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EL EXILIO REPUBLICANO Y LOS CAMPOS DE CONCENTRACIÓN NAZIS

Marco Histórico y Teórico

NUNCA MÁS, NIE WIEDER: ETHICAL ASPECTS OF REMEMBERING IN THE NARRATIVES OF RAVENSBRÜCK SURVIVORS, THEIR DESCENDANTS AND OTHER PERSONS ENGAGED IN THE MEMORY WORK

Nunca mas, nie wieder: aspectos éticos del recuerdo en la narrativa de los supervivientes de Ravensbrück, sus descendientes y otras personas involucradas en el trabajo de la memoria

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Resumen: Este artículo trata de la memoria colectiva de un campo de concentración nazi para mujeres. El objetivo de este texto es examinar la posibilidad de la construcción de la memoria compartida por las supervivientes del campo de concentración Ravensbrück, sus descendientes y otras personas, principalmente mujeres, dedicadas al trabajo de memoria en torno a este dominio particular. A partir de la teoría social del trauma de Jeffrey Alexander, se presentarán unos ejemplos del intenso trabajo cultural y político necesario para crear un trauma compartido. Con base en el análisis de los datos creados durante la investigación etnográfica multisitio, el artículo explorará los aspectos éticos del proceso de recordar y la fabricación de un trauma colectivo..

Palabras clave: Ravensbrück, teoría social del trauma de Jeffrey Alexander.

Abstract: This article deals with collective memory of a women's concentration camp in Nazi Germany. The objective of this text is to examine the possibility of the construction of a shared memory by survivors of the concentration camp Ravensbrück, their descendants and other persons, mainly women, engaged in the memory work around this particular site of memory. Drawing on Jeffrey Alexander's social theory of trauma, a number of examples of the intensive cultural and political work necessary for creating a shared trauma will be presented. Based on the data created during multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork, the article will explore ethical aspects of the process of remembering and the fabrication of collective trauma. .

Keywords: Ravensbrück, Jeffrey Alexander's social theory of trauma.

INTRODUCTION

“The necessity to transmit (the memory) comes from the wish to understand and never forget; for the preservation of memory has become a civic obligation”¹, write Luis and Margarita Catalá, the son and the daughter of Neus Catalá, in the preface to the book ‘De la resistència i la deportació’. It is a collection of fifty testimonies of Spanish women-survivors of the Nazi concentration camp Ravensbrück, which Catalá, a survivor herself, collected. The expression ‘never again’ is often pronounced at memorial sites and printed on commemorative-wreath ribbons laid at sites of Nazi genocide or monuments to the victims of it. “Nie wieder” is the political statement that marked the foundation of the Austrian Ravensbrück Association and the very idea lies at the core of similar national survivor organizations in Europe. Moreover, the responsibility to testify and tell one’s own experience of deportation to the concentration camp is observable in a large number of survivors, in general. Aleida Assmann writes about the emergence of the memory of moral witness in the 1980’s which is defined by an ethical aspect. Such type of memory “includes public commemoration and an appeal to future generations”². Survivors of the Holocaust gave voice to the ones that perished in the genocide and took part in “the social recognition of historical traumas”³.

Survivors, who are labelled witnesses, rememberers or the deported, depending on the cultural context, are perceived as the contributors of authenticity to public meetings, commemoration or educational events related to the Second World War. However, there are various social factors which affect the adoption of the role of survivors and the content of their narratives. According to Jeffrey Alexander, social

¹ Neus CATALÁ, *De la resistència y la deportación. 50 testimonios de mujeres españolas*. Barcelona, Memorial Democràtic, 2015, pp. 23.

² Aleida ASSMANN, *Introduction to Cultural Studies, Topics, Concepts, Issues*. Berlin, Erich Schmidt Verlag, 2012, pp. 172.

³ *Ibid.* pp. 177.

trauma is a result of symbolic construction⁴. The fact that people lost their lives is not sufficient to create shared collective suffering. Wars only become traumatic if the victims seem worthless. By contrast, if narratives of triumph are prevalent, groups speak of sacrifices for a noble cause. It is a collective process centring on meaning-making which forms collective suffering. It draws on relevant individual experiences of pain and hardship in interaction with collective identity. Alexander notes that it is a matter of intense cultural and political work involving public speeches and storytelling, rituals, meetings, plays and movies. In the social theory of trauma, the actual experience of an individual is not vital; it is rather insufficient, for recognizing a collective trauma.

When referring to the past related to Nazi concentration camps, we inevitably deal with moral categories. Remembering is ‘good’ and forgetting is ‘bad’. It is the way of remembering which voices the individual experience and makes it visible, i. e. public. Subsequently, it is believed to serve as a reminder and an opportunity, if not necessity, for society to learn from it. Essentially, this understanding of the role of moral witnesses may be illustrated by the popular quote of George Santayana: “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it”⁵.

In this article it will be revealed that a significant number of active witnesses, those who speak in public and thus are involved in the construction of the cultural memory of deportations to Nazi concentration camps, regard their role as a civil duty and moral obligation to participate in speaking up against the evil. Nevertheless, it has not always been so. The process of meaning-making⁶ is on-going. There are social and political variables which have called survivors (and others) to agency and which had suppressed their visibility or, more literally, audibility in the past. Sue Campbell claims survivors’ testimonies are a relevant source for investigation of “our cultural respect for rememberers to be realized in the types of narratives we allow or encourage them to

⁴ Jeffrey ALEXANDER, *Trauma, A Social Theory*. Cambridge, Polity Press, 2012.

⁵ Marianne S. WOKECK, Martin C. COLEMAN (Eds.), *The Life of Reason or the Phases of Human Progress by Introduction and Reason in Common Sense*. Cambridge, The MIT Press, 2011, pp. 172.

⁶ Jeffrey ALEXANDER, *Trauma. A Social Theory*. Cambridge, Polity Press, 2012.

engage in”⁷. Selected aspects of the intensive cultural work on a shared memory will be presented.

This article is one of the outcomes of broader ethnographic fieldwork conducted between the years 2014 and 2017 at a number of sites. A number of methods were employed, such as participant observation, interviewing or textual analysis. The research included participation in two annual commemorative ceremonies which took place at the Ravensbrück Memorial and various visits to the expositions on the site. Moreover, the annual meetings of the International Ravensbrück Committee and also other meetings of national organisations were integrated in the research. Survivors, their descendants and other people involved in the memory work concerning Ravensbrück were interviewed. The content of the interviews as well as written accounts published by survivors or memory organisations, or the memorial itself, were analysed. Besides participant observation and execution of semi-structured interviews, audio-visual methods were employed. The research design was transnational and multi-sited, involving private and public spaces of remembrance in Austria, Spain (Catalonia), the Czech Republic, Germany and Italy.

For the purpose of this article, the presented findings will be illustrated by excerpts of interviews and written accounts relating predominantly to Spanish informants. The interviews were principally conducted in the languages spoken by the informants and later translated into English. Parts of the interviews in Spanish will be cited below the English translations.

MEANING-MAKING OF THE PAST

Memory functions both at an individual and a group level. Memory, its content and operation have been a subject of interest of various studies as philosophy (since Ancient times), theology (e. g. the Jewish imperative to observe and recall) and in modern times in social and political sciences. Maurice Halbwachs investigated the question of social determination of memory⁸. According to him, individuals never

⁷ Sue CAMPBELL, “Women, “False” Memory, and Personal Identity”, *Hypatia*, nº 12 (1999), pp. 61.

⁸ Maurice HALBWACHS, *Kolektivní paměť*, Praha, SLON, 2010.

remember alone, as remembering always takes place in interactions with others. Individuals have perceptions, which are bound to the body and thus are strictly individual. However, to recall, it is necessary to order the images and perceptions in a certain way to create a coherent structure. Such organization is influenced by the so-called social frameworks of memory, which individuals use as patterns to arrange the pieces in. Moreover, when remembering, people deploy language, a collective tool. Therefore, the social groups which the individual belongs to, affect the forming of the process of his or her remembering. Accordingly so, as Astrid Erll summarizes, individual memory, referring to the memories of distinct individual people, is a specific combination of forms and contents of a memory compounded by one's memberships to different groups⁹. Collective memory is the term used for the memory shared within a particular social group.

Halbwachs perceived a close connection between memory, history and identity. Assmann and Shortt illustrate this relation by selecting the utterance from the foreword to his book "change the collective and the stories will change" and adding "change the stories and the identity of the collective will change"¹⁰. They continue "the events of the past cannot be changed, but our perception, our narratives, our memory constructs of these events can, as can the identity of a state, a society and/or a person"¹¹. Apparently, memory is bound to group identity. It reflects the practical demands of the present rather than the criteria of the truth about the past. It is in service of self-identification or self-assertion of a particular group. Also, collective memory is dynamic since it is carried by lively groups and therefore in permanent evolution. As Pavel Barša refers to Pierre Nora's ideas about memory, it creates a problematic, incomplete reconstruction of something that is already not there¹². From the point of view of veracity, memory does not provide the access to the past, it is rather a reflection of the present state of a particular group and its current needs.

⁹ Astrid ERLI, *Kollektives Gedächtnis und Erinnerungskulturen, Eine Einführung*. Stuttgart, Verlag J. B. Metzler, 2005.

¹⁰ Aleida ASSMANN, Linda SHORTT (Eds.), *Memory and Political Change*, London, Pelgrave MacMillan, 2012, pp. 13.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

¹² Pavel BARŠA, *Paměť a Genocida*. Praha, Argo, 2011.

Memory is often placed in contrast to history. History is understood as the representation of the past which belongs to everyone and no one. Although the quest for universality is disputable, history should aim to be universal. Sharon MacDonald writes that memory is “regarded as subjective and fallible, based on individual recollections” in opposition to “proper evidence of the past verified through expert institutional practices and persons”¹³. On the other hand, this view is often accompanied by “a reversed evaluation”, which presents history as “a product of elites” and their (hidden) interests and memory is assigned more honesty¹⁴. Also, as MacDonald points out, “in research practice, the line between history and memory may be blurred”¹⁵. Therefore, the “the specific contexts, motives and frameworks of productions” are crucial, as “a historical account might draw on individual reminiscences, and remembered events may find ample substantiation in other contemporary sources”¹⁶.

COLLECTIVE, COLLECTED AND COSMOPOLITAN MEMORY

The term collective memory, coined by Halbwachs¹⁷, refers to memories held by groups, in order to differentiate them from individual memories. It describes representations and accounts of the past, forms of remembering that are shared. By contrast to the unified phenomenon and common meanings, the “collected memory” approach focuses on various memories in practice¹⁸.

In regard to the Holocaust, the aspect of its memory exceeding national boundaries and national collectives has been described by various scholarship. The collective memory of the Holocaust has been referred to as transnational culture of

¹³ Sharon MACDONALD, *Memorylands: Heritage and Identity in Europe*. New York, Routledge, 2013, pp. 13.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 13.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 14.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Maurice HALBWACHS, *Kolektivní paměť*, Praha, SLON, 2010.

¹⁸ James E. YOUNG, *Texture of Memory. Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*. Dexter, Michigan, Yale, 1993.

commemoration, a moral category, an iconic trauma¹⁹. It has revealed a certain cosmopolitan features as it is commemorated in the USA, Israel or Spain, an International Holocaust Remembrance Day has been recognized internationally and people from various countries travel to visit the sites of former Nazi concentration camps. Levy and Sznajder write about cosmopolitan memory, in which the national state is not a beholder of the representations of the past. It is a result of a process in which “national and ethnic memories continue to exist but they are subjected to a common patterning. They begin to develop in accord with common rhythms and periodizations. But in each case, the common elements combine with pre-existing elements to form something new...the result is always distinctive²⁰.

FABRICATING COLLECTIVE TRAUMA

The violent and genocidal events committed on various groups of people under the reign of German National Socialism and the ways societies come to terms with this past lie in the centre of approaches to investigating memory. Scholarship have taken the Holocaust as an example to illustrate different influences among the interpretation(s) of the past on the formation of memories and identities²¹.

The Holocaust is represented mainly by images of suffering and described as a trauma transgressing borders. However, such perception is not natural or self-evident. Moreover, the event was understood differently immediately after the affairs related to what we nowadays call the Holocaust had occurred. The American sociologist Jeffrey Alexander invented a social theory of trauma which is based on the tradition of social constructivism. He writes that “cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future

¹⁹ Muriel BLAIVE, Christian GERBEL, Thomas LINDENBERGER, *Clashes in European Memory*. Innsbruck, Studien Verlag, 2012.

²⁰ Sharon MACDONALD, *Memorylands: Heritage and Identity in Europe*. New York, Routledge, 2013, pp. 189.

²¹ Muriel BLAIVE, Christian GERBEL, Thomas LINDENBERGER, *Clashes in European Memory*. Innsbruck, Studien Verlag, 2012.

identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways²². It is “an empirical, scientific concept, suggesting new meaningful and causal relationships between previously unrelated events, structures, perceptions, and actions” which “also illuminates an emerging domain of social responsibility and political action”²³. For it is by the process of construction of cultural trauma that societies recognize the source of suffering and may take moral responsibility for it. Also, this suffering may or may not be shared with others, which impacts group identities as it may extend the understanding of ‘we’ or create a separating line between ‘us’ and ‘them’.

Alexander chooses the Holocaust as an example to illustrate how shared trauma is symbolically constructed. It is observable exactly in the process of change in understanding of the holocaust, denoting a type of event generally, to the Holocaust, a proper name given to the event. There is no natural element in an event causing individual (or group) suffering which would secure the fact that the suffering will be recognized as such by society. The reality that people have lost their lives in a war, for instance, does not necessarily mean that a collectively shared trauma will occur. The experience of suffering by individual members of a society is not significant. It is rather insufficient for a past event to be understood as a shared trauma. Wars become traumatic if a society regards their victims as worthless. If, on the other hand, a society relates to the war through a narrative of victory, one does not speak about victims but about those who sacrificed their lives for a noble cause. The social dimensions of “religion, nation, race, ethnicity, gender, class can be a medium for inflicting social pain”²⁴. A cultural trauma is nevertheless created in a collective process of meaning-making, which forms collective suffering based on the interaction between the experienced pain and collective identity. Alexander writes of “symbolic-cum-emotional representation as a collective process centering on meaning making”²⁵. Although individual suffering charges the process, it is the menace to collective identity which construes the suffering. A social trauma is constructed in intensive cultural and political

²² Jeffrey ALEXANDER, *Trauma, A Social Theory*. Cambridge, Polity Press, 2012, pp. 6.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 1.

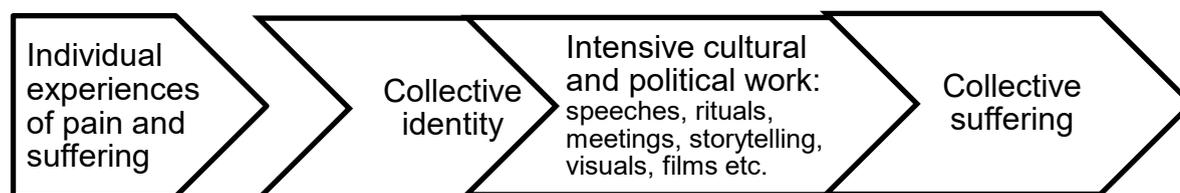
²⁵ Ibid., pp. 2.

efforts which include public gatherings, speeches, narratives, rituals, performances or films. “Intellectuals, political leaders, and symbol creators of all kinds make competing claims“, as “they identify protagonists and antagonists” and create (accusatory) narratives which are presented to audiences. For “suffering collectivities (...) must be imagined into being”²⁶.

Alexander identifies “four critical representations”, which are essential in the process of creation of a new master narrative of social suffering about a particular event. For each dimension a question must be answered in order for the group to successfully proceed in the meaning making. The four representations are the following, 1) the nature of the pain – investigating events (What happened to a particular group?), 2) the nature of the victim – identifying the ones who suffered (What group of persons are affected by the traumatizing pain?), 3) relation of the trauma victim to the wider audience – exploring social response (To what extent do the members of the audience for trauma representations experience identification with the immediately victimized group?), and 4) attribution of responsibility – establishing the antagonist (Who caused the trauma?)²⁷.

The new master narrative of shared trauma unfolds in various social arenas such as “religious, aesthetic, legal, scientific”, the one of “mass media” or “state bureaucracy”²⁸.

Graph 1: The Construction of Collective Trauma (adapted from Alexander 2012)



WOMEN'S CONCENTRATION CAMP RAVENSBRÜCK AS A SITE OF MEMORY

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 20 – 23.

All informants who contributed to this research relate to one particular place, by remembering their own experience, by having been exposed to familial memories or the cultural memory of it. The shared locale is the former Nazi concentration camp Ravensbrück, where a memorial including a museum was established after the war. The Holocaust has drawn the attention of the media, politicians and the general public since the 1980's, as well as of various scholarship. A mass of research on Nazi genocide in history, oral history, philosophy, ethics, law, sociology, anthropology and other fields has been conducted and a quantity of testimonies of survivors published. However, not much particular attention has been paid to the concentration camp Ravensbrück and its women-survivors. The Nazi concentration camp Ravensbrück opened in May 1939 and was liberated in April 1945, making it one of the very last camps to be reached by the Allies²⁹. The number of women-prisoners reached 130,000 in the six years of existence of the camp. Women from over forty nations, political activists, Jewish, Roma and Sinti women, Jehovah's Witnesses, and women labelled as criminals or anti-social were interned there. Prisoners were subjects to forced labour in the camp, in a related industrial complex, for example in the built-in factories of the companies Siemens and Halke, and in satellite camps. Many, especially Polish women, fell victim to medical experiments executed in the camp. In 1944 a gas chamber was erected on the camp site. Before the liberation of the camp, thousands of prisoners had been evacuated by the Red Cross and other organisations and thousands had set out on the co-called death march throughout the surrounding lands, seeking refuge and finally their homelands.

In 1959, the first museum was established at the original camp ground displaying artefacts donated by former prisoners. Simultaneously, the facilities of the camp were practically used by the Soviet army between 1945 and 1999. Nowadays, the memorial is under the administration of the Brandenburg Memorial Foundation under the German Ministry of Culture. The official name in German Mahn- und Gedenkstätte Ravensbrück is a remnant from the era of the German Democratic Republic. It clearly illustrates the intended function of the institution. The German verb *mahnen*, which forms the name of

²⁹ Sarah HELM, *If This Is a Woman*. London, Little Brown, 2015.

the memorial, means to remind or to warn. Thus a visit paid to the memorial implies not only the avoidance of forgetting but also behaviour in compliance with the “nie wieder”, “never again” slogan.

Some researchers believe that Ravensbrück, as at first a labour, later an extermination camp constructed exclusively for women, holds a particular place in the history of Nazi genocide. The current director of the Ravensbrück Memorial and a researcher Insa Eschebach perceives the distinctive feature of the site in the fact that “it’s a women’s place” (Interview, 2017). The singularity of the place can be traced also into the past, for the official name of the institution in the Nazi system was ‘Frauenkonzentrationslager’ (women’s concentration camp) and it was the only place labelled so.

FINDINGS

All the interviewees have become active carriers of witness memory by voicing their experiences or transmitted memories. According to Aleida Assmann, witness memory “includes public commemoration and an appeal to future generations”³⁰. By liberating their voices and public referring to the traumatic experience of the internment in a Nazi concentration camp, survivors (and their descendants) intend to transmit their memories to the public, to prevent society from forgetting, often in order to maintain peace ideals of humanity. Survivors share a certain degree of urge to tell their stories in order to encourage political awareness and sensitivity to human rights and their violation in the audience.

In the introduction to a collection of testimonies of Spanish women-survivors, Neus Catalá writes:

The Spanish women of exile, like shadows, also wove the nets in which Nazism would be trapped and defeated. However, the great death silence of our victims launches its warning cry and awakens our conscience. There are too many signs of the persistence and recrudescence of fascism,

³⁰ Aleida ASSMANN, *Introduction to Cultural Studies, Topics, Concepts, Issues*. Berlin, Erich Schmidt Verlag, 2012, pp. 177.

too many "holocausts" in too many places in the world for us to remain silent³¹.

*"Las mujeres españolas del exilio, como sombras, tejían también las redes en que el nazismo quedaría atrapado y derrotado. Pero el gran silencio de muerte de nuestras inmoladas lanza su grito de alerta y despierta nuestra conciencia. Son demasiados signos de pervivencia y recrudescencia fascistas, demasiados "Holocaustos" y en demasiados puntos del globo para quedarnos mudas"*³².

Another survivor from former Czechoslovakia expresses her wish for the future generations to learn from the past by saying:

I prefer speaking about history rather than personal matters. For it's such a coincidence what happened. (...) I want people not to forget the history, because it was just terrible in the time of Hitler. Your life could change so much.

(Interview, 2015.)

The importance of the role of the witness is highlighted in the greeting speech of Annette Chalut, the president of the International Ravensbrück Committee performed on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Ravensbrück and published in a brochure of the Committee in 2005. She speaks about the task of the international group and their engagement in the work of survival and remembrance.

*As long as we are alive, we will talk about Ravensbrück and its satellite camps, in schools, in the media, all around the world. After us, historians will take over our thing"*³³.

Survivors bear witness to the reality in the women's concentration camp itself, the actual system, practices executed and events which occurred there. The

³¹ Neus CATALÁ, *De la resistencia y la deportación. 50 testimonios de mujeres españolas*. Barcelona, Memorial Democràtic, 2015, pp. 34. Translated by the author.

³² Ibid.

³³ Siegrid JACOBET, Bärbel SCHINDLER-SAEFKOW, *Frauen-Konzentrationslager. Ravensbrück 1945 – 2005, 60 Jahre Befreiung*. Fürstenberg/Havel, Internationales Ravensbrück Komitee, 2005, pp. 3. Translated by the author.

testimonies of survivors collected in the first decade after the war contributed to the mass of factual information about the operation of the camp because the majority of archives were destroyed before the liberation of Ravensbrück. At that time, political prisoners were in the centre of national attention in various European countries, such as France or East Germany or former Czechoslovakia. Later, in the 1960's there was an alteration of the status of the victim in Western culture. Barša claims that Nazi genocide functions as a source of moral capital as the innocent victim is socially recognized³⁴.

Despite the survivors' deliberate engagement in public transmission of the memory of Ravensbrück, apparently, a period of non-engagement preceded. It is marked by silence, or a "silent presence" of the memory, in families and in public³⁵. The triggering moment for the commencement of publishing testimonies was predominantly external. For instance, survivors were addressed by some public institution, as a school, by a national survivors' association or the media.

Political context appears to be a key factor influencing the length of the public silence. Sarah Helm, a British historian illustrates this in her book 'If This Is a Woman', published not earlier than in 2015, when she writes that it was "the Iron Curtain, which split survivors – east from west – and broke the history of the camp in two"³⁶. Subsequently, "the site became a shrine to the camp's communist heroines, and all over East Germany streets and schools were named after them", while "in the West, Ravensbrück literally disappeared from view"³⁷.

Also, the survivors from Spain had been invisible in their country of origin. Most of them had not returned after the liberation of the camp but stayed in exile in France. Paula Simón refers to "more than three decades of dictatorship" which "played a distinctive role" in acquiring knowledge of "the exile from 1939" as the regime had deployed censorship and blockage of the sources, silenced them and was reticent

³⁴ Pavel BARŠA, *Paměť a Genocida*. Praha, Argo, 2011.

³⁵ Carol A. KIDRON. Toward an Ethnography of Silence, The Lived Presence of the Past in the Everyday Life of Holocaust Trauma Survivors and Their Descendants in Israel. *Current Anthropology*, n° 50 (2009), pp. 5–27.

³⁶ Sarah HELM, *If This Is a Woman*. London, Little Brown, 2015, pp. xiii.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. xiv.

about the existence of the exile, and also manipulated their accounts³⁸. The niece of a Spanish survivor reveals the difference between the reconstruction of the past experience of Nazism in after-war France and Spain.

At that time, at the end of the sixties, my aunt was in the committee of the deported. They did a lot of things (...) and I experienced it when I was in France. But when I was here in Spain, nothing. There was nothing. One didn't speak about this topic. It was not allowed. I did experience it in the family, but I didn't speak about it with anyone.

(Interview, 2016. Translated by the author)

En aquella época también a finales de los sesenta, mi tía ya estaba en el comité de los deportados y hacían muchas cosas (...) y yo lo viví cuando estuve en Francia pero cuando estaba aquí en España, nada. No había nada, no se hablaba de éste tema, no se podía hablar. Yo sí, lo viví en la familia, pero no lo hablaba con nadie.

The long-lasting absence of social recognition of the traumatic past related to the effects of Nazism in Spain illustrates a more general process of meaning making in which the following three questions need to be answered, what actually happened to the particular collective, what groups were affected by this traumatizing pain, and to what extent the members of the audience for trauma representations experience identification with the immediately victimized group³⁹.

The past invisibility of the deported to Nazi concentration camps in Spain, especially that of female prisoners, may be illustrated by a story told by a member of Amical Ravensbrück, a Spanish association concerned with the legacy of the deported to the camp. A member of the memory group recounts the first encounter of Spanish deportees with the writer and journalist Monserrat Roig, who was interviewing Spanish survivors. It happened on the French territory.

³⁸ Paula SIMÓN, *La escritura de las alambradas, Exilio y la memoria en los testimonios españoles sobre los campos de concentración franceses*. Vigo, Editorial Academia del Hispanismo, 2012, pp. 34. Translated by the author.

³⁹ Thompson quoted in Jeffrey ALEXANDER, *Trauma, A Social Theory*. Cambridge, Polity Press, 2012.

I told a story how the invisibility of women is sometimes surfaced by coincidence. Monserrat Roig used to meet the deported men and they all told her their experiences. However, they never told her that there had been women who had been deported. So, as she interviewed them one after another, they told her: "Listen! Next week, there's a reunion of the exiled and deported from Spain in France. Why don't you go? You will be able to speak with more at a time (...) you will be able to speak with fifty or sixty."

Monserrat Roig went. The moderator of the reunion was Neus Catalá, whose name is Neus and whose name is Catalá. Moreover, she speaks French with a noticeable Catalan accent.

During a break, Monserrat Roig addressed Neus and asked: "Listen! Are you Catalan?"

And Neus told her: "Yes."

"Oh! And were you in a concentration camp?"

And Neus told her: "Yes, I was. But can you see all those (women) there? They were, too."

So, in such manner of coincidence and informality, it was revealed that there had been women from the resistance deported to Nazi concentration camps.

(Interview, 2016. Translated by the author)

He explicado la aneodota de como la invisibilidad de la mujer a veces sale a la luz por una aneodota. Y fue que Monserrat Roig quedaba con los deportados hombres y todos le explicaban sus experiencias pero jamás le dijeron que habían mujeres que habían estado deportadas. Entonces, como iba entrevistando de uno a uno a los deportados le dijeron: ¡Oyé! La semana que viene hay una reunión en Francia de los exiliados y deportados españoles. ¿Porqué no vienes? Y Podrás hablar con varios a la vez (...) Pues, podrás hablar con cincuenta o sesenta. Monserrat Roig fue y entonces ésta reunión estaba moderada por Neus Catalá, que se llama Neus, se llama Catalá y además habla francés con un marcado acento

catalan. En una pausa Monserrat Roig se dirigió a Neus y le dijo: “¿Oyé, tú eres catalana?”

Y Neus le dijo: “Sí.”

“A! ¿Y has estado en un campo de concentración?”

Y Neus le dijo: “Sí. Yo he estado. ¿Pero ves a todas aquellas de allá? También.”

De ésta manera, de ésta manera tan casual y tan informal salió a la luz el que habían habido mujeres en la resistencia y la deportación en los campos Nazis.

However active survivors' associations, survivors frequently avoid verbal transmitting of their memories from the camp to their primary descendants. A daughter of a Spanish survivor confirms that by saying the following.

My mother used to travel alone to the commemoration ceremonies in Ravensbrück. She was very happy when we were invited by the German government in 1975. But after that, she never spoke about taking us, my brother, myself, nor the father. It was her ... I don't know ... something hers, her past. She told us but we never accompanied her. Only when I was already forty years old, she took me to Ravensbrück. She had gone there several times alone, sure, but we never spoke about it at home.

(Interview, 2016. Translated by the author.)

Mi madre iba sola siempre a las conmemoraciones a Ravensbrück. Estuvo muy contenta cuando 1975 nos invitó el gobierno de Alemania. Pero nunca después habló de llevarnos, a mi hermano, a mi, ni a mi padre. Era su ... no sé ... era algo suyo, su historia. Lo contaba pero no la acompañábamos nunca. Solo cuando ya yo tuve cuarenta años, quiso llevarme a Ravensbrück. Ella había ido varias veces sola, claro, pero nunca se habló en casa.

Several years later, the mother requested that her daughter continue in the memory work she had begun. The newly nominated member of the International Ravensbrück Committee recalls:

I found it normal but also a little violent... Because she didn't ask me: "Do you want to continue my work?" She told me: "You have to continue my work!"

(Interview, 2016. Translated by the author.)

Lo encontré normal, pero también un poco violento...porque no me pidió: "¿Quieres seguir mi trabajo? Me dijo: "¡Tienes que seguir mi trabajo!"

Thus, finally, the next generation adopts the civil obligation to bear witness and engages in the cultural memory work.

The familial experience of an involvement in the resistance also influenced the motivation of a young researcher to become a member of the Spanish survivor and memory organisation Amical Ravensbrück.

For a long time, I was interested in studying ... Well, I immediately saw that the women didn't have a place in our history. By contrast, I knew that they had played an important role during the republic and the Civil War and as a result of them (being involved) in the exile and in anti-Francoism in Spain ... And, of course, they were victims of the deportation. That's why I was interested in emphasizing this role and recuperating it somehow. Yes, it's true that I might be interested because when I was a child, my grandparents used to tell me the stories they had experienced. Both of my grandparents participated in the Civil War. They were in the group of the red, the republicans.

(Interview, 2016. Translated by the author.)

Desde hacía tiempo que me gustaba investigar sobre... Bueno, ví enseguida que las mujeres no tenían un lugar en nuestra historia y que en

cambio sabía que habían tenido un papel muy destacado durante la república, durante la guerra civil y que a consecuencia de ellos, pues, en el exilio y en el antifranquismo dentro de España ... y claro también fueron víctimas de la deportación. Y por lo tanto me interesó mucho destacar éste papel y de alguna manera recuperarlo. Sí, que es verdad que a lo mejor esto me viene pues porque de pequeña mis abuelos me contaban las historias que habían vivido ellos. Mis dos abuelos participaron en la guerra civil, en el bando de los rojos, de los republicanos.

Relations to survivors encourage vicarious memory characterised by strong, personal identifications with historical collective memories that belong to people other than those who experienced them directly⁴⁰. It often engenders the feeling of responsibility to carry on the memory, from the individuals who had directly experienced the event in the past to those who experience it indirectly. They carry on in the memory in order to prevent the traumatic events from repeating themselves – *nunca más, nie wieder, never again*.

CONCLUSION

In this article various examples of the memory work concerning the women's concentration camp Ravensbrück were presented. The suffering caused by the Nazi genocidal system has been recognized as social trauma in Europe and therefore, moral categories are an unavoidable part of remembering. It is apparent that the adoption of the role of a witness connected with public engagement in memory practice is closely related to the notion of moral duty or civil obligation to transmit the memory of the traumatic experience and avoid its forgetting. However, the decision to voice one's experience from the camp is often triggered in interactions with certain groups, mainly political, civil or survivor-centred.

In order to create moral responsibility "sufficiently persuasive narratives have to be created and broadcast to wider audiences, lessons of the social trauma

⁴⁰ Jacob J. CLIMO. "Prisoners of Silence, A Vicarious Holocaust Memory." Marea C. TESKI, Jacob. J. CLIMO. *The Labyrinth of Memory, Ethnographic Journeys*. Wesport, Bergin&Garvey, 1995, pp. 175–184.

memorialized and ritualized, new definitions of moral responsibility generated and social solidarities extended"⁴¹. All those actions have been occurring regarding the cultural memory of Ravensbrück. For example, in Europe, testimonies of survivors have been collected and archived, monuments have been built in various cities, public places have been named after certain survivors and official national and transnational commemorative events take place. Also, more awareness has been raised to victimhood, and female victimhood in its particularity.

Yet, the process of fabrication of a shared trauma in this case is incomplete as national differences in the recognition of the topic, the individuals and groups affected have been revealed. Also, the temporal situation of the memory work varies. Moreover, the lack of scholarly attention to the site of memory persists⁴².

⁴¹ Jeffrey ALEXANDER, *Trauma, A Social Theory*. Cambridge, Polity Press, 2012, pp. 30.

⁴² Janet JACOBS, *Memorializing the Holocaust. Gender, Genocide and Collective Memory*. New York, NY, I. B. Tauris & Co, 2010.

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