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MEDIATIZING A PAST OF
CONFLICTThe Spanish Civil War through TV
documentaries in the twenty-first century¹*Enric Castelló*

During his time as a war correspondent in Spain, Ernest Hemingway (2007 [1938]) wrote a story, as short as it was devastating, entitled “Old Man at the Bridge.” With a dialogue and two descriptive brushstrokes, he masterfully captures the desolation of an inhabitant of Sant Carles de la Ràpita before the advance of the Nationalist troops to the Ebro. From the bridge, Hemingway uneasily surveys the African-like landscape of the delta, and wonders how long it will take the enemy to arrive. When he asks the old man which side he is on, the reply is neither, that he is seventy-six years old, has walked twelve miles, and can go no further. This character is now anchored to the bridge, despondent, and worried about the cat, four pairs of pigeons, and two goats left behind in his yard. The old man can be read as a metaphor for memory: he is too exhausted to continue, too terrified to turn back, teetering between the two banks of the present, which is advancing as relentlessly as the river.

The journalistic reports of the Spanish Civil War published by newspapers around the world have been widely used in its historical reconstruction. These chronicles of troop movements, descriptions of bombing and destruction, and statements by politicians represented the first narratives to mediatize the war. The story of the battle of the Ebro was especially widely disseminated, on account of the number of casualties and the spectacular nature of its military operations. Hemingway may already have suspected that the story of the war would remain alive in the memory of the Spanish people several generations later. The grandchildren and great-grandchildren of characters like the old man at the bridge would continue to question their elders about the tragedy: about where they were, what they saw, and what they felt.

The Spanish Civil War, like all the wars of the twentieth century, was mediatized from the beginning, and many of its chroniclers offered biased accounts, putting their expertise at the service of propaganda. Examples include documentary films such as *Reportaje del movimiento revolucionario en Barcelona* (Santos 1936) or *Heroic Spain* (Reig et al. 1938), which have been studied by various authors (e.g., Gubern 1986; Pingree 2007). For example, one of the first documentaries about the battle of the Ebro includes footage shot by Manuel Aznar (*La batalla del Ebro*, 1938) for one of those propaganda films.

The issue of using journalism and documentary film as an ideological tool was debated among these first narrators of the war. Paul Preston explains how the *New York Times* correspondent, Herbert L. Matthews, was concerned about the impartiality of his writing. Reporting from the Republican side, which he openly supported, Matthews always maintained that taking part in the war was not incompatible with explaining the truth in his chronicles. However, the reporter showed a somehow naïve confidence in history, if only journalists would stick to the following criterion: “History will never fail so long as the newspaperman writes the truth” (Matthew quoted in Preston 2008, 23).

The truth is that the victory of fascism in Spain led to the exile of leftist intellectuals, and the media became a tool of indoctrination at the service of the National Catholic ideology of Francisco Franco’s totalitarian regime. After nearly forty years of dictatorship without freedom of expression (1939–1975), the *Transición* (1975–1979) would bring Spain democracy, but, as many authors have pointed out, at the cost of accepting a sort of *pact of silence*. This is a controversial issue whose detailed analysis is beyond the scope of this chapter. However, Carme Molinero (2010, 35) summarizes this unwritten pact by arguing that: “Defenders of the Franco regime had agreed to accept democracy and the anti-Franco sectors ‘forgot’ forty years of dictatorship.” The pact was sealed with the Amnesty Act (1977), which served to prevent the investigation and trial of crimes committed during the Civil War and the dictatorship, even when petitioned by the UN (Junquera 2013a, 2013b). Thirty years later, the *Ley de Memoria Histórica* (2007), passed by the Socialist government of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero and criticized by the right-wing Popular Party, was a step forward in the recognition of the victims of Francoism, but it was unable to resolve problematic issues such as the exhumation of mass graves. The Francoist regime spent forty years honouring its fallen, but, aside from this gesture, Spanish democracy has failed to make equivalent reparations to the opposite side.

The present article deals with the television documentaries on the Spanish Civil War produced in the twenty-first century, particularly in the context of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the military uprising against the Republic in 1936. These documentaries have developed a function of visually resurrecting discourses and narratives, bringing into the public sphere the memories of many Spaniards who had chosen to remain silent, had had no previous opportunity to speak, or had never been asked to do so. Although it is inappropriate, in ontological terms, to speak of a “recovery” of memory – a concept that has been problematized elsewhere and implies a “reification” of memory (see, e.g., Castelló and O’Donnell 2006; Labanyi 2008) – it should be noted that some of these documentaries have been instrumental in stirring consciences and raising awareness of a troubled past that contemporary Spain is yet to come to terms with, however much institutional discourses insist on the story of “reconciliation.”

The collective past and the media

The relationship between the media and collective memory has been discussed by various authors within the framework of a multidisciplinary field of research that has adopted the label of “memory studies.” The concept of mediatization essentially refers to the idea that the media act as “agents of social change” (Hjarvard 2008) or as “moulding forces” (Hepp 2009) of society and culture. The mediatization of memory, according to Andrew Hoskins (2009, 31), evolves in two stages: firstly, the mass media establish dominant narratives, before archives, testimonies, and personal memories are revisited and interconnected. This second phase, following the author, is an inherent feature of the “post-broadcast” era. A social network of collective memory is formed, producing unlimited clusters of meaning. In addition, this second

mediatization phase that Hoskins refers to does not take place only in the network; today the availability of recording devices, widespread access to archives, and easy editing of images in multiple formats has turned this second phase into a genuinely experimental field in which the hegemony of large media operators in establishing a collective memory is strongly contested.

Mediatization affects collective memory and to a degree transforms it. There is no doubt that Maurice Halbwachs's (1992 [1952]) long-established definition of collective memory now needs to be revisited, since today the public and private spheres are far less clearly demarcated than they were sixty years ago. In this regard, José van Dijck has drawn attention to the concept of "cultural memory" as a means of identifying the problematic relationship between the public and private spheres when it comes to defining memory, and the willingness of individuals to share their personal memories with a group. For this author, the mediation of memory (she does not use the term "mediatization") implies that the media highlights, corrupts, extends, and even replaces memory (van Dijck 2007, 16).

In an effort to understand the process of mediatization of collective memory, we can refer to the three factors outlined by Joanne Garde-Hansen: the first involves the media as an institutional means of registering the past, central to which are institutions such as museums or public television stations and their archives; secondly, the media serve as technological means of recording the past through devices such as cameras, smartphones, and computers; and thirdly, the media can act as memorials that bestow recognition on an individual, a group or a particular episode in history. In this last sense, the media can be understood as spaces of memory and remembrance of wars, their victims, and historical figures. These dynamics function simultaneously, but I would emphasize the prominent participation of citizens in the third of these. Memory organized "top-down" (promoted by institutions, public policy, etc.) is mutating into citizen-driven memory, with a central role being played by associations, NGOs, etc. On the third dynamic, Garde-Hansen (2011, 65) writes:

This increased media practice coming from bottom up has impact for understanding how social and cultural heritage and history is changing. Ordinary people are engaged not just in genealogical research but also in civic and community entrepreneurship activities.

Such an empowerment of individuals and groups, who only a decade ago had far less access to the means of production and mass distribution of messages, is building a new collective memory. Memory is arguably something of a civil right, a matter of justice linked to public policy (Lee and Thomas 2012, 15). If we look at this question from the point of view of media ecology, deficits or gaps not covered by public policy would today be filled by collectives who organize events, produce material, and share their experiences in networks.

In the case of the Spanish Civil War, Joan Ramon Resina (2010) undertakes a psycho-analytical foray into the issue by referring to a "collective unconscious," as opposed to the concept of "collective memory," specifically implying an archive of shared memory that has disappeared from public view for political or social reasons. In twenty-first-century Spain and Catalonia, this unconscious, which stems from an unresolved traumatic experience, is reflected in the documentaries about the war, both those perpetuating the hegemonic discourse established by post-Francoism and the *Transición*, and those who oppose this hegemonic discourse that dominates the mainstream media. Moreover, this collective unconscious also turns into memory when what has been silenced is brought out and released into the vast narrative repository of the network.

The memory conflict

Reams of pages have been written about the Spanish Civil War by historians, but there has been little analysis of the television documentaries dealing with this event. Hernández Corchete (2012a, 12) suggests that this deficit is due to the difficulty of keeping up with the sheer volume of production, and this is surely correct; a systematic analysis of all television documentaries made only in the last ten years would provide material for a very extensive case study. Television began to narrate the conflict in documentary form during the 1980s – most prominently with the thirty-episode series *España en guerra* (Cervera 1987) – and more productions of this type followed in the 1990s. However, the television war documentary flourished after the turn of the century, particularly in the context of the seventy-fifth anniversary.

On the other hand, television is still discredited as a medium worthy of academic study. To give only one example, Sánchez-Biosca (2006, 16) considers that it is not particularly concerned with upholding “methodological rigour.” This stance is supported by the low quality of some productions and initiatives, as well as the tendency of television in the “post-broadcast” era to prioritize entertainment in historical and scientific programming, often sacrificing quality and accuracy of content in the process. For Sánchez-Biosca (2006, 18):

Hace ya tiempo que los medios de comunicación han abandonado la modestia de ilustrar discursos a los que reconocen un rango superior, como sería el caso de la Historia, y se comportan con una soberbia sólo parangonable a su ignorancia.

Sánchez-Biosca has pointed out two parallel trends in the public narration of the Spanish Civil War: on the one hand, the huge output; and on the other, the way many of these documentaries and reports constitute “an extremely belligerent and accusatory narrative,” an opportunity for “neo-propaganda,” characterized by simplification and the power of emotional narrative (Sánchez-Biosca 2006, 17). To an extent, the mediatized account of the war has become a jumble of perspectives that mixes documents and facts with fictionalization, historical reconstruction, re-enactments, and dramatization. The hybrid nature of these programmes has meant that historians tend to keep their distance, but it has also drawn interest from other disciplines of the humanities. Nevertheless, these discrediting features do not apply to every case, and mediatization has also produced some unprecedented and original narratives which would have been unthinkable only a few years ago.

Media narratives of the Civil War also include revisionist accounts by conservatives and the political right, who Balfour (2008, 179) suggests have learnt to mimic academic protocols, inverting discourses, and decontextualizing and reinterpreting readings in a presentist mode. Their views are reflected today across all media platforms, including reports broadcast on television, accessed online, or sold on DVD. This fragmentation of the narratives on the war has become universal, and in addressing particular audience profiles the ideological premise is converted into just another target-defining element.

Catalan and Basque national channels have also contested the hegemonic discourse of the Civil War, which until the 1990s operated at state level. Both have developed an approach that aims to problematize the so-called *pact of silence*. In Catalonia, journalistic reporting has shed light on highly controversial topics not dealt with previously (including the abducted or indoctrinated children of Republican parents, the mass graves of people murdered after the war, deportations to concentration camps, etc.; Castelló 2012), while in the Basque Country, the narratives have emphasized aspects related to the national conflict (see de Pablo 2012).

Finally, in the context of the aforementioned second phase of mediatization, a third trend is worth noting which involves contributions to the narrative that are shared on online social networks or distributed directly. I am referring to low-cost or local productions circulated by citizens with minimal resources, such as students of journalism or film preparing their first audiovisual projects, cultural associations of all types, ideological organizations, political party foundations, audiovisual amateurs, or history buffs. This amalgamation of stories, which is extremely difficult to keep track of, can range from worthy local or family-based productions (the testimony of relatives, politicians and local characters; anecdotes, local history, etc.), to others that enter the realm of propaganda.

In sum, the mediatization of the Spanish Civil War in the twenty-first century may be described as converting its narration into a case of memory-conflict. Its narrative production operates in a field of ideological dispute over the past, with a variety of purposes and objectives grounded in the present, and with the expectation of a particular outcome in the near future, examples of which may include public recognition, blaming or pointing out responsibilities, legitimizing or discrediting particular groups, or just remembering trauma or personal accounts on the war.

Viewpoints on the war

This section offers a brief examination of some recent war documentaries that contribute to the mediatization of Spanish collective memory from very different, even confrontational, perspectives. I focus particularly on several broadcasts on Spanish public television (TVE), one documentary from the San Pablo CEU Foundation broadcast on Telemadrid (TM), some productions by Televisión de Catalunya (TVC), and an independent film with support from Memorial Democràtic.

TVE (Televisión Española) and the Civil War

Since its inception in 1956, and at different stages of its life, TVE has taken a variety of approaches to the Civil War (Hernández Corchete 2012b; Montero and Paz 2011). According to Hernández Corchete (2012b, 50), after the transition to democracy, documentaries on Spanish television reinforced the idea of apportioning blame and moving on, placing particular emphasis on the human tragedy. In the first decade of the new century, this trend would continue, but the period of the right-wing government of José María Aznar (1996–2004) culminated in two controversial episodes of the historical series *Memoria de España* (Andrés 2004) about the Second Republic and the Francoist regime. Julián Casanova (2005) labelled them “historical revisionism” and an example of “the neo-Francoist syndrome,” while advising against “whitewashing the past.” In the first term of the socialist government of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero (2004–2008), TVE launched the series *La memoria recobrada* (Domingo 2006) which, according to Ibáñez (2012, 75), “takes the side of the defeated,” while being an “outstanding document of a time when it was still conceivable that a Law of Historical Memory would bring justice to all victims of Francoism.”

In this context, TVE screened *El laberinto español* (Reverte 2006a), consisting of thirteen documentaries, each followed by a historical debate. Ibáñez’s remarks (2012) about *La memoria recobrada* are also applicable to this series, which was made at a time when Zapatero’s government was on the verge of passing the *Ley de Memoria Histórica*. Two of its episodes were concerned with showing and discussing *La batalla del Ebro* (Reverte 2006b), adapted by the director from his own book (Reverte 2006c), which combined history and

journalism. It was a two-part documentary that was not a mere adaptation but an innovative audiovisual work that has been already noted as one of the most interesting TVE productions in recent years (Palacio and Ciller 2010).

The first part of this documentary offers comprehensive contextualization and assembles many archive images, interviews with historians, and testimony of all kinds. Highlights include survivors of the “Quinta del biberón,” elderly men who recall how they forded the river and the battles where thousands of their youthful companions died.² Ex-soldiers on the Francoist side also provide eyewitness accounts of military operations: a colour code (a red or blue filter) is used to introduce testimony from both sides, which helps the viewer interpret what is being related.

Elements of dramatization are kept to a minimum, limited to glimpses of soldiers in a dark forest, or another carrying a water canteen. These resources often consist of subjective camera work from the perspective of a moving soldier and are interspersed with archive footage, testimonials, and photographs. Shots of the river try to recreate the tension of the moment for the viewer without actually resorting to a reconstruction, which risks ridicule if attempted with insufficient resources. It includes animated maps, a huge amount of data, numbers, locations, and facts, all interspersed with the memories of the surviving soldiers. It therefore has an informative value and a carefully honed aesthetic, replete with spectacular aerial images of the area. The viewer’s interest is held by illustrative anecdotes, which are reasonably justified within the context of what the documentary seeks to convey. Overall, *La batalla del Ebro* helps the viewer understand how the battle evolved, step by step.

This documentary does not touch on the viewpoint of the population or the impact of the war on the villages, but that is not its declared aim. Focused almost exclusively on military activity and the historical context, it takes a journalistic rather than ethnographic approach. It is certainly a piece of work that Herbert L. Matthews would have liked to see, because in some ways it fits into what the American reporter aspired to provide for future generations of journalists and historians. Like *La memoria recobrada*, *La batalla del Ebro* fits in with the new socialist period of TVE, at a time when the government was working towards passing the *Ley de Memoria Histórica*, but it aspired to achieve documentary rigour, harmoniously combining action with a series of audiovisual resources.

Right-wing “myths”

The right-wing vision, or revision, trains its focus on the violence committed by the Republicans during the Civil War. On the occasion of the seventy-fifth anniversary of its outbreak, the clash of viewpoints even affected the obituary sections of the main Spanish newspapers. In the words of Rodrigo (2009, 213–214), for a few days a real “war of obituaries” broke out in *El País*, *El Mundo*, and *ABC*, in which each side remembered their dead. Many initiatives focused on the war marked this anniversary. Television producers and channels of all types launched numerous reports and discussions focused on different topics, often taking opposing ideological views.

Molinero (2010, 48) states that with the arrival of democracy in Spain, the generation of the grandchildren of those who suffered reprisals under Franco wanted to know what had happened, why their grandparents were shot, and where they were buried. There was a forceful emergence of a “memory of the vanquished,” as opposed to the “memory of the victors.” The latter still dominates today, and is present in the streets named or monuments such as El Valle de los Caídos (the Valley of the Fallen). For the Right, this new discourse of “the vanquished” violated the silence-based pact of the *Transición*. Therefore, it broke with what Resina (2003,

88) has labelled a “programmed amnesia” and triggered a reaction in the form of audiovisuals and television programs (debates, interviews, etc.) aimed at strengthening the testimony of the victors, which had monopolized the public space in Franco’s time but now had to deal with a counterpoint.

An example of this trend is the documentary series from the San Pablo-CEU Foundation, *La Guerra Civil Española. Mitos al descubierto* (Bullón and Togores 2012).³ With the occasion of the screening of the first episode of the series on Telemadrid (*El asesinato de Calvo Sotelo*) in the programme *Madrid opina* (Sáenz de Buruaga and Arribas 2006), some scholars expressed their objections and disapproval.⁴ For example, the historian Santos Juliá (2011), described the production as a “regrettable manipulation,” while Socialist Party advisers denounced the work on Madrid’s public television network as “tendentious” and “biased” (Galló and Gómez 2011).

In this symbolic struggle, the term “myth” is often used to counter that of “history.” Sánchez-Biosca (2006, 23) refers to myth in terms of the original Aristotelian meaning, which is the opposite of *logos*, or reason. In *La Guerra Civil Española: Mitos al descubierto*, the narrative tries to counteract accounts of the war that show Francoists as unjust or villainous. The use of the word “myth” in the title of the series aims to discredit the discourses generated by the stories of the defeated. It thereby problematizes the categories that have come to define the Nationalist/Republican conflict in much of the historiography and democratic memory of the war: respectively, perpetrators/victims; rebels/legalists; fascists/democrats, etc. The aim of the revision is to try and unseat the terms of this antagonistic discourse in relation to the “truth.”

The series contains some two hundred minutes of historical re-enactment and draws on a range of experts, local historians, and personal accounts. Much of the narrative is geared towards spotlighting the victims of Republican aggression, with an emphasis on the murder of religious believers and the destruction of church property. Other atrocities committed by the Republican side are featured, including the Paracuellos murders, presented as “the largest organized genocide in the history of Spain” (“El Partido Comunista y la defensa de Madrid: La masacre de Paracuellos”); the uncontrolled violence of anarchist groups towards Nationalist supporters and religious orders (“Violencia en la retaguardia”); assaults on the church and the murder of priests (“La persecución religiosa”); and conflict and strife in the Republic (“Divisiones internas en el bando republicano”). The recreations in the series are largely dramatizations of executions or arrests, with an overwhelming emphasis on those committed by anarchists. Expert voices, reenactments, and memories are interwoven with archival footage, including material from the Fundación Nacional Francisco Franco, an organization that works to disseminate the memory and work of the dictator.⁵

Paul Preston (2014, 24) argues that the revisionists’ accounts underplay the suffering of the victims on the Republican side, attributing this to a kind of historians’ conspiracy. In the episode “La toma de Badajoz: entre la verdad y la leyenda” the “truth” is said to lie in the repressive actions of Republican militias, and in the assaults and chaotic situation which preceded the Nationalist military conquest. The alternative view or “legend” is countered with comparative data that apparently tries to balance out the excesses on both sides, but which effectively consigns the disproportionate Francoist repression in Badajoz to “myth” or “legend,” (thereby problematizing the nature of “truth”).

A story of proximity

Mediatization also provides many opportunities to narrate stories of proximity, as occurs in *La batalla de la memoria* (Pons Múria 2009), a documentary co-produced by TVC and Mario Pons Produccions Audiovisuals, with the collaboration of Memorial Democràtic and the

Institut Català d'Indústries Audiovisuals,⁶ as well as the support of various municipal councils near the Ebro.⁷ The documentary explores how the battle of the Ebro was experienced by the population through a series of mechanisms that portray the complexity of the conflict. The documentary uses footage from No-Do and the Spanish National Film Archive, but the real value of the production lies in the use of witness accounts.

Pons Múria was advised by the historian Josep Sánchez Cervelló, a specialist in local history and specifically in the wars this territory has endured throughout its history (e.g., Sánchez Cervelló 2001). The professor features in the documentary as a narrative guide, along with one of his students, who is investigating the death of his grandfather in a prison after the war. The documentary contrasts opposing versions of the conflict, but the prevailing theory is that Francoist repression in the area was disproportionate, ruthlessly cruel, and directed against many people who were not significantly involved or were innocent of any crime.

La batalla de la memoria recalls the crimes committed by anarchist brigades in villages of the Ebro, and includes accounts from relatives of religious and right-wing victims. These memories are offset by stories from the other side, such as those of the student's grandfather or the execution of Republicans after the entry of Franco's troops. The aim is to highlight the deep wounds the war left in the population, creating a social breakdown that lasted for generations, and the injustice committed on both sides, with a special focus on post-war Nationalist repression. As Sánchez Cervelló puts it, "the Left committed crimes first. But they [the Francoists] spent forty years avenging them." Moments of particular tension include the discovery of human bones in the hills where fighting took place, or the meeting at the end, which brings together people from both sides.

Though it relied on the support of regional television, Pons Múria's documentary is an example of a second phase in the mediatization of memory, since it is based on testimonial contributions and is austere produced. A recognition and visualization of memory is achieved by a modest deployment of unspectacular techniques. This documentary shows that the Spanish Civil War has entered a dynamic in which local history, the memory of citizens, and the interest of new generations – embodied by the student investigating the death of his grandfather – is generating new discourses from perspectives which have hitherto been ignored. This phase of mediatization has access to limited or scarce technical resources (as is the case here), a good network of contacts, and the collaboration of various actors in the field.

The achievement of *La batalla de la memoria* is enhanced by its aesthetics: the everyday scenes of village life and of people working in the vineyards and cellars, and frequent landscape shots of the river and the buttressed sierras of Cavalls and Pàndols, accompanied by the rhythmic compositions of Quico el Cèlio, El Noi, and El Mut de Ferreries, popular music which distils a whole philosophy of life and culture emanating from the people who live along the last stretch of the Ebro. Ultimately, the uniqueness of this production lies in its point of view, which focuses on the villages of the area and the complexity of the conflict, with the participation of people who suffered on both sides, and who sometimes lived only a few metres away from each other in the same street.

New formats and initiatives

The Spanish Civil War is a narrative repository that forms the basis of new productions, both documentary and fictional. Some even navigate between these two genres. Another standout production in this crossover between documentary and fiction is *Mirant al cel/ Looking at the Sky* (Garay 2008), which deals with the 1938 bombing of Barcelona. The mediatization of the Civil War involves experimentation and breaking away from the classical canons of genre

aesthetics. *Mirant al cel* presents two parallel stories, one fictional, with parts played by actors, and the other comprising the testimony of older people who remember the suffering and fear produced by the bombing. An old man in the fictional part plays one of the Italian pilots who took part in the bombing. The programme was the result of a collaboration between the writer Juan Goytisolo, historians, journalists, and the doctor Moises Broggi, who attended many of the victims during the attacks. Overall, this production is clearly in line with the “restoration” of the collective memory of the city of Barcelona.

The widespread and indiscriminate bombing of civilians in Barcelona is also dealt with in the TVC documentary, *Ramon Perera, l'home que va salvar Barcelona / Ramon Perera, the Man who Saved Barcelona* (Armengou and Belis 2006), which explores the construction of shelters by this Catalan architect. His work would subsequently be studied in London during the Blitz. Montse Armengou and Ricard Belis, journalists for Catalan public television, deserve special mention for their work on silenced aspects of the Civil War and the Franco regime, as several authors have pointed out (Castelló 2014; Herrmann 2008).

Mediatization implies that citizens and novice creators have access to the media to create new stories, and create visual memories of their family, neighbourhood, and local area. Documentary initiatives are emerging from young creators such as the three directors of *Han bombardejat una escola* (Corbera et al. 2010), recovering the little-known story of *Escola del Mar* in the Barceloneta neighbourhood. This school, which was a model of modernity in the Republican education system, was bombed and destroyed in 1938. Participating in this production are elderly women who as girls endured both the war and the loss of their school. This documentary also explores the end of the Republican educational system, which was much more advanced in its modern values and respect for women than what would be imposed by the dictatorship.

Han bombardejat una escola is another example of how mediatizing collective memory can have very different outcomes, resulting in a product that is intimate, original, and of documentary interest, and one which is close to the people. Its work is that of a municipal archive, making contact with neighbours and family archives, to create a story that combines emotion and documentary value.

Relativism and pigeonholing

The human tragedy lives on in the people who suffered it, and their families. The mediatization of the memory of the Spanish Civil War has many facets, but the hegemony exercised by the mass media in the late twentieth century has found a counterpoint in all manner of productions in the second decade of the twenty-first century. These recent narratives contribute to what some authors have identified as a true postmemory of the Spanish Civil War that encompasses not only cinema (Coronado 2016; Quílez 2016), but all types of platforms, including graphic literature (Galán and Rueda 2016) or even board games (Gonzalo 2016). In the field of the television documentary, we find series and one-off productions driven by organizations, small producers, educational institutions, local or regional television, and even individual citizens concerned with capturing memory, writing about their past or problematizing what others have written about their people.

The existence of multiple visions of the war should not lead to the radical relativism which is beginning to be voiced in some quarters, a relativism that considers all views on the past as equally legitimate, and therefore all historiography as valid (or even invalid). This is not the place to deal with this scepticism in the depth that the issue requires, but it would be unfair to view serious documentary work in the same light as productions which attempt to contort the past to their own ideological ends. Victims of all kinds have a right to memory, but using it

to legitimize or delegitimize stories based on historical fact is a very different exercise. In the mediatization of the Civil War, not all accounts are on the same level: the right to construct or even “rescue” memory does not mean that every engagement with this subject is of the same kind. Moreover, one cannot equate the memory of the defeated with that of the victors, whose discourse dominated the collective narrative of the war in the decades of repression, censorship, and lack of freedom.

Today the mediatization of the Spanish Civil War is also yielding innovative work, which breaks new ground when compared with the first audiovisual productions and documentaries on the subject. Their interpretation and evaluation should not be limited to ideological pigeonholing on a left-right axis. Both pigeonholing and relativizing discourses would perhaps serve to undermine them and strip them of some of their merits. But some of these productions can constitute valuable pieces of research, drawn from the memories of survivors and their families, which can contribute to the recognition of the suffering experienced by war victims and make future generations aware of the barbarism endured by their predecessors in a graphic and engaging way. A major problem for a diverse audience is to distinguish such material from its counterpart.

In Spain today the construction of a memory of the Civil War and Franco’s dictatorship requires overcoming various obstacles. The courts do not allow for the review of cases such as the execution of Salvador Puig Antich in 1974, and historians have had difficulty accessing certain public records for their research. Meanwhile, monuments exalting Francoism, such as the Valley of the Fallen, are still standing and the United Nations’ experts urge Spain to investigate the atrocities during the Civil War and under Franco’s dictatorship without a response from the state (UN 2014). This institutional framework may offer no help, but nothing seems to stop citizens in their determination to engage with the memory of the victims and to capture their memories on screen.

Notes

- 1 This article is part of the research projects entitled “The media construction of political and territorial conflicts in Spain. Study of discourses and narratives” (CSO-2010–20047) and “Second-Degree Memories: Postmemory of the Civil War, Francoism and democratic Transition in contemporary Spain” (CSO2013–41594-P), supported by the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness.
- 2 The “Quinta del biberón” (Baby-bottle Call-up) was mobilized by Republican authorities in 1938–1939 and recruited young people born in 1920 and 1921.
- 3 The San Pablo CEU Foundation is an organization of the Asociación Católica de Propagandistas (Catholic Association of Propagandists), whose educational aims fall within the framework of the Catholic Church. Accessed April 7, 2014. <http://www.ceu.es/fundacion/quienes-somos.html>.
- 4 Mito al descubierto. Accessed April 7, 2014. <http://www.telemadrid.es/mitosaldescubierto>.
- 5 This organization was funded by the government of the Partido Popular, which was strongly criticised by the leftist parties of the Spanish parliament (see Cué 2002).
- 6 Memorial Democràtic is an institution of the Generalitat de Catalunya aimed at “recovery, remembrance, and fostering democratic memory during the period 1931–1980.” Accessed April 7, 2014. <http://www20.gen.cat.cat/portal/site/memorialdemocratic>.
- 7 See the project “La batalla de la memòria.” Accessed 7, 2014. <http://labatalladelamemoria.blogspot.com.es/>.

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