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Spain Remembering: The Civil War on Film

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Introduction

In the last few decades there has been an explosion of literary and cultural texts on the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). According to historian Helen Graham, the Spanish Civil War has produced over fifteen thousand books, a number that “puts it on par” with World War Two (preface). However, there have been more than just texts produced and in the new millennium there have been at least 47 films on the war (Martinez-Salanova Sanchez). The films included in this study are Pájaros de Papel, El laberinto del fauno, and Los girasoles ciegos all of which have been produced in the 21st century. These films were chosen on the basis that they have a strong child protagonist because children present a creative way to gain access to traumatic memory. All the films also represent the viewpoint of the Republicans and the victims of the Francoist Regime. This study argues that Pájaros de Papel, El laberinto del fauno, and Los girasoles ciegos can be interpreted as a response to the Pact of Silence, as objects of collective memory and postmemory, and as instrumental in Spain’s healing process from the trauma of the war and post-war period. This study analyzes the role of silence within the films, trauma and how it is coped with, and interpreting films as postmemory and collective memory, while also looking for examples of each within the films.

The Spanish Civil War

The war began on July 17, 1936 with a military coup (Graham 1). Spain had traditionally been a monarchy, but prior to the coup, they had a new democracy established in 1931 (Graham 7). With the new Republic came changes. Spain essentially split in two: those who supported the democracy and those against it (Graham 7). Those in favor of the Republic were usually the working classes and the poor because the Republican gave them the opportunity to better their lives (Graham 14). Those against the Republic were the upper classes, the church (Graham 18), and the military (Graham 10). They saw the new democracy as a threat to their traditional positions of power. The military transformed the threat into a war. They saw it as their purpose to “purify” and “unify” Spain, making it their mission to stop progress towards modernization (Graham 3).

The outcome was the fall of the Republican forces and the takeover of the Nationalists on April 1, 1939 (Graham 85). A dictatorship was established under the fascist rule of General Francisco Franco. The people who had sided with anyone but the Nationalists could no longer be open about their beliefs and had to erase or try to cover up parts of their pasts that might put them in jeopardy. This was the beginning of a long period of silence (Casanova 188).

After the war, violence continued against those who did not support Franco. There were mass incarcerations, executions and murders (Casanova 187). Many people died without being properly buried, and many also disappeared. Historian Paul Preston refers to this as the “Spanish Holocaust” estimating the death toll to be half a million (xi).

General Franco died in power in 1975, but his dark legacy did not. The dictatorship officially ended but his presence lingered. In the transition to democracy, Spain adopted an amnesty law, the Pacto del olvido, or the Pact of Silence (De Diego 198). As De Diego puts it, “Franco’s followers sat down with members of the Communist Party and other political organizations to write a constitution which would erase the ancestral fratricidal conflicts:” in other words, setting aside their past (198). The people who had committed crimes against the supporters of the Republic were not prosecuted or tried for the crimes (De Diego 198). The intention was not to forget the horrors that had happened entirely but not to let the past affect the future (Labanyi, Memory and Modernity 93). Ironically, the more they tried to leave the past out of their narrative as a nation, the more it resurfaced.

Recently, a new Spanish generation that is curious about their past as a nation has emerged. They are asking questions, wondering what happened to their grandparents and other members of their family, and are also unearthing mass graves in an attempt to find their grandparents’ remains (Labanyi, Memory and Modernity 95; De Diego 204). They noticed sites
where “war heroes” from the victor’s side were buried, but the graves of the victims remained unmarked (De Diego 205). The need to rediscover the past, to remember it, grew with the creation of the Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory in 2001 (De Diego 205). Therefore, in 2007 the Law of Historical Memory was passed. Another right related to the Law of Historical Memory was the right to exhume mass graves (De Diego 205). Spain was, by literally opening mass graves, returning to their past. The Law of Historical Memory serves as a way to break the silence that has lingered for a long time. It attempts to remember what has been forgotten and honor the victims of the war and those who were not mourned correctly. This begins to explain the recent explosion of films, or the “memory boom” as Jo Labanyi calls it (El cine como lugar de la memoria 158). More importantly, Spain can begin to talk about their past in a new way, but this time including Franco and the horrors of the war.

The pact of silence served as a way to push the past into oblivion, but the Law of Historical Memory acknowledges that the past is living with the present. The “memory boom” is helping Spaniards today remember the traumatic war their country and their people experienced. In remembering and in telling the story of the war, Spain has begun to heal from its traumatic past. Therefore, theory on trauma further helps us to understand Spain’s recovery process. Because trauma is a form of remembering, we cannot state its uniquely complex form without mentioning theory on collective memory and postmemory as well. The aforementioned silence left a lack of memory on the war, but the films in this study are creating memory and places for the past to reside. Thus, to view how the films in this study strengthen the link from past to the present we use theory on memory.

Trauma, Memory, and Postmemory

The films in this study will be analyzed as cultural texts through theory on trauma, postmemory, and collective memory. Mercedes Camino explains that in “the Spanish case articulating a past that was outlawed from the public memory for more than 50 years remains unfinished business in the twenty-first century” (39). Therefore, cultural film makes the healing process of trauma easier. In addition, they become sites of memory and a link to the past because they recount the history of the war, but in narrative form.

To start, Cathy Caruth explains the paradoxical characteristics of traumatic memory. An individual experiences trauma when they live through a powerful event that they do not fully or consciously understand (153). One of the characteristics of trauma is that the victim will experience the memory over and over again in the form of flashbacks or nightmares (Caruth 152). These flashbacks are intrusive, random and unexpected and cause the victim to relive the traumatic experience. Furthermore, traumatic memories, which also “serve as record of the past,” cannot be changed or manipulated and are precise every time the victim relives the experience (Caruth 151). The victim’s inability to change the memory or control when the memory resurfaces shows that they are possessed, or owned, by the memory (Caruth 151). The paradoxical nature of traumatic memory is in that “while the images of traumatic reenactment remain absolutely accurate and precise, they are largely inaccessible to conscious recall and control” (Caruth 151). When the individual experiences the traumatic event, they capture the power of it but fail to understand it. Due to the victim’s inability to comprehend it, the event has no place in their conscious memories. It is then, “a history that literally has no place, neither in the past in which it was not fully experienced, nor in the present, in which its precise image and enactments are not fully understood” (Caruth 153). This also means that the experience cannot be recalled at will.

Caruth states that in order to heal from trauma, the victim must integrate the experience into their memory (153). One way the victim can accomplish this is through the “talking cure” (Caruth 153). If the victim can narrate their experience, then they are beginning to be able to recall the event to memory and are beginning to own it. Eventually, through telling and retelling, the story will not be as precise (154). This will allow the victim to gather a sense of understanding and give the memory a place (153). Since the ‘talking cure’ is a way to heal trauma, then the opposite, silence, is a form of keeping trauma alive or keeping the wound open. This study interprets the films as narratives of the trauma of the Spanish Civil War that are ‘talking’ now, in an effort to help Spain heal. But in order to show that the wound of the war remains open, we must also look for examples of silence in the films. They are indicators that the trauma of the war is still present.

Postmemory, according to Marianne Hirsch, “describes the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but that were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right” (103). While the individual did not live through the traumatic experience, they feel a strong living connection to the event (Hirsch 104). Individuals who grow up in a society were the main narrative of trauma came before their birth, but who adopt the stories of the victims as their own, are also an example of postmemory (Family Frames 22). This study focuses on the third generation of Spaniards who feel the weight of the trauma although they themselves did not live through the Spanish Civil War or its post-war period. Their own personal stories are set aside and are not as significant compared to the stories of their grandparents who escaped death or who were buried in a pit along with other individuals like them.

Collective memory is the concept of memory as a social structure. Maurice Halbwachs argues that our memories are not our own but belong to a group or a society (38). It is within the social framework of that group that we gain memories, thus it is also within that group that we remember them. Halbwachs’ second argument is that memory is a reconstruction rather than a recovery (46). The example he provides is that of reading a childhood book. While we have read the book several times in our childhood, and we have memories attached to it, when we read it as an adult it seems that the book is new and one we had not encountered before. When we no longer have environments of memory, we are left with memory sites (Nora 12). Historian Pierre Nora adds that memory sites are “the embodiment of memory in certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists,” and “where memory crystallizes and secretes itself” (Nora 7). We have these memory sites, like books, museums and memorials because we lack whole environments of memory (Nora 7). Different from history, which is “a representation of the past,” memory “is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present” (Nora 8). It is forever changing and fluid (Nora 8). The purpose of memory sites, according
to Nora, is “to stop time, to block the work of forgetting...to immortalize death, to materialize the immaterial” in order to “capture a maximum of meaning in the fewest of signs” (19). It is up to the individual to stop forgetting; it is their responsibility to remember. In the past, minorities felt the need to learn about their origins and search for their identity (15). Now, because there is less and less memory, the marginalized are not the only ones “haunted by the need to recover their buried pasts” (15). Nora then puts the responsibility on the individual to "remember and to protect the trappings of identity." The urgency is that "when memory is no longer everywhere, it will not be anywhere unless one takes the responsibility to recapture it through individual means. The less memory is experienced collectively, the more it will require individuals to undertake to become themselves memory individuals” (Nora 16).

In relation to this study, the victims of the Spanish Civil War and its aftermath have very few memory sites because of the repression they suffered. Therefore, the memories of the war have been very much individualized even though they belong to the Spanish society as a whole. This lack of memorabilia causes a sense of urgency to remember and to recover the past. The films in this study are then sites of memory because they serve to memorialize the narrative of the Spanish Civil War from the perspective of the vanquished. They are materializing the horrors of the Spanish Civil War, and like museums and books, they make these memories accessible to the public. Cultural theorist Stuart Hall explains that films create identities for those groups whose identities were oppressed (qtd. in Colmeiro 22). They do not merely rediscover a past identity but create a new one. Essentially, the films in this study are creating a collective memory for the victims of the Spanish Civil War. They are filling in the missing narrative and turning sites of memory into environments. Thus, the film boom is the telling and retelling of their war narrative, making it their healing process.

The Child Protagonist

All three films in this study utilize children to tell the traumatic story of the Spanish Civil War. This is no coincidence, in fact, many other films such as Pan Negro (2010), El espíritu del diablo (2001), La lengua de las mariposas (1999) and El espíritu de la colmena (1973), to name a few, also use the child figure. The two main reasons children are a key role in the films in this study is because of the characteristics they represent and their ability to narrate trauma.

Children are used as the protagonists in Spanish Civil War films because of the general characteristics associated with children and childhood. For example, children represent innocence and vulnerability as seen in Ofelia in El laberinto del fauno and in Miguel in Los girasoles ciegos (Clark and McDonald 57). Ofelia’s innocent bloodheightens the aesthetic of trauma and opens the portal to the underworld. Miguel is powerless against the horrors of the Francoist dictatorship and cannot prevent his stepfather’s death. The children have no power or say in the war’s horrific events and are susceptible to the harsh realities that surround them (Pheasant-Kelly 104; Looney 14). For example, Lorenzo in Los girasoles ciegos is deeply impacted by his father’s choices and cannot do anything to change his situation. Children are also characterized as observers, outsiders to the adult world, whose gaze can be interpreted as corrective and transformative (Clark and McDonald 56; Bergero 637; Kotecki 244).

More importantly, techniques from children’s literature provide a creative entrance into the traumatic memories of the Spanish Civil War. Caruth explains that traumatic memory is largely inaccessible. However, she also states that “breaking with traditional modes of understanding, creates new ways of gaining access to a historical catastrophe” (105). As Laura Looney puts it, “The use of children’s literature motifs helps reduce the Civil War to key metaphors and provides access into a world of myth, imagination, memory and fear” (3). One frequently used literary technique from children’s literature is the rejection of chronological time or atemporality (Pheasant-Kelly 103-104; Looney 11). For example, in El viaje de Carol, the summer is timeless, and the film loops because it begins and ends with Carol’s arrival and with Carol’s departure. Pajaros de papel also loops when in the final scene Miguel goes from being an old man to a young boy again. Los girasoles ciegos begins and ends with images of the gold-trimmed altar in the cathedral and with Salvador confessing. In El laberinto del fauno, the film begins with blood trickling back into Ofelia’s nose and the narrator taking the viewer into “a long time ago” (Pheasant-Kelly 104). Looney explains that “A return to the point of origin has a universalizing effect and opens the dialogue between the past and present, and the chronology markers convey a self-consciousness that they are storytelling” (11). The time loop then leads us into the traumatic memory, while also acknowledging the telling of the memory, allowing healing to take place.

In brief, the child’s viewpoint helps the audience better understand the complexities of the war because “it reshapes the tragedy into a simplified, metaphorical, and universal, conflict” (Looney 14). It makes the memory accessible to everyone.

Pajaros de papel

Pajaros de papel (2010) begins during the Spanish Civil War. Jorge Del Pino is a vaudeville performer and comedian who works alongside Enrique Corgo with a traveling company. One afternoon, Jorge heads home after an air strike to find that his house has been reduced to rubble and his wife and son have both died in the attack.

A year later the war is over. Jorge returns to the company and is reunited with his old performance partner, Enrique. They meet a young orphaned boy, Miguel, who wishes to be a part of the company. Enrique decides to adopt Miguel, and Jorge reluctantly agrees. The trio begins to piece together various acts and to rehearse. At the same time, a Nationalist official is hired to work undercover and keep an eye on the performers. In one instance he overhears a suspicious conversation about a plot to kill General Franco. As a result, Jorge is falsely accused of participating in an attempted murder. Jorge, Enrique and Miguel attempt to flee to Portugal. However, the officials reach the group before they leave and arrest Jorge. Miguel, having witnessed his stepfather’s murder, crumbles in despair.

The ending of the film is set in 21st century Spain. Miguel is an old man now and he is getting ready to perform. He steps out on stage and begins to sing a satirical song Jorge used to sing. The audience sings along and transforms into the members of the company from when Miguel was young. Back on stage, Miguel is a young boy, and once again performs beside Jorge and Enrique.

Silence

In the film Pajaros de papel (2010), silence lingers gloomily around Jorge after the death of his wife and son. He reacts to their deaths by disappearing and isolating himself for a year. Jorge keeps the trauma
of his loss alive through his decision not to speak about his past or his family. This is reflected in his reaction to Miguel when he asks Jorge about his son, Rafael. Jorge is reluctant to speak about his son and forbids Miguel to ever mention Rafael’s name. This portrayal of an adult coping with trauma using silence shows the ineffectiveness of such a method. Jorge’s decision to remain silent about his experience only makes him bitter instead of initiating a healing process.

The element of silence is also present in Miguel’s knowledge of his mother. Miguel knows that his father passed away during the war but is unsure of his mother’s whereabouts. Initially, Miguel is presented as an orphan who carries with him a photograph of his mother. Then, one evening, the performance company watches a video in which Miguel swears that he saw his mother and to him that means she is still alive. He urges Jorge to help him find her. The silence settles in when Jorge decides not to tell Miguel that he found his mother in a mental hospital. Instead, Jorge tells the boy he did not find his mother. The mother is lost in a haze she cannot come out of and remembers only her husband. Jorge does not want Miguel to see his mother in the condition she is in, but not telling Miguel about his mother does not mean he suffers less. He continues to feel her loss but copes with it by talking about her and keeping her alive in his memory.

Trauma

Jorge Del Pino and Miguel both experience trauma in the loss of family members. Jorge loses his wife and son and Miguel loses his mother and Jorge. In the beginning of the film, Jorge’s immediate family dies tragically due to an air strike. He finds their bodies buried underneath the debris of his home. Miguel figuratively loses his mother. She is not dead but very ill since her husband’s death and cannot come out of her mental state. Miguel’s mother cannot care for him because of her condition, so he is taken to live with his abusive uncle. This is a traumatizing experience for Miguel because he constantly misses being with his mother and worries about her. In addition, he is neglected by his uncle because of his bad habits. Luckily, Jorge and Enrique decide to adopt Miguel and they become his new family. However, his experience is short lived because Jorge is killed right before his eyes.

While both Jorge and Miguel experience trauma by losing loved ones, each copes with their losses differently. Jorge remains silent on the deaths of his family members. His silence does not allow him to heal from the trauma he experiences, causing it to remain alive. In contrast, Miguel’s methods of coping emphasize the importance of telling one’s story and finding healing. He copes with the trauma he has lived through by telling people about his life and finding an alternative world in theatre. For example, he is open to telling the people that surround him about his mother and father. This is shown when he informs everyone, towards the beginning of the film, that his parents have passed. In another instance, when the company is watching a video, he tells everyone he has seen his mother in the video and emphasizes his mother’s existence showing them the photograph he carries of her. In addition, it is clear in the film that the world Miguel finds within theatre is an enticing alternative to his real world and a coping mechanism. Miguel immerses himself in a world filled with rehearsals, music, and performances. He wears make-up when he performs which makes him a different person as he changes into character and the change brings him into a Franco free world.

As the plot progresses, Miguel’s reality and fantasy merge blurring the line between both worlds. This occurs when military officers attend a rehearsal and begin questioning the performers in the theatre. Later, the same men mistreat a young girl performer, Marcela, and Enrique. A product of the blending of both worlds is the satirical song Jorge composes on the inability to live with “un Franco.” The phrase “un Franco” means that life under the rule of General Franco is impossible. Since Jorge and Enrique sing it with common French phrases, such as ‘mon ami,’ the term also means “one franc” which was France’s monetary unit at the time. It refers to the poverty performers and Spain faced during this post-war period. This song helps make the unbearable conditions of the regime something they can handle, more importantly, something Miguel can handle. The result of Miguel’s effective coping methods is shown towards the end of the film. Miguel is an old man now and he gets ready to perform once again. He repeats the mantra Jorge used to say before performing and when he is back out on the stage, he tells the audience of Jorge and the father he was to him. Miguel breaks the silence that surrounds the war and makes it possible for the audience to be more comfortable discussing it. He can sing Jorge’s satirical song on the Francoist regime and the audience can sing along without bitterness or hatred. Miguel continues to use theatre and performance arts to help him through his pain, until all that is left is a bittersweet memory. Miguel’s magical world is reinforced in the end when the camera pans the audience and they transform into the familiar faces of the company. On stage he is young once again, singing beside Enrique and Jorge.

Postmemory and Collective Memory

The film *Pajaros de papel* (2010), provides a clear example of postmemory in the song Miguel sings on the Francoist Regime. While the audience did not live through the war, they create a connection to it and make it a part of their memories through the song. It is their living connection to the civil war. In their relationship to the war, it is important to the audience that they remember the war and its victims in order to bring them honor and peace. The song comes from the perspective of the victim because it does not glorify the regime, and by speaking out on the victim’s behalf, it brings them honor. From the song radiate the spirits of those who suffered, and the audience is there to receive them, to connect with them.

A second example of postmemory is in the photographs Miguel carries because a photograph serves as a way to link life and death, what is and what has been. Hirsch describes the ‘death’ or ‘sting’ in a photograph, and the ‘life,’ using Roland Barthes concepts from *Camera Lucida* (Family Frames 4). The photograph, by itself, is still and dormant, and the sting in a photograph comes from viewing it and recognizing one’s self within the photograph, interrupting the static state of the photograph with a sting (Hirsch 4). In addition, the sting also comes from the notion that death haunts all photographs, meaning that all that once was, will, at some point, no longer be (Hirsch 19). The ‘life’ in a photograph is in the context, the reading, and the writing of the narrative in the photograph. The ‘life’ does two things: first, the reading of the photograph becomes a moment of discovering one’s self, and second, the writing of the photograph takes the image out of its dormant deathly state and awakens it to life (2-4). Hirsch explains how the reading of the photograph is a very personal task and uses Barthes’ description of when he is reading the photograph of his mother.
to illustrate: “To us it would be just another generic family photograph from a long time ago. He cannot show because, although it is a picture of his mother and uncle, he claims it is a very private kind of self-portrait, revealing, unexpectedly, the most intimate and unexposed aspects of himself.” (2). Barthes’ reading of the photograph is then his process of finding himself and discovering his identity.

Writing the photograph is what Barthes does in *Camera Lucida*, instead of showing us the photograph. The effect of writing the image is that “...it undoes the objectification of the still photograph and thereby takes it out of the realm of stasis... into fluidity, movement, and thus, finally, life” (3, 4). The ‘life’ also comes from the familial aspect of photographs. Hirsch explains that photography is a tool used by families to continue to tell their history and to keep learning about their past (6).

This is shown through the ‘umbilical cord’ analogy. The umbilical cord that connects a mother to her child is present when both are living. Then death cuts the cord, severing the connection. Nevertheless, the photograph revives the connection, serving to repair the cut. Therefore, by reading and writing the image, the child revives the mother, who radiates a connection to the child creating the ghostly and living presence of the umbilical cord (Barthes 81; Hirsch 5).

In relation to postmemory, the connection is between Miguel and the photographs he carries throughout the film. One of Miguel’s images is a shot from the shoulders up of a young woman, his mother, and of Miguel, presumably when he was a toddler. The second image is of two smiling men, Jorge and Enrique, with Miguel as a preadolescent. For Miguel, the people in the photographs reflect him and he reflects them, because they are individuals who helped raise him and their presence in his life influenced him deeply. The sting, or puncture, comes from the fact that those in his photographs are no longer present in his life. Death haunts the photographs, showing Miguel the past existence of his mother and his stepfather, and also his own impending end. This is reason enough for him to continue to tell his story, because he needs to tell everyone what he has lived through before he is also only present in photographs.

Miguel’s constant return to the photograph of his mother portrays the ‘life’ in the photograph. When Miguel looks at the image of his mother and talks about her, he re-discovers himself in it. For example, before Miguel steps out on stage he usually pulls out the picture of his mother, and in the end he also pulls out the photograph of his stepfathers. He thinks about her and what he is about to do, or about the lessons he has learned from Enrique and Jorge and how they shaped him. Of course, this is a very personal experience and the viewer cannot fully understand or know the depth of Miguel’s thoughts because it is a process of self-discovery. On the one hand, Barthes literally writes the photograph of his mother and in doing so brings the image to life. Miguel, on the other hand, verbally ‘writes’ the narratives of his mother and that of Jorge and Enrique. In the film, when Miguel is attempting to persuade the other members of the company that his mother was in the video they watched, he pulls out the photograph of his mother and talks about her, verbalizing her narrative. Without the context, the viewer sees only a woman and a child, in a black and white still, but the narrative brings her to life and makes her a mother who was victimized by the war. The photograph then emits life creating a bridge, the ghostly umbilical cord, between Miguel and his mother and also between the viewer and the mother. The same applies to the photograph of Jorge and Enrique. Before his performance, Miguel verbally writes the narrative of Jorge and the father he was. He verbally illustrates the image for the audience so that they can picture Jorge, although they do not physically see the photograph.

Telling the story of Jorge makes the static, smiling man in the photograph come to life, and we see him sing and dance, one last time, with Miguel.

Furthermore, Hirsch adds that complex stories of a family’s past are being brought to light through the use of family photographs, specifically the type of stories that usually remain hidden and untold (7). In the film, we learn about Miguel’s familial past through the photographs of his mother and himself. The absence of his father in the photograph symbolizes his death. We later learn that he died in the war. The mother is present in the photograph, but physically absent from Miguel’s life. We learn, through narrative, that his mother could no longer be with him, revealing a past we otherwise would not have known about. In relation to the civil war, the telling of a complex family past represents the film’s telling of a complex national narrative. The compilation of images, that is the film, reveals to us, the audience, a narrative that had remained silent for a long time. Because a film is composed of a vast amount of images, the umbilical cord that connects us is all the more radiant and strengthened, making the past more alive than ever. In brief, the photographs that create a connection between Miguel, his mother, and his stepfathers are also linked to the audience through the narratives they share of the victims of the Spanish Civil War, a part of their shared history.

The ghostly representation of Jorge and Enrique towards the end of the film could also mean that they are in fact ghosts. Labanyi explains that ghosts are living remains of the past who were not allowed to leave remains (“History and Hauntology” 67). She quotes Derrida, in saying that the ghosts of our past need to be exorcised by granting them “the right...to...a hospitable memory...out of concern for justice” (“History and Hauntology” 66). A ghost wants to be honored and acknowledged and not simply erased (“History and Hauntology” 66). She also adds that a ghost is “unfinished business” (“Memory and Modernity” 102). Jorge comes back at the end of the film in ghostly form to be honored and remembered once more. Miguel, in an effort to placate his ghost, gives him honor through telling his story. Jorge’s death is also “unfinished business,” in that his death was unjustified and the man who killed him was not held accountable for his actions.

The song Miguel sings at the end of the film in front of a large, inviting audience is not only postmemory, but it is also a key example of collective memory. The audience and Miguel share the memory of the song because it is a part of their national history. The song, by providing the victims’ perspective, brings a different story of the Spanish Civil War. The story it tells is not one written by the victors; therefore, it is a ‘memory site’ filling in the holes of Spain’s collective memory.

The audience in the film listens attentively as Miguel tells the story of Jorge and then sings. Their reaction is to take in the memory of Jorge and jovially sing along. The behavior from the audience, in response to Miguel, can be said to mirror the external audience which watches the film. The internal and external audiences are composed of a generation of Spaniards who want to hear more about what happened and who do not neglect their past. They are willing to ask and listen. Presumably, both audiences could be composed of third-generation Spaniards.
who ask about their deceased grandparents and seek to exhume unmarked burial sites. The behavior of the audience, while it can be argued that they mirror the external audience, can also be interpreted as a call-to-action to those who still remain silent or oblivious to their past. It sends to them an example of how the Spanish Civil War and the ghosts of their past should be approached. Rather than continue to ignore the ghosts of their past, they should be attentive to them, help them share their story and bring them honor. They need to be given a place in memory so that they may rest.

The film as a whole is also a ‘site of memory’ for Spain because it narrates the story of the victims of the war, a story that for a long time was silenced. The director, Emilio Aragón, stated in an interview that the purpose of this film was to honor and remember those who lived and struggled throughout the war and postwar period (Aragón) particularly, those who were performers and comedians, attempting to bring joy and laughter in a dark time, because they were the ones who helped pave the way for actors and performers today (Aragón). In a similar fashion to the rest of the films in this study, this film tells the story of a traumatic war experience, but the story of the war needs to be told more than once in order for healing to occur. This story of the civil war, narrated in different ways, shows that while trauma is still present, the healing process is currently occurring.

El laberinto del fauno

El laberinto del fauno (2006) begins with the myth of a princess who left the underworld and died in the human world. Her father, the king, is waiting for her soul to return. The film is set in post-civil war Spain in 1944. Ofelia and her pregnant mother Carmen head towards the camp of Carmen’s new husband, Captain Vidal. He is a nationalist military officer, attempting to drive out the last of the rebels hiding in the mountains. Upon their arrival, Ofelia explains to Mercedes, the maid, that her real father was a tailor who passed away in the war. Later that night, Ofelia sees a fairy and follows it into a labyrinth where she meets Pan, the faun. He tells her that she is the lost princess of the underworld. In order for her to reclaim her throne she must complete three quests before the full moon.

Ofelia completes her first quest which is to retrieve a key from a giant toad’s belly. Back at the base, the adults are having dinner and a general tells the story of Vidal’s father. Ofelia sees Mercedes sending signals to the rebels but promises not to tell anyone. Ofelia begins her second quest which is to retrieve a dagger from the lair of the Pale Man, an ogre-like monster that eats children. She received instructions not to eat anything, but she eats a grape from the banquet table. The Pale Man wakes up and Ofelia barely manages to escape. The rebels in the mountains attack the base. Carmen goes into labor and gives birth to a boy but dies in the process. Ofelia, in an attempt to complete her third quest, takes her little brother into the labyrinth. Captain Vidal follows her. The faun tells Ofelia that she must sacrifice her brother, so that his innocent blood can open the portal to the underworld. She refuses to hurt her brother so the faun leaves her. Captain Vidal finally reaches Ofelia, takes the baby boy from her, and shoots her. As he exits the labyrinth, he is surrounded by the rebels and Mercedes. He surrenders the infant and is killed. Mercedes runs into the labyrinth and holds Ofelia’s body as she passes away into the underworld.

Silence

In the film El laberinto del fauno, Captain Vidal represents the dominant Nationalist narrative that attempts to completely silence all alternative narratives. Throughout the film, he does not allow other stories to be told, dismissing the narratives of others (Orme 227). For example, at dinner one evening Carmen tells her guests the story of how she met the Captain, which he dismisses as boring and then apologizes to his guests because they had to listen to her. He embarrasses her, making her story seem unimportant (Kotecki 244). During the same dinner scene, a general tells the story of Vidal’s father. He was also a man of the military and he kept a pocket watch. When Vidal’s father died, he crushed the watch so time would stop, and so that his son would know the exact time of his death. He wanted his son to know how brave men die. After the general tells the story, Vidal dismisses it as rubbish. However, the cracks on the crystal of Vidal’s pocket watch confirm that the story is true. Vidal also gives a speech at the dinner in which he reiterates that he wants his son to be born in a pure and clean Spain. He is depicting the Spanish Civil War as a way to ‘clean’ society, a dangerous idea that spread throughout Europe at the time and a reference to the Holocaust (Ribeiro de Menezes 91; Pheasant-Kelly 109). Vidal firmly believes that only his narrative is valid, and like the victors of the war, he silences other narratives and repeats his own (Orme 230). Towards the end of the film, when Vidal surrenders the infant boy, he asks Mercedes to tell the boy about his father’s death because he wants his story to live on with his son (Orme 231). Mercedes interrupts Vidal, letting him know that his story dies with him because his son will know nothing of his father. Mercedes’ interruption can be interpreted as the disruption of the silence the vanquished endured for so long. It gives way for alternative narratives to be told.

Silence is also present in the absence of Ofelia’s father. To begin with, Ofelia’s father was a tailor who died in the war. Yet, when Ofelia asks Carmen why she remarried, Carmen answers her without mentioning her late husband. Carmen attempts to silence her past with him by remarrying, with Vidal filling in his place as a husband. Ofelia does not like her mother’s attempt to erase her father. Like a ghost demanding recognition and a place in their familial memories, he continues to come up in conversation only to be dismissed by Carmen again. His interrupting narrative is the attempt to tell the story of the vanquished, only to be silenced again and again.

Silence is passed down to the next generation symbolically through Ofelia’s young infant brother. In the same way that the Pact of Silence did not acknowledge the injustices perpetrated by the nationalists, Mercedes the maid told Vidal that his son would know nothing of him. Vidal is a representation of the Franco Regime and the war and post-war violence it created. He is not held accountable for all the lives he took and the people he made suffer. Instead, his narrative is thrown into the oblivion, to be forgotten. Not acknowledging the horrors of a country’s history causes the trauma of the horrors to remain alive (Caruth 153). And, by withholding justice to those who suffered these horrors, and neglecting honor, causes them to linger as ghosts (Labanyi 66). Because the film ends with the infant still young, it leaves open the question of whether or not Mercedes will tell the boy of his sister and his mother, or will the boy grow up with the silence that surrounded the war decades later?

The child’s approach to counter silence with stories and narratives communicates
Trauma

Guillermo del Toro’s dark film has several examples of trauma, beginning for Ofelia with Carmen’s difficult pregnancy, and later her death. Carmen has a very difficult pregnancy throughout the film. In the beginning of the film, on the way to the Captain Vidal’s base, Carmen is obliged to stop the vehicle to vomit. Then, one afternoon, Ofelia opens her book of quests and the image of fallopian tubes appear briefly as the page fills with blood. When she looks up, Ofelia sees her mother bleeding uncontrollably. Carmen almost has a miscarriage which deeply traumatizes Ofelia. The viewer knows this because Ofelia, having witnessed the difficulties of her mother’s pregnancy, refers to her mother as being “enferma de niño,” or “sick (ill of) with child.” Ofelia also vows never to have children. Later on, Carmen’s pregnancy leads to her death. After scolding Ofelia for believing in the magic of the mandrake root, Carmen throws it into the fire and the root shrieks foreshadowing Ofelia’s own cries. As soon as the root is consumed, Carmen goes into a painful and bloody childbirth. The trauma of this experience is heard through Ofelia’s shrieks as she calls for help, witnessing her mother’s pain. After Carmen dies, Ofelia is even more terrified of her stepfather, and her only family now is her brother. This can be interpreted in that the birth of a nation can be a painful and bloody birth in which death will be right beside life.

Trauma caused by the horrors of the war and post-war violence is seen in examples of Captain Vidal’s merciless murders. First, he brutally kills a hunter’s son by bashing a bottle into his eyes. The father witnesses this and cries out in horror. Vidal responds by shooting him until he dies too. He tortures a captive rebel from the mountains but does not want to kill him. He wants the rebel to continue to suffer in pain. Vidal wants the captive to heal enough that he continues to live, only so that Vidal may torture him again. The doctor Vidal employs to keep the captive alive disobeys Vidal and takes pity on the man. The doctor gives the rebel captive a lethal injection to alleviate his pain. Vidal then shoots the doctor, for disobeying, several times until he is dead. Towards the end of the film, Vidal’s last victim is Ofelia. He takes the infant boy from her and shoots her. Ofelia’s image as a young innocent girl emphasizes the cruelty of Captain Vidal, and it reflects the brutal nature of the dictatorship.

Ofelia copes with the trauma she experiences by alternating between a fantastical world and an adult world (Ribeiro de Menezes 94; Orme 226; Clark and McDonald 54). In the film, while she is in the mythical world, the adult world seems to be at war or in chaos (Pheasant-Kelly 105). Her alternative reality helps her to “make sense” of the horrors and of the life that surrounds her (Clark and McDonald 56). For example, on her first quest to retrieve a key from the giant toad’s belly, Vidal’s men see smoke rising through the forest, implying that someone has recently been there, and they go in search of them. In another scene, Ofelia sits frightened by the creaky sounds of her dark, old home. To her surprise, a fairy visits her. In one instance, her brother causes her mother pain and Ofelia tells him the story of the rose of immortality to calm him and herself. In another scene, Carmen almost has a miscarriage but Ofelia believes that the magic of the mandrake root will help her soothe her pain, and because she believes it, it does. Whenever Ofelia feels afraid or threatened in the adult world, she finds refuge in her fantastical world.

Another aspect of the film that shows Ofelia’s separation from the adult world into her mythical world to cope, is the creative use of colors. The distinction between the child’s world and the adult world is clear in the hues that paint each scene. When the rebels in the mountains are fighting Captain Vidal and his men, the colors are cool shadows of blues, grays and dark greens (Ribeiro de Menezes 92; Pheasant-Kelly 102; Looney 11). While they are in the mountains fighting, Ofelia is in the process of completing her first quest. She approaches the tree she must step into. On the outside, the tree is full of shadows of brown and it is obvious the tree is dead, but once she steps inside, the colors begin to change gradually the further in she goes. Once she reaches the giant toad at the center, the colors are golden with warm glows of yellow, orange, and red (Ribeiro de Menezes 93). Her mythical world, while it is an alternate world, is not completely safe and calm because aspects of her real world leak into it. The giant toad is grotesque and terrifying, but Ofelia learns to be brave and face her fear, something she cannot do in the adult world where her fears are beyond her and meant to be for adults. Therefore, she resorts to her mythical world where she can make sense of the trauma she experiences. Similarly, during her second quest, Ofelia leaves her cold, dark blue room, and makes a door into the large hall that leads to the Pale Man with a piece of chalk. As soon as she opens the door, the glow of her mythical world shines through and she steps into a brightly lit hall with golden decorations. In the banquet hall, the colors are shimmering shades of red and orange. The food is in bright, appetizing colors. In contrast, the pile of children’s shoes from the Pale Man’s past victims is a dark shade of gray and blue. Once again, while in the adult world her fears would immobilize her, but here they urge her to think quicker and take action. For example, normally if Captain Vidal questions her, she would freeze and stammer retreating in fear. However, when she wakes up the Pale Man by eating a grape, Ofelia runs and acts quickly to make another door and barely escapes him. Even though she was extremely frightened, she acts through the traumatic event, working her way through the trauma. The war is then portrayed, through colors and coping, in the division between child and adult and how they manage it differently.

There are other distinctions between the two worlds Ofelia inhabits, but as the film progresses the distinctions between fantasy and reality begin to blend (Pheasant-Kelly 103). This happens in instances like Carmen’s childbirth and her close miscarriage (Pheasant-Kelly 109). This is also the case when Vidal, Ofelia and Pan are in the labyrinth, but Vidal cannot see Pan, because Ofelia drugged his drink (Orme 228). Further, Ofelia...
draws a door with chalk to escape her locked room in order to leave with her brother and complete her third task. Ofelia actually leaves her room, implying that her alternative world is as real, if not more real, than her adult world.

*El laberinto del fauno* really captures the horrors of war and the traumatizing effect it has. This film tells the narrative from the perspective of the resistance fighters in the mountains, exploring their narrative and the way they had to deal with poverty, lack of nourishment, and torture. While the film still centers around the war, it is the only film in this study in which the victims celebrate a small victory in killing their oppressor. It also clearly portrays the horrors families experience during civil wars because it is a fight between brothers and families. In this film, Ofelia's family breaks down until the only one remaining is her infant half-brother. Her father died in the war, her mother died during childbirth, and she was murdered by her stepfather.

In the film, storytelling is liberating, as it is in trauma (Clark and McDonald 59). We must continue to tell the story of the war in order to free ourselves from the trauma that surrounds it. In other words, the narrative of the Spanish Civil War must continue to be told in order for Spain to heal and make amends with their past.

**Postmemory & Collective Memory**

*Pan’s Labyrinth* is then as a whole considered postmemory and collective memory. As postmemory, it makes the story of the victims available to the generations that come after, in this case, the third generation that has questions. It is a link for them to have a piece of their past readily accessible to them, so that they may rectify and relive the memory to honor those who died at the hands of the Nationalists or of the Francoist dictatorship.

The film is a site of memory in that it contains rich layers of fairytales, mythology, cultural films, and a reference to World War Two (Pheasant-Kelly 105). The film begins like a traditional fairy tale, in which the narrator begins with “Once upon a time,” or “A long time ago.” The fairytale techniques extend to zoom in on a book when, for example, it tells the story of the toad that lives under the tree (Kotecki 236). The same is done in the beginning of Disney’s adaptation of *Beauty and the Beast* when the narrator tells the story of how the prince becomes a beast (1991). The book technique emphasizes that they are telling a story. The film also makes reference to other children’s tales, for example, *The Wizard of Oz* (Kotenczi 245). In *The Wizard of Oz*, the young protagonist leaves her plain and colorless world for a fantastical, colorful, and dangerous one (Clark and McDonald 60). Ofelia, in *Pan’s Labyrinth*, lives through the same events. She is the Princess Moanna who leaves a colorless and dark world with peace to see the blue skies of the human world, but also to face the harsh winds and the pain and suffering. Similarly, both Ofelia and Dorothy must complete a set number of tasks or quests before reaching their destinations, which for Dorothy means fighting the Wicked Witch and meeting the Wizard to head back home to Kansas (Clark and McDonald 60). For Ofelia, she must go through three quests in order to be reunited with her parents in the underworld, which for her is home. The familiarity of these techniques make it easier for the audience to connect to the film regardless of nationality.

Additionally, the intertextuality extends beyond fairy tales and into Greek mythology with the Pale Man and with the spirit of Pan. The Pale Man makes reference to the myth of Kronos, a Greek deity who ate his children in fear that they would overpower him (Ribeiro de Menezes 94). The spirit of Pan is portrayed in the beginning when Ofelia asks him who he is. He says that he is the earth, the wind, and he is everywhere. At the end of the film, Ofelia adopts his spirit when the narrator states that she has left traces of her time on earth, visible to those who know how and where to look. The Pale Man is the representation of Captain Vidal in the mythical world. They can be compared during the dinner in which Vidal sits at the head of the table and in the second quest in which the Pale Man also sits at the head of the table (Pheasant-Kelly 109). Adding Greek mythology, again, makes the story more accessible and the trauma easier to understand for everyone.

Last but not least, the pile of shoes in the Pale Man’s lair makes reference to images of shoes and clothes piled outside of the Nazi concentration camps during World War II (Ribeiro de Menezes 94; Kotecki 245). The horror is emphasized in that the owners of the children's shoes are absent, and in the hall there are grotesque images of the Pale Man eating children (Pheasant-Kelly 109; Bergero 636). This portrays the incomprehensible horrors of the Spanish Civil War and pairs it with the Holocaust; a horror of the past that we still cannot understand.

In the end, as cinematographer Guillermo Navarro puts it, the film is “a strong stand against fascism, things that should not be repeated ever. It’s an homage to mankind” (Tarradell). The film tells the story of war from a child’s perspective (Clark and McDonald 57). Unlike the other films in this study, where the war is the backdrop, Ofelia is, unfortunately, a participant in it (Bergero 638). Her death, sacrificing herself for her brother and standing against fascism, sends the message of ending the cycle of violence to the viewer (Looney 11).

**Los girasoles ciegos**

The film, *Los girasoles ciegos*, is set in Ourense, Spain in the year 1940, after the end of the Spanish Civil War. Elena lives with her husband Ricardo and is the mother of two children, Lorenzo and Elena. Elena's husband lives in hiding, in a hole in the wall behind a wardrobe. The authorities are searching for Ricardo because of his political ideas.

Salvador, a misguided deacon, returns to the seminary in Ourense after having served on the Nationalist side in the Spanish Civil War. He begins work as an instructor in a school and becomes Lorenzo’s teacher. Elena takes her son to school every day, and Salvador grows curious with her and her son. He asks Lorenzo about his mother and the boy tells him that his father died in the war. Salvador, thinking that Elena is a widow, becomes infatuated with her. The deacon reaches out to old contacts in the military and learns that Elena, among other secrets, has a daughter who ran away with a communist.

One afternoon, Salvador visits Elena in his military uniform having abandoned the seminary. He tries to take advantage of Elena and make her his but is surprised by Ricardo who fights him off and by Lorenzo. In a frantic state, Salvador yells out to the police warning them that there is a “red” or a communist in the home. Elena is unable to stop him and Ricardo, having suffered enough, commits suicide by jumping out the window. Elena sobbs uncontrollably as Lorenzo tries to comfort her.

**Silence**

Looking only at the film adaptation of *Los girasoles ciegos*, the theme of silence.
engulfs most of Lorenzo's life, particularly at school. The young boy cannot mention his father's or his sister's existence in order to protect them. When Salvador, his school teacher, asks Lorenzo about his father, he tells him that his father died. Salvador infers that it was during the war to which the boy replies that his mother does not like to talk about it. The deacon also asks Lorenzo if he has any siblings, and Lorenzo replies that he is the only child, the truth being that he has an older sister, Elenita. In the beginning of the film, Elenita leaves the city to head to Portugal with her boyfriend. He is a poet who is wanted for his 'red' or communist ideas. Silence is a tool used by Lorenzo so as not to bring attention to himself or to his family.

Additionally, Lorenzo uses silence as a peaceful form of resistance to the Regime. One morning, during the singing of the Nationalist anthem “Cara al sol,” Lorenzo is caught by the head priest physically mumbling the lyrics but not actually singing them. Lorenzo is silencing the Nationalist victory by not recognizing it as a victory since he witnesses daily what the 'victory' has done to his father. Since Lorenzo does not explain his actions to the priest who catches him, his mother intervenes and makes up reasons for her son's disobedience (Ryan 451). Salvador intervenes and brings up the issue with Elena and tells her that there must be a reason why Lorenzo is not very patriotic.

Elena lives with silence the same way Lorenzo does. She pretends to be mourning the death of her husband and claims to only have one son. She delivers works translated into German by her husband, Ricardo, but must take credit for the work because he cannot. When Salvador asks her about her husband, she adds to Lorenzo's lie, stating that he was killed by 'reds.' The mother, aside from her denial of her husband's existence outside of her home, in one instance, must also deny him within her home. One late night, Elena wakes to her son telling her that he heard someone outside. Ricardo quickly hides in the hole behind the wardrobe while the young boy goes back to bed and hides under his covers. Three policemen arrive and greet Elenita letting the viewer know they have been there before, searching for Ricardo. Elena reluctantly lets them in and two, dressed in suits, begin to search the home. The third, dressed in uniform, questions Elena on her knowledge of her husband's whereabouts. She remains silent, not saying a word and not showing a hint of emotion. Like Lorenzo, she uses silence to fight against supporters of the Regime. The officer then asks about the daughter, and after a moment of silence he tells Elena that she ran away with a communist. He assures her that they will find the young couple, but Elena remains silent. The officers leave but their intrusion leaves her shaky and feeling that the silence that hung around her outdoors has now leaked into her home.

Lalo, Elenita's boyfriend, experiences a deep and troubling silence after Elenita's and the baby's deaths. He has no one to tell his troubles too. The only sound that fills the air is his sobs. The silence is intensified in the book version of Los girasoles ciegos. Lalo writes in a notebook so that he may have a form of speech, a way to break the silence, because there is no one else to hold a conversation with and he never learned how to speak to himself (Mendez). Later, silence is synonymous with death. When his son dies, he writes “He learned from his mother how to die without any fuss, and this morning simply did not respond to my words of encouragement” (Mendez). The failure of the young infant to respond to his father meant that he no longer had life. The child died silently, using silence as a form of resignation.

Last but not least, silence is evident in the film when Ricardo finds out, through the local newspaper, that Lalo has been shot carrying a deceased infant. The absence of Elenita in the news story lets Ricardo know that she did not survive either. The news coverage of Lalo's death does not mention Elenita making silence her final narrative. The only form in which she is given a voice is through the film itself, making her story known to others. Ricardo keeps this family tragedy to himself and does not tell Elena when she comes home.

The silence that surrounds the family becomes harder to maintain as Salvador's curiosity and lust for Elena grows, leading to tragic consequences. Salvador, noticing Lorenzo's quiet, unpatriotic, and occasionally absent-minded behavior, asks an old military contact about Elena. He finds out that her husband was a literature professor and that Elena has a daughter who recently left town with her "red" boyfriend. Furthermore, neither of Elena's children are baptized. This only creates more complications for Elena as she struggles to keep Salvador from suspecting her husband's existence. Eventually, Ricardo breaks the silence that surrounds him, no longer able to stand it, and commits suicide.

**Trauma**

Lorenzo experiences trauma in the absence of his living father, due to the war. He cannot have a 'normal' childhood. Alison Ribeiro de Menezes notes, "Lorenzo's father hides in a wardrobe with a mirrored door, and for Lorenzo, this symbolizes the divided world that he lives in- divided ... into secrecy of home and the public context where life is a façade and he has to deny his father's existence. This denial of the father is itself traumatic for Lorenzo" (97). The impact of his father's absence is portrayed throughout the film. For example, Lorenzo tells his father that he and the boys are going to go down to the river, because summer is here and they want to swim. Because Lorenzo cannot swim, he adds, “Paquito's father taught him how to swim... Wouldn't you like to go? When will you be able to go?” Lorenzo's childhood suffers because of a war between adults, reminding the adult viewer that their actions impact his or her life and also that of the younger generations. His father cannot step out of the apartment to teach his son how to swim. This runs through Ricardo's mind because he pauses to reflect. The child then tells his mother, “You know, Paquito said that we never invite him to come to our house.” The mother gives the father a long accusing look, and eventually Lorenzo is allowed to invite his friends for an afternoon while his father sits in the hole in the wardrobe. Thus, while the father's absence from Lorenzo's life is supposedly a lie, there is truth in it and this causes a traumatic childhood experience for the young boy.

Trauma is also present in the way deacon Salvador continues to bother Lorenzo. He is constantly pointing him out and asking him questions. This results in the boy telling his parents that he no longer wants to go to school because he is not comfortable there. His interactions with Salvador cause him great discomfort. This causes the parents to worry. The name ‘Salvador' means 'savior,' which is ironic. Salvador firmly believes he is saving the family. He makes himself believe that he is doing them good and should continue to help them. In reality, he only brings destruction. He reflects the ideology of the Francoist Regime, in that it claimed to be saving Spain but was really destroying its people.

The child protagonist copes with trauma...
by spending quality time with his father and by simulating a “normal” boy life. His father cannot teach him to swim but instead teaches him how to read and do math. This gives his life a bit of balance because he can acknowledge his father’s presence for a time and the rest of the time pretend he does not exist. He attends school like a regular student, pretends to be an only child, and pretends to sing along to the anthem in the mornings. He lives in an environment where his father exists and in one where he does not. Both environments begin with a fine line dividing them. As the film continues, instances such as the police officer in the home and the visiting children blur the line between both worlds. The home is a place where the father is present, but in those instances his presence is denied in a universe where he is supposed to exist. This tilts the film towards the world where Ricardo is absent, and in the end Lorenzo only has a world without his father.

Lorenzo’s and Elena’s witness of Ricardo’s suicide is another example of trauma in the film. Caruth explains that traumatic memory resurfaces constantly, and its resurgence serves to “bear witness to a past that was never fully experienced as it occurred” (151). Elena and Lorenzo could not fully capture the significance of seeing Ricardo throw himself to his death. In the film, as they witness the suicide, Elena falls to the ground, sobbing, and repeating “no,” as if in denial or disbelief of what is occurring. Lorenzo, startled by his mother’s cries, does not cry in the moment. Instead, slightly unaware of the situation, he kneels down beside his mother and tries to console her. Lorenzo was really young at the time of the incident but managed to own the traumatic experience as shown by spending quality time with his father and by simulating a “normal” boy life. His father cannot teach him to swim but instead teaches him how to read and do math. This gives his life a bit of balance because he can acknowledge his father’s presence for a time and the rest of the time pretend he does not exist. He attends school like a regular student, pretends to be an only child, and pretends to sing along to the anthem in the mornings. He lives in an environment where his father exists and in one where he does not. Both environments begin with a fine line dividing them. As the film continues, instances such as the police officer in the home and the visiting children blur the line between both worlds. The home is a place where the father is present, but in those instances his presence is denied in a universe where he is supposed to exist. This tilts the film towards the world where Ricardo is absent, and in the end Lorenzo only has a world without his father.

Lalo’s example of trauma and his inability to cope with it shows the severity of oppressing and forcing silence upon a person who has lived through a traumatic event. If we apply this example to the millions affected, silenced and traumatized by the Spanish Civil War, then we amplify the severity. This is why Spanish Civil War films are of great significance to the victims of the regime and to the Spanish society as a whole. They need to heal from the war that has owned them for so long. It is also important that film directors continue to make more films on the Spanish Civil War so that the narrative can be owned completely and the trauma can heal.

An example of collective memory is the references to World War Two in the film. In sequence, in which Elena drops off translated texts, in the background there is a military officer with a red band on his shoulder and the image of the Nazi swastika. When the man returns, he makes a comment saying how the Germans have helped Spain a lot. This alludes to the title in that the man, like many Spaniards at the time, is like a blind sunflower, not clearly seeing the situation (Ribeiro de Menezes 100). In addition, Ricardo lives in hiding, in a whole in the wall, for his ideas. This makes reference to the story of Anne Frank, a young Jewish girl who also lived in hiding during part of the Holocaust. The references to WWII serve to help the viewer familiarize themselves with the time period and associate post-war Spain with the horrors that happened under fascist leader Adolf Hitler. It also helps make the search for justice a more global cause rather than limiting it to Spain.

This film creates a link from the powerful narrative it tells to the national memory of Spain and for Spain’s current and future generations. This film is a darker narrative, but an equally true one as the narratives in the other films have also been. It offers the audience a darker perspective really embodying the horrors of the Spanish Civil War and its aftermath.

Postmemory and Collective Memory

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Conclusion

In brief, the films Pájaros de papel, El laberinto del fauno, Los girasoles ciegos and El viaje de Carol break the Pact of Silence that oppressed the victims of the Spanish Civil War for many decades. Finally, they share their story of trauma and of the horrors that were not investigated in Spain’s transition to democracy. By sharing the narrative, they continue the healing process for Spain, encouraging other film makers, writers, scholars, and storytellers in general, to do the same. The films as a whole also help Spaniards access their past in a way they could not before because of the lack of narratives. These films are memory sites, filled with narratives of the war, now readily available to the public. Through these films, the audiences create a living connection to the war, making the experience a part of themselves. It is our responsibility, then, to continue to share these stories for the future of Spain and for the victims, the lingering ghosts, of the unjustified horrors of the war and the Francoist dictatorship.
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