Spain, as we have already seen, Francoist symbols remained in the streets and public places even 30 years after the death of Franco and investigations involving the past were boycotted, until “La ley de memoria histórica” in 2007 finally intended a rapprochement to the conflictive past.

Both countries found through literature a way of achieving reconciliation with their past. Despite having experienced the conflictive events in different ways (Günter Grass took active part in the war while Javier Cercas did not, but he grew up during Francoism), both authors use literature and the novels we have already discussed in order to come into terms with their past at a time where the respective countries were struggling with it. In Spain, Francoism had become a taboo subject and in Germany, the memory of the German suffering had fell into the hands of the extreme-right.

Both novels have in common the fact that the central tragic event (the sinking of the Wilhem Gustloff and the firing squad at Colell) were suffered by people who were actually considered to be guilty: the Germans and the Francoists respectively. Despite the development of the stories being different, both perfectly blended historical, real facts together with fictional ones, all this with the aim of creating a context in which the reader can get to identify the perpetrators as victims and acknowledge what a person is capable of doing under certain circumstances.

Cercas’s novel also acts as a way of remembering the forgotten republican heroes who not only fought against fascism, but most importantly helped and saved one of their

main enemies in a war context, an enemy but a man indeed. By doing that, Cercas shows that sometimes humanity prevails over hate and death. *Crabwalk*, meanwhile, is a serious warning towards the future generations on the dangers of the Internet, but most importantly it shows the terrible consequences of silencing parts of the past.

The processes followed by Germany and Spain can be related to the two extremes, which Todorov (2009) points out at the time when a country has to deal with a tragic past. On one hand, there is the “equivalent punishment”, as happened in Germany when the perpetrators were applied the same punishment they had applied to their enemies: death, as in the Nuremberg or Jerusalem trials. On the other hand, we find “total impunity”, which can be related to the case of Spain as the criminals did not receive any kind of penalty. Since any of these options are valid to Todorov and neither for any of both nations (as it has been proved through Cercas and Grass), the philosopher suggests in those cases a “restorative justice”, which would be at the center of those extremes. A “restorative justice” refers to an existing concern about the specific individuals that compose society. Neither the processes of Spain nor the ones in Germany showed special care for their individuals, causing serious consequences onto people and the future generations as we have seen in both novels.

Todorov’s theory presents some disadvantages as the perpetrators are meant to confess their responsibility involving the crimes they have committed and show regret, which is unreliable. Nevertheless, Todorov’s thoughts are the ones to which I agree the most. As a counterpart, I totally disagree with Schlink when he discusses about expelling criminals out of society. Todorov also shows certain disapproval towards this idea as we have already seen, but I would also like to point out that by doing that we are not only blocking an understanding, but also making the criminal’s followers exalt his figure. It happened with John Calvin, Hitler and even with Konrad at the end of the

novel. Through this project I have learnt that understanding is the best way to face a conflictive past, even if our nation has suffered a lot, nothing good comes out of hate and anger. This understanding is the one that *Crabwalk* and *Soldiers of Salamis* looked for and the one they achieved.

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