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Confronting Silence and Memory in Contemporary Spain: The Grandchildren's Perspective

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The choice that we have is not between remembering
and forgetting; because forgetting can't be done by an
act of the will, it is not something we can choose to do.
The choice is between different ways of remembering.
Tzvetan Todorov¹

The relationship between memory and history in contemporary Spain remains controversial. In spite of the current obsession with memory, materialized both in cultural production and in media debates over whether to acknowledge or forget the past, the lack of a political consensus on the issue points towards a 'memory crisis'.² Seventy-five years after the end of the Spanish Civil War, and nearly 40 years after Franco's death, Spain has not fully resolved the fratricidal conflict that started in 1936, or successfully dealt with its violent traumatic past. Throughout most of the 20th century, the conflict has been remembered – or disremembered – in a very different manner in each historical period, depending on the political needs of the time. This, in turn, has influenced the collective memory and the construction of a national identity based on a division between the 'victors' (Nationalists) and the 'defeated' (Republicans) created by Francoist discourse. After Franco's death, the promulgation of the 1977 Amnesty Law and the symbolic 'pact of oblivion' negotiated in the transition period postponed the settling of scores for war and post-war crimes, prolonging an indefinite silence for the 'defeated'. However, democracy – with its consequent freedom of speech – gave rise to a fruitful cultural production that problematized Spain's relationship with its past, initiating a remarkable transformation of its collective national memory. This was given legislative effect, however, only in 2007 with the so-called 'Law of Historical

Memory'. Despite constituting an important step in addressing the country's conflicted past, and providing additional financial support to the victims, the law has been criticized for privatizing memory and failing to provide an official apology to the victims of Francoist crimes.³

The enduring impact of the Civil War on Spanish society and politics is evidenced by the differing reactions and interpretations of three generations of Spaniards. In post-Franco Spain, the memory of the Civil War and the consequent repressive dictatorship has been treated as a collective traumatic experience.⁴ Several scholars have emphasized how the analysis of different generational memories is crucial in obtaining a diversity of perspectives on a conflicted past that can contribute to the creation of a more representative and inclusive collective memory. Paloma Aguilar, for instance, notes that the 'generational effect' is strongly related to the study of collective memory because it is useful to trace the development of a country's collective memory as new generations come to power.⁵ Julio Aróstegui observes that the evolution of the generational memory of the conflict has not always coincided with the new interpretations provided by historiography.⁶ Insisting on the plurality and dynamic nature of memory, Aróstegui emphasizes its unstable and protean qualities.⁷ Consequently, public manifestations of memory are heterogeneous, fragmented and often contested. In some cases, as is exemplified by the protagonists in the films analyzed in this essay, an incompatibility arises between individual memories and the collective memory of the war. In this sense, it is important to examine the differences between 'autobiographical memory' and 'transmitted or inherited memory'. Over time, as Aguilar suggests, those who lived through the war had the opportunity to compare and complement their personal experience of this event with that of other individuals, as well as the official historical narrative and that provided by novels and films. This generation had – and still has – the opportunity to learn from history. Aróstegui terms the memory of this generation – the only one based on personal experience – the memory of *identification* or *confrontation*, according to which side they supported.⁸

In contrast, those who do not have a direct experience of the war possess a memory transmitted by multiple sources, one that cannot be contrasted with personal recollections of the event. The first version of the war learnt by this generation is the one conveyed at home, as Jesús Izquierdo and Pablo Sánchez observe: 'it is not the war that happened in 1936, it is the war that our families explained to us.'⁹ Yet, such were the psychological repercussions of the Civil War that the generations who did not experience the conflict were also deeply affected.¹⁰ The war had a

two-fold negative impact on their lives as they experienced – and transmitted – the inherited trauma of the war, as well as their own trauma of the post-war era. As a result, Aguilar concludes, the post-war generation did not draw the same conclusions about the conflict as those who actually fought in it.¹¹

The silence of this second generation, Jo Labanyi suggests, is more difficult to examine due to the lack of testimonial documentation.¹² Santos Julià, nevertheless, has claimed that the children of both victors and defeated rebelled against their parents by rejecting the memory imposed by the victors as a fraud.¹³ A major challenge faced by this generation, he argues, was the impossibility of replacing the victors' memory with an alternative collective memory, since the defeated parents, shattered and traumatized, were not permitted to transmit their own stories. Consequently, the war's children considered this chapter of history closed; although it had affected their parents, they sought to forget in order to move on or to pursue new paths to democracy. For this reason, Aróstegui classifies the memory of the second generation as the memory of *reconciliation*, indicating a desire to overcome collective trauma.¹⁴ However, the transition did not promote a genuine reconciliation as it did not embrace the memory of the defeated, provoking in turn a reaction in the following generation, which demanded a revisionist memory.

At the turn of the last century, a new social dimension of memory emerged, leading to what Aróstegui has termed the memory of *reparation* or *restitution*.¹⁵ Within the last two decades, the descendants of the executed, mainly the grandchildren, have assumed the responsibility of confronting the violent past experienced by their relatives. They sought to recover the experiences – and, in many cases, the burial sites – of relatives whose fate had been overlooked for decades. From these organisations demanding the recuperation of historical memory has emerged a movement to find and exhume the mass graves of the victims of the war and of Francoism. Scholars have emphasised the significance of the third generation's demands for the investigation of the Francoist repression, highlighting its impact on debates about Spain's past and its memory. Labanyi, for example, observes that this generation has re-established the process of generational transmission of memory disrupted during the dictatorship and the following 25 years of democracy.¹⁶ According to Julià, the generations born or raised in the era of democracy, who lack personal experiences and memory of the war or Franco's dictatorship, confront the past with a different gaze.¹⁷ They are more interested in finding out why their grandparents, on both sides,

were so 'bloodthirsty', why so many indiscriminate killings of civilians took place, and why society after the war was so repressive. As a result, their concerns are oriented more towards the consequences than the causes of the conflict and repression. The greater detachment of the grandchildren's generation from Spain's violent past might allow them to provide a more objective and critical assessment of these events, and to translate their predecessors' political trauma into more conciliatory cultural representations.

Representing generational memories on screen

In parallel with these demands for the re-examination of the past, a new trend of films has emerged to represent the third generation's concerns from a more reflective and enquiring perspective. Unencumbered by Francoist repression, the war's grandchildren have taken on the responsibility of representing the family stories of the silenced, narratives that remain essential to the construction of identity. Focusing on female-authored films, this essay explores how two contemporary filmmakers portray the differing approaches to memory characterized by the three generations. On the one hand, the melodrama, *Para que no me olvides/ Something to Remember Me By* (Patricia Ferreira, 2004), portrays the influential pull of Spain's traumatic past on the lives of three generations of Spaniards. On the other hand, the documentary, *Nadar/Swimming* (Carla Subirana, 2008), depicts the inquisitive attitude of a grandchild pursuing the silenced story of her executed grandfather.¹⁸

Both directors articulated their preoccupation with the reconstruction of Spain's collective memory, evident in their film narratives, in the interviews that I conducted with them.¹⁹ Although Ferreira has not declared a personal connection with the film's storyline, she acknowledges her responsibility as an artist to 'to stand up against a situation that I consider totally unfair'.²⁰ Subirana, in contrast, demonstrates a very personal standpoint in recounting her family story within the context of Spain's divided past: 'In order to place ourselves in the present we need to know what happened in the past. It is necessary as a country to heal, to close wounds, but I have the feeling that in this country the Civil War is still an open wound, isn't it?'²¹ My essay argues that both directors' representations of the past can be seen as interventions aimed at constructing a memory of reparation and which propose effective means of reconciliation in order to heal contemporary Spain's open wound.

The directors' divergent choices in terms of genre facilitate their original ways of confronting a troubled past. Ferreira has chosen melodrama

for her project. Isolina Ballesteros points out the advantages of using this genre to represent the complexities of memory, arguing that 'Ferreira's melodramatic mode provides a means through which individual memory can become official history, as well as a potential therapeutic model for dealing with the trauma that generates collective empathy and affective identification.'²² The story centres on a tri-generational family drama that addresses the hardship of losing a loved one. Early in the film, David (Roger Coma), a young architecture student, dies in a bike accident shortly after moving in with his girlfriend Clara (Marta Etura) against the will of her mother Irene (Emma Vilarasau). This tragedy has a huge impact on both women, as well as on David's grandfather, Mateo (Fernando Fernán Gómez). With one another's help, the three bereaved characters develop strategies to deal with David's death, a process symbolizing the divergent generational attitudes to the memory of Spain's traumatic past. Under the guise of a domestic family drama, the plot enables Ferreira to develop an allegorical reading of the memory of the defeated.

In the case of Subirana, her experimental film project portrays her own journey of discovery about her grandfather's execution in Barcelona in 1940. Straddling documentary and fiction-film, this young filmmaker's directorial debut reveals the challenges of tracing the experiences of war survivors so many years later. Except for the details of his death and his name, Joan Arroniz, Subirana lacks any other substantive information about her grandfather when she begins her quest. Her grandmother, Leonor, who had never previously talked about him, has now become unable to do so due to Alzheimer's disease. Subirana decides to undertake and document her own investigation through archival research and interviews with family members, historians and war survivors. Towards the conclusion, the focus of the film switches to her relationship with her mother, Ana, who, after Leonor's death, is also diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. As Laia Quilez points out, *Nadar* recuperates the past from a post-memorialist perspective, allowing Subirana to present a gaze that is dissociated from traumatic memories and, therefore, capable of combining autobiographical with politically critical elements.²³

Both films capture the curiosity, as well as the imperative, that has driven the efforts of the war's grandchildren to re-examine the past in order to better understand their own identity and place within Spain's broader collective memory. They highlight the obstacles faced by their respective protagonists in trying to fill gaps in the official historical memory, but also in personal and family memories. Each film explores the role of the transgenerational transmission of memory in the

construction of national and personal identity. By contrasting these two family portraits, this essay seeks to foreground the perspective of the grandchildren in endeavouring to restore their repressed family histories. Both directors, it is argued here, represent the past in metaphorical ways in order to provoke a wider reconsideration of its impact.

Reconciling trauma and memory in *Para que no me olvides*

After briefly introducing the three family members, apparently living together harmoniously, David's sudden death is presented as a traumatic experience, one which functions as a metaphor for the Civil War. The differing responses of each character to this tragic event – that is, conscious reminiscing by Mateo, obsessive remembering by Clara and deliberate forgetting by Irene – provides an analogy for 20th-century Spain's politics of memory. In particular, the complex reactions of the two female protagonists become the focus of the narrative. In order to move on, Irene endeavours to forget her son by getting rid of any photograph or object that triggers the slightest recollection of him, aiming at oblivion. Irene's character represents the memory of the children's generation, born and raised in Franco's regime. Much as in Julià's characterization of this generation, Irene is depicted as rejecting her father's memory as she generally fails to pay attention to his war and childhood stories, and is sarcastic about aspects of that harsh historical period. Her attempts to blank out the death of her son mirror the silencing process instigated during the post-Franco transition era. Irene's efforts to erase the memory of David conflict with Mateo's attitude to death, for which she reproaches him: 'I am not like you. I need to forget to continue with my life. If David is gone, I want it to be forever.' But just as the attempt to neglect Spain's traumatic past at a collective level was unsuccessful, Irene's determination to 'disremember' her son fails to resolve her feelings of loss, or her guilt for having argued with him prior to his death. Irene exemplifies Todorov's argument about the impossibility of forgetting through an act of will. However, through the character of Clara – who tries to commit suicide – the film also warns that obsessive remembering does not resolve trauma.²⁴ Clara's plight, representing how excessive remembrance can reopen old wounds, can be seen as a critical commentary on the contemporary surfeit of repetitive memory which appears neither to disclose new information about the past, nor aim at reconciliation.

The character of Mateo, a first-hand witness to the war and the dictatorship, is seen to represent a more effective middle way between the

extremes of remembrance and oblivion. After losing his parents and other relatives in the war, Mateo has chosen to keep alive their memory by imagining conversations with them. It might be noted that the approach taken by Ferreira in this representation of the first generation's memory is unusual. Mateo's reaction to remembering the past differs strongly from the prevailing attitude of his peers who – largely through necessity of circumstances – opted for silence. Ferreira's creative – even idiosyncratic – approaches to commemorating the past emphasize the important role of memory in learning to live with trauma. Throughout the film Mateo helps both women to understand the importance of dignifying the memory of loved ones and accepting their deaths.

Having experienced her son's tragic death, Irene finds herself able to empathize with her father's lifelong suffering, finally understanding his motives for constantly remembering his own family. The ensuing reconciliation between father and daughter is the film's most poignant and – at the same time – critical scene. It not only depicts a reconciliation between two generations which differ in their methods of dealing with the trauma of the past, it provides Ferreira's critique of Spain's politics of memory. Mateo's explicit political vindication of the need for a collective memory of the defeated is seen to justify his strategy of keeping alive the memory of the dead: 'I knew that I had to remember everything until they return the honor to all the nameless dead that that merciless regime swept away.' This vindication also emphasizes the discordance – observed by Aróstegui – between individual memories and the collective memory which, Aguilar suggests, can impede political stability if sufficiently extreme.²⁵ Cruz similarly observes how Mateo's misfortune stems from the discordance between his own personal memory and the official memory of Spanish society.²⁶ Ferreira's film culminates with Mateo's frustrated outburst, which sees him lament the absence of an official apology to the victims of the war and the dictatorship, the decline of the last remaining eyewitnesses, and the ignorance of the younger generations:

But as days go by I realize that they will never ask for our forgiveness, that they will never put up the names of the dead in some prominent place for all to see, as they did over 60 years ago with the names of those who died for God and Spain. Young people should know. (Figure 3.1)

Through the characters of Clara and David, Ferreira addresses the relevance of the past to the younger generations. While David reveals a strong interest in Spanish history, particularly his grandfather's war stories, Clara attributes her lack of historical knowledge to the fact that



Figure 3.1 Trauma and generational memory in *Para que no me olvides/Something to Remember Me By* (Patricia Ferreira, 2004)

Source: Image courtesy of Tornasal Films.

the war was not spoken of at home, suggesting also that she did not learn about the conflict at school. Following David's death, Mateo finds among his papers several notebooks which David had begun secretly to transcribe when he realized that his aging grandfather's memory was starting to fail. The transmission of Mateo's oral recollections into a material object serves the purpose of preserving his memory for future generations. David's writings become the vehicle for Mateo's memory, which also allows for its incorporation into the broader collective memory of the Civil War. Ironically, after David's death, these roles are reversed. Mateo transcribes his grandchild's story to give to Clara, who needs to know more about her boyfriend, an act which serves also to preserve David's memory.

Towards the end of the film, both women become involved in an investigation initiated secretly by David into the potential historical significance of an old building destined for demolition. Although David does not directly research the war, the parallel between his motives and the revisionist movement's efforts to examine Spain's recent past is clear. David, therefore, embodies the minority – mainly the grandchildren of

the defeated – who have assumed the responsibility of reconstructing their country's historical memory. The property, it transpires, is Mateo's childhood home, which he was forced to leave due to the war when he was 15. David had hoped to show his grandfather the place that he continued to remember nostalgically at the end of his life. Described by Igor Barrenetxea as a 'posthumous homage from a grandchild to a grandfather',²⁷ this gesture provides Mateo with a memory of *reparation*, a symbolic reconciliation acknowledging that Mateo's long remembrance has not been in vain. This discovery brings the three protagonists closer together and their mutual support becomes crucial in enduring David's absence and preserving his memory. Overcoming the trauma of the Civil War, the film suggests, requires both time and collective effort.

The film's ending conveys the importance of generational memory for identity formation, illustrating Labanyi's argument that the generational transmission of memory is dependent on a belief in some kind of collective identity.²⁸ When Mateo is taken by Irene and Clara to visit his childhood house, he finds one of his old books, *Treasure Island*,²⁹ inscribed with a dedication from his father: 'From your father, for you to pass on to your children and they to your grandchildren.' Mateo's father passed on the value of literature to his children, which Mateo bequeathed to David. However, the generational transmission of familial beliefs and memory in this film appears both to skip a generation, and to occur within gendered parameters: from grandfather to grandson. As a result, the male protagonists are not only represented as the bearers of knowledge about the past, but also as its transmitters (both writing each other's memoirs). Jaqueline Cruz's feminist reading of the film highlights the exclusivist role of male agency in this respect.³⁰ According to Cruz, the male characters adhere to the sexist tradition in cinema denounced by Laura Mulvey in which the male protagonist plays the active role that allows the story to progress. The film's emphasis on male agency results in a dual discriminatory effect as its narrative revolves around the male characters' actions (David's death, David's investigation, Mateo's war stories), while also perpetuating the stereotype that men are responsible for making – and writing – history. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the story is successfully resolved by the two female characters, who locate Mateo's house, providing him with an "architectural space of memory", from which the recovery of familial and collective trauma can be initiated'.³¹ In addition, the stereotypical enmity between girlfriend and boyfriend's mother gives way

to a friendship that enables the resolution of the story with a credible happy ending.

***Nadar*: politicizing personal portrayals of silence and amnesia**

The relationship between silence, remembrance and oblivion in *Nadar* reflects the complexities of Subirana's attempt both to retrieve and to represent a combination of individual, family and historical memories. The director's autobiographical approach to memory, which combines the personal with the political, transcends that of the individual, portraying the experience of several generations to explore the troubled past. The progressive loss of her grandmother's memory, just as Subirana is seeking to challenge Spain's collective amnesia through her quest for the phantasmagorical figure of her grandfather, constitutes a powerful metaphor. As Ryan Prout observes: 'Subirana's act of de-personalizing the illness and of reading it across a social history is in itself a political gesture'.³²

Nadar not only depicts how the struggle against time impedes the collection of first-hand testimony about the Civil War and the early post-war era, it also portrays the inability of victims to articulate their traumatic memories. The scarcity of information conveyed by family members, the refusal of other war survivors to testify and the dearth of information in official records provide the central challenges to surmount both in Subirana's research and in the making of her film. The outcome is an eight-year project in which the director's present and past converge. Initially conceived as a fiction film, the script was modified from its original idea, in particular by the incorporation of subsequent events in her life (including the illnesses affecting Leonor and Ana, and the birth of her first son). A key figure in Subirana's journey is cineaste Joaquim Jordà, who acts as her mentor, advising on the script in various conversations which have been included in the film.

Contrary to Subirana's expectations, a copy of the summary trial reveals that Joan Arroniz, whose war-time activities form the subject of considerable mystery, was found guilty of three armed robberies. Later she discovers that, following the Civil War, he was part of a band of anti-Franco leftists who, it is believed, used the proceeds of their robberies to help the needy. Arroniz's criminal past is recreated in film-noir-like fiction scenes, in which Subirana fantasizes romantic scenarios involving her grandparents. Half-way through the film, Subirana learns that her

grandparents never married, although they had intended to do so. To her surprise, Subirana comes across documents revealing that Arroniz's wife – who was not her grandmother – claimed a widow's pension for herself and her child. Perceiving that she forms part of Arroniz's clandestine family, Subirana's investigation takes on a new dimension. As her mentor Jordà insists, she needs to find this family in order to complete her own family history. However, after extensive archival research and numerous interviews, Subirana realizes that it is too late to compensate for her grandfather's absence. The director's personal approach results in an innovative film, which intersperses domestic videos of her mother and grandmother, fictional black-and-white sequences and stylized images of herself reflected in a swimming-pool. Posing new questions rather than resolving longstanding concerns, *Nadar* allows the viewers to contemplate the importance of knowledge of the past and their own family background.

The approaches to memory taken by the protagonists in this film are determined both by the female gender of these three generations and their respective historical contexts. The film reveals how aspects of female identity impart a particularity to the experiences of 'forgetting' that, in other works, are assumed to be the same for men as for women. It also portrays how the traumatic experience of the war, and the silence imposed during the dictatorship, affected the first two generations of women, and prompted, in turn, confusion and frustration for the third generation raised during the democracy. The question of transgenerational transmission, therefore, is shown to be more problematic in *Nadar* than in *Para que no me olvides*, since the intergenerational dialogue about the past that takes place between Mateo and David is impossible between Leonor and Subirana. Certainly, Leonor's personal circumstances, together with her gendered experiences during a particularly repressive period for women, play a crucial role in her decision not to transmit her story to future generations.

Leonor's strategy of silence was presumably motivated by several factors, including her generational experience of the trauma of the war, as well as the gendered experience of unwed motherhood in a conservative era.³³ However, the principal reason for Leonor's silence was probably her partner's left-wing inclinations, as Jordà observes in one scene: 'It was better being a single mother than the widow of an executed man.' As Luisa Passerini argues: 'Certain forms of oblivion point to a lack of identity or to an effort to cover up some of its components.'³⁴ In the early post-war years, a connection to anyone executed by Franco's regime was cause for stigmatization, imprisonment or even execution. In order

to protect herself and her child, Leonor did not reveal the identity of Ana's father, until Subirana's present-day curiosity leads her to break her silence. As Labanyi has noted, due to the length of the dictatorship, silence was a survival strategy that endured over several generations.³⁵ Consequently, Subirana is unable to obtain any information about Arroniz from her grandmother because she has been silent for too long, and from her mother because she never possessed such knowledge.

The secondary characters among the first generation in *Nadar* offer broader insights into war survivors' memories. The reluctance of both Leonor's younger sister, Herminia, and the historian, Abel Paz, to discuss issues from the past attests to the culture of silence and censorship imposed by the dictatorship. After Leonor dies, only Herminia – the sole survivor of four siblings – is in a position to provide more details about the family history. For Subirana, discovering this silenced part of her family history has become a pressing need, essential for reconstructing her own identity. As Todorov has noted: 'If we learn something about the past that forces us to reinterpret the image that we had of ourselves and of our own circle, we have to modify not just an isolated aspect of our selves, but our very identity.'³⁶ Herminia, however, repeatedly refuses to speak about the past, claiming that Leonor would not have wished it, a comment that prompts the director to respond in the voice-over: 'I hope that she understands that her sister's story is also *my story*.'³⁷ Although a certain detachment from our predecessors is necessary to understand who we are, as Vita Fortunati and Elena Lamberti point out, a certain continuity is also required.³⁸ Herminia's negative attitude to Subirana's project indicates the continuing fear of disclosing a family secret that has been suppressed for decades.

Similarly, Abel Paz, a former anarchist combatant in the Civil War and the author of numerous works on anarchist history, also refuses to answer Subirana's questions about political ideology. In order to complete her research, Subirana considers it essential to speak to someone who can explain Arroniz's outlook. Although Paz's appearance in the film does not contribute much to Subirana's investigation, his testimony illustrates the *desencanto* (disappointment) of old left-wing militants with the political system and with the position of the working class in Spain. Through this testimony, Fran Benavente suggests, *Nadar* claims the legacy of Joaquín Jordà's militant cinema, as 'the resistance by historian Abel Paz seems to be the "real" trace of a rupture against any attempt to devise a line of continuity or constitute a conscious legacy of a certain memory of activism.'³⁹ Paz's lack of straight answers, his annoyed facial expressions, his continuous silences and his aggressive

tone reveal his discontent with the country's socio-political development and extended conformism. He concludes the interview with a sceptical comment that denotes a strong feeling of frustration: 'I don't know anything at all, do you understand? Because everything I know it's like as if I didn't know.'

By filming *Nadar*, Subirana materializes her own memories of her grandmother, depicted in the domestic videos and, at a later stage, of her own mother as well. Ana's role in the documentary is not prominent until she is diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. From this moment, the progression of her illness is incorporated in the film. Replicating her mother's behavior, Ana has also not spoken about Subirana's own father as she was not able to replace the absence of her own father with any other memory (as Julià claims is often the case for the second generation). This silence, spanning two generations, can only be disrupted by Subirana. In their visit to the cemetery, Subirana is able to reconcile her mother's memory of her own father's ghost by providing her not only with a physical memorial, but a heroic one. Ana looks very impressed when she sees her father's name engraved on the war memorial, as Subirana observes with irony on the voice-over: 'That same day she decided that her father was a hero. A stone column forgotten at a cemetery was enough for her.' Ana's lack of inherited memory has been replaced by the memory of *restitution*.

The generational transmission of the past has been inverted: from daughter to mother. The process is also transgressive as it subverts the stereotype of history as a form of knowledge passed from men to other men. In the absence of reparation at a national level, the generation of grandchildren seeks to acknowledge their predecessors' past through individual homages, as David does by transcribing his grandfather's memories and locating his childhood home. Subirana's homage to her family memory is corroborated in her documentary by means of a meta-cinematic device. The final scene shows Subirana watching one of the fictional scenes of her own documentary at a cinema, as the director dedicates the film to her mother in the voice-over's final comment.

As both the research project and film have progressed, Arroniz has become increasingly distant from Subirana's family. Throughout the film he is represented as a shadow, the ghost that he always was for Leonor and Ana, playfully embodied in a faceless film-noir gangster inspired by Jean Paul Belmondo's character in *Breathless* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1960).⁴⁰ Near the conclusion, Subirana's visit to Arroniz's sister finally puts a face to the ghost when she receives an old black-and-white photograph. Subirana subsequently explains how, looking at this

photograph, she felt as if two separate historical moments had been brought into alignment to confront a ghost.⁴¹ In the film, the photograph (as is illustrated below) is observed within a storage box, as Subirana's voice-over exclaims: 'I have the feeling that he looks at me and tells me: how the hell have you arrived here?' (Figure 3.2)

As the documentary reveals, Subirana's project has been transformed into a journey of self-discovery, reinforcing and validating her identity as a member of a family of single mothers. In addition, the impossibility of the transgenerational transmission of a part of her family story has made her aware of the importance of recording her mother's and grandmother's past in order to pass it on to her own son.

Rather than offering answers about post-war Spain, *Nadar* poses many questions, which are often voiced as Subirana is swimming, as the title symbolically suggests. In general, the film depicts places associated with water as reflective spaces for the director, but this provides also an invitation for viewers to reflect on their own past, and to contemplate their own story. Subirana recounts the response of a 95-year-old man who, after fighting on the Nationalist side, went into exile in Mexico.⁴² He admitted to her, with tears in his eyes, that her film had moved him, causing him to reflect on his own years of silence when he suppressed his memories by concealing his own war stories from his children. His experience suggests that Subirana's film has the capacity not only to promote constructive debate about the past, but reconciliation on both sides.



Figure 3.2 'How the hell have you arrived here?'; *Nadar/Swimming* (Carla Subirana, 2008)

Source: Image courtesy of Carla Subirana.

Conclusion

This essay has presented an analysis of two films that problematize the fragility of memory, while emphasizing its protean nature across generations. Todorov's observations concerning the different ways of remembering the past, and the impossibility of conscious forgetting, are reflected in the diverse representations of attitudes towards memory in both films. As the number of war survivors diminishes, and their recollections become less accurate, the memory of the first generation is beginning to fade. In *Para que no me olvides*, this is suggested by Mateo's slight loss of memory in several scenes, whereas in *Nadar* the impact of Alzheimer's disease on the lives of Leonor and Ana assumes a central role. With aging, the ability to remember and transmit the past becomes no longer a matter of conscious choice, as in the case of Mateo and Leonor. Consequently, both films emphasize how a more complete and inclusive collective memory depends on the collection, preservation and dissemination of a wide range of first-hand testimonies.

The most original contribution made by both family portraits lies in their avoidance of a traumatic or nostalgic representation of the past by means of an intergenerational perspective that attempts to reconcile divergent generational memories. Both films eschew the victimization of their characters, aiming to vindicate the silenced memories of their predecessors at an individual as well as a collective level. *Para que no me olvides* focuses on Mateo's war and childhood experiences, stressing his determination to sustain the memory of his relatives until an official apology can be won. Mateo's memory of *confrontation* emphasizes how individual memories diverge from the official memory. Through the character of Irene, the film suggests that addressing the past remains necessary both in order to live in the present and to fashion a future. In this way, the film refutes the notion that a peaceful future is incompatible with remembrance of the violence of the past which underpins the transition era's pact of oblivion.

Nadar's narration of a silenced family story over three generations of women stresses the positive – but also precarious – aspects of being raised in a fatherless family. Instead of becoming the story of an executed left-wing anti-Franco fighter, the documentary's focus shifts to the resilience of strong and independent women who were forced by historical circumstances to remain silent. The film not only explores the beautiful relationship between the director, her mother and her grandmother, but also depicts gatherings with single mothers and divorced women. The consequent normalization and celebration of these representations of alternative family structures that challenge the Francoist

patriarchal model of family becomes Subirana's major contribution to the nation's collective memory.

Notes

1. Tzvetan Todorov, *Hope and Memory: Lessons from the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 311.
2. José F. Colmeiro, *Memoria histórica e identidad cultural. De la postguerra a la modernidad* (Barcelona: Anthropos Editorial, 2005), p. 13.
3. For details of this law, see <http://www.boe.es>, date accessed 14 April 2014.
4. Julio Aróstegui, 'Traumas colectivos y memorias generacionales' in Julio Aróstegui and François Godicheau (eds), *Guerra Civil: mito y memoria* (Madrid: Marcial Pons Historia, 2006), p. 58.
5. Paloma Aguilar, *Memoria y olvido de la guerra civil* (Madrid: Alianza, 1996), pp. 27–29.
6. Aróstegui, 'Traumas colectivos', p. 63.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 59.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 81.
9. Jesús Izquierdo Martín and Pablo Sánchez León, *La guerra que nos han contado. 1936 y nosotros* (Madrid: Alianza, 2006), p. 304. My translation.
10. Aguilar, *Memoria y olvido*, p. 30.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
12. Jo Labanyi, 'The Languages of Silence: Historical Memory, Generational Transmission and Witnessing in Contemporary Spain', *Journal of Romance Studies* 9 (2009), p. 25.
13. Santos Julià, 'Bajo el imperio de la memoria', *Revista de Occidente* 302–303 (2006), p. 13.
14. Aróstegui, *Traumas colectivos*, p. 82.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 89.
16. Labanyi, 'The Languages', p. 25.
17. Santos Julià, 'Echar al olvido: Memoria y amnistía de la transición', *Claves de Razón Práctica* 129 (2003), p. 23.
18. Other documentary-makers have also taken a personal or autobiographical approach to portray the memory of surviving eyewitnesses, including *Mujeres en pie de guerra* (Susana Koska, 2004), *Bucarest, la memoria perdida* (Albert Solé, 2008) and *Death In El Valle* (C. M. Hardt, 2005).
19. In 2012, I interviewed both directors as part of my PhD project during a research field trip funded by Flinders University (all translations in quotations that follow are my own).
20. Natalia Sanjuán Bornay, Interview with Patricia Ferreira, 25 July 2012.
21. Natalia Sanjuán Bornay, Interview with Carla Subirana, 21 June 2012.
22. Isolina Ballesteros, 'Feminine Spaces of Memory: Mourning and Melodrama in *Para que no me olvides* (2005) by Patricia Ferreira', in Parvati Nair and Julián Daniel Gutiérrez-Albilla (eds), *Hispanic and Lusophone Women Filmmakers: Theory, Practice and Difference*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), p. 43.
23. Laia Quílez Esteve, 'Memorias protésicas: Posmemoria y cine documental en la España contemporánea', *Historia y Comunicación Social* 18 (2013), p. 388.