BOOK REVIEW

Antonio Gómez López-Quiñones and Susanne Zepp, eds. *The Holocaust in Spanish Memory: Historical Perceptions and Cultural Discourse*. Leipziger Beiträge zur jüdischen Geschichte und Kultur [Leipzig Studies on Jewish History and Culture]. Vol. 7. Berlin: Leipziger Universitätsverlag GmbH, 2010. 265 pp. ISBN 978-3-86583-457-7.

The already consolidated trend of historical memory studies, brought about by the new millennium, is rendering a number of important publications in the field of Hispanism. This volume is one of them. *The Holocaust in Spanish Memory: Historical Perceptions and Cultural Discourse*, edited by Antonio Gómez López-Quiñones and Susanne Zepp, focuses on the relationship between Spain and the Holocaust, contributing to the existing bibliography on historical memory with an exploration of its global dimension.

At the national level, it has been repeatedly argued—and contested—that Spanish democracy drags behind the Latin American countries that undertook truth commissions and former fascist European countries like Germany, Italy, and France. The 2002 Anagrama prized essay “Bienestar insuficiente, democracia incompleta: Sobre lo que no se habla en nuestro país,” by Vicenç Navarro, helped consolidate this notion, which is instrumental for a critical understanding of the Spanish transition. Unfortunately, this idea perpetuates the cliché of Spanish peculiarity—arriving late to modernity and now dragging behind as a political democracy. The place of democratic Spain vis-à-vis the fascist past of Europe needs to be carefully examined if we are to avoid dangerous commonplaces.

At the international level, the last few years have seen a strong push to recognize the victims of fascist violence and to recover the historical traces of mass crimes in several countries. This push is evident in mainstream cultural production, social activism, and local and national parliamentary politics. In
Europe, the restitution of historical memory has a transnational global dimension that needs to be comprehended in its pan-European context. The legal case against Judge Baltasar Garzón, formally accused of corruption for leading the legal battle against the Francoist’s dictatorship, is just an example. The support for Garzón by the International Association of Jurists as well as the articulation of his defense on the basis of witnesses’ accounts of international jurists well known for their persecution of crimes against humanity illustrate the internationalism achieved by the historical memory phenomenon. Thus, in the present historical moment, it is particularly important to understand the nuts and bolts of a globalized historical memory: its mechanics, cultural, social, and political manifestations, and juridical implications.

The Holocaust in Spanish Memory illuminates a corpus of cultural artifacts that most critics have ignored because of the marginal position occupied by the Holocaust in Spanish’s imaginary until recently. The new interest in the Holocaust and all things mnemonic make the critical analysis of those artifacts a pertinent and timely contribution. Since this volume is the “first systematic attempt to study perceptions of the Holocaust in Spain” (8), it may well become a path-breaking book. The Holocaust in Spanish Memory examines the Holocaust in current Spanish memory through a multidisciplinary approach. The first essay, by Reyes Mate, reflects on the relationship between history and memory, placing this relationship within a philosophical tradition that reaffirms the centrality of a historical memory that is conceived simultaneously as a type of hermeneutics, a form of justice, and a matter of public duty. This defense of historical memory—in spite of its detractors—sets a basic approach to the understanding of the past that is implicitly shared by the editors in the introduction and also by the rest of the essays.

Going beyond theory, The Holocaust in Spanish Memory mingles articles on historiography, literature, and cultural studies. Concerning historiography, it is worth mentioning Bernd Rother’s detailed deconstruction of the Francoist myth that for years celebrated Franco as a savior of the lives of thousands of Jews. In regard to literature, the volume offers insightful analyses on Sefarad, by Muñoz Molina, San Juan by Max Aub, and Jorge Semprún’s narrative, and also on more marginal narrative works that—as Gómez López-Quíñones proves with respect to Mariano Constante—are highly relevant for the current international politics of recognition and reparation of victims. Poetry is also studied, as both Sultana Wahnón and Luis Martín-Estudillo examine a rich poetic tradition that includes poets such as Dámaso Alonso, Rafael Alberti, Cansinos-Assens, Miguel Fernández, and Antonio Martínez-Sarrión, together with specific poetic creations like the genre laments for the Jews. Within the realm of cultural studies, the volume calls attention to Francesc Boix, the only Spaniard who testified at the Nuremberg trials, and his photographic collections on Mauthausen. The Holocaust in Spanish Memory examines experimental art as well: the combination of portraits alla prima (the painting of a
portrait in one single session) in connection with the testimony of Holocaust survivors.

However, the most valuable contribution of the volume lies in its ability to shed light on a pan-European memory—its benefits and dangers—that is being conceptualized under the shadow of current Holocaust theory. Thus, “To Mauthausen and Back: The Holocaust as a Reference in Spanish Civil War Memory Studies,” by Isabel Estrada, critically denounces the growing influence and even appropriation of Holocaust studies over the Spanish Civil War studies. Through a comparative linguistic and semiotic cultural analysis, Estrada shows how the current migration of terminology from the former field to the latter runs the risk of reducing the particularity of the Spanish past to a case study of the Holocaust, consequently calling for a much-needed theoretical self-consciousness in historical memory studies. In a different way, in “Between Fiction and Faction: On César Antonio Molina’s Esperando a los años que no vuelven and Juan Manuel de Prada’s El séptimo velo,” Dagmar Schmelzer claims that the integration of the Spanish past within the context of World War II and European fascism consolidates the normalization and Europeanization of Spain. However, such normalization and Europeanization would be the product of a discourse that reduces the Holocaust to a form of sentimentality that runs the risk of depoliticizing the tragic events by stressing their universal and anthropological dimension. For his part, Martín-Estudillo firmly locates the debate on the Spanish identity inside Europe, affirming in “Death’s Twilight Kingdom: Antonio Martínez Sarrión’s Cantil” that shared historical memory constitutes the grounds on which a sense of European global identity may be constructed. Beyond the nuanced textual analyses and rigorous historiographical explorations that are included in this collection, the true value of the volume lies in its fostering of important discussions on key questions of globalization and historical memory as they inform the emerging tradition of European studies. This is where The Holocaust in Spanish Memory proves theoretically most ambitious and illuminating.

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